

HANDBOOK OF

---

**Language &  
Ethnic Identity**

Edited by  
**JOSHUA A. FISHMAN**

New York • Oxford

Oxford University Press

1999

---

---

## Latin America

OFELIA GARCÍA

Somos un agujero  
en medio del mar y el cielo  
500 años después,  
una raza encendida  
negra, blanca y taína  
pero, ¿quién descubrió a quién?

We're a hole  
in the middle of sea and sky  
500 years afterwards,  
a gleaming race  
black, white and indian  
but, who discovered whom?

!Ay! y el costo de la vida,  
pa'riba tu ves,  
y el peso que baja  
pobre, ni se ve,  
y la medicina,  
camina al revés,  
aquí no se cura  
ni un callo en el pie,  
y ahora el desempleo  
me mordió también;  
a nadie le importa,  
pues no hablamos inglés,  
ni a la mitsubischi  
ni a la chevrolet'

Oh! and the cost of life  
goes up, you see,  
and the peso goes down,  
poor thing, hardly seen,  
and medicine  
goes backwards,  
here one can't cure  
not even a foot corn,  
and now unemployment  
has also bitten me;  
no one cares  
because we don't speak English,  
not to Mitsubishi  
nor to Chevrolet.

Juan Luis Guerra, "El costo de la vida," *Areito*

### The Sound of a Merengue

The well-known merengue just quoted eloquently expresses the sentiments of today's Latin Americans toward their cultural and linguistic identity. Although he

is speaking of Dominicans, the popular poet Juan Luis Guerra and his famous music group transcend national identity, as Latin Americans everywhere vote with their dancing feet their approval of Guerra's critical vision of Latin American identity.

The popular poetry of this merengue confirms concepts that were clearly defined by Latin American thinkers and essayists of the early twentieth century. Instructive in this regard is Guerra's allusion to the 1492 encounter between Europeans and Native Americans and his definition of today's Latin Americans as "a gleaming race/black, white and *taína* but, who discovered whom?" Guerra's verse is reminiscent of Mexican essayist José Vasconcelos's 1925 essay entitled "La Raza Cósmica." The recognition of *mestizaje*, of the mixture of races, is essential in defining Latin America in the twentieth century, as is the *transculturación* that has molded its identity and is exemplified in the question, "but, who discovered whom?" The concept of transculturation was first defined by Cuban ethnologist Fernando Ortiz in his 1940 book, *El contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*. By opposing his transculturation to the Anglo-American concept of acculturation, Ortiz identifies a symbiotic Latin American identity, the product and recreation of the many cultures of those who have been in and come to Latin America.

But this *mestizaje* and transculturation that are such integral parts of a Latin American identity have not produced the "cosmic race" that Vasconcelos had optimistically predicted. The continent that was to encompass the vastness of the cosmos has turned, sings Guerra, into "un agujero," a hole in the ground. The optimistic identity once defined by the presence of a dominant messianism has yielded to a pessimistic perception increasingly dominated by absences, as poor and indigenous Latin Americans have raised their multilingual voices to claim recognition for their differences and their social problems.

The merengue expresses this smothering negativity: Everything "goes down," "walks backwards," becomes almost invisible, "ni se ve." And it turns out that no one cares, no one listens, because even when said beautifully in the crystalline diction of Guerra's Caribbean Spanish and to the seductive tune of a noisy merengue, there remains the trouble that "no hablamos inglés"—that we lack the language that is not just the language of the "Coloso del Norte" but now, too, of the multinational corporations like Mitsubishi and Chevrolet.

The sense of spiritual superiority of Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking Latin Americans over the utilitarian English-speaking Anglo culture, best expressed by the Uruguayan José Enrique Rodó in his 1900 essay "Ariel," has been nearly lost today. In the early 1960s, *el hombre nuevo*—dreamed of in the early optimism of the Cuban revolution and sung in the ballads of Pablo Milanés and Silvio Rodríguez—was to give voice to the poor and oppressed in Latin America, as Indians and blacks, the poor and uneducated, stood shoulder to shoulder next to the mostly white Latin American intelligentsia. But then came the 1970s and 1980s, and this "new man," who, in different languages and different varieties of Spanish, was to realize the ideals of the early decades of the century, was silenced by repressive regimes. As the twenty-first century approaches, many areas have seen at least a dampening of the most brutal forms of repression and a return of some of the electoral trappings of a tentative and timid democracy. Although indigenous groups

have progressively demanded that their native languages and cultures be recognized as national languages and communities, the pluralistic and multilingual reality of Latin America remains officially unrecognized.

### Toward a Definition of Latin American Ethnolinguistic Culture

Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, a noted Mexican anthropologist, explains the situation in which Latin America finds itself:

En América Latina hay muchos más pueblos que estados nacionales. La inmensa mayoría de las llamadas sociedades nacionales contienen en su interior, no uno, sino una diversidad de pueblos distintos. Son, por eso, sociedades plurales. El problema es que esa condición plural no ha sido reconocida por los estados con todas sus consecuencias. . . . Una sola lengua, una sola raza, una misma historia, una cultura común: tales eran los requisitos para consolidar un verdadero estado (napoleónico). Y la realidad iba por otros cauces, lo que exigió que el Estado se pretendiera constituir en forjador de la nación unificada, uniforme culturalmente, *inexistente*. La terca realidad seguía siendo plural: había indios, ante todo; pero también negros y ciertas regiones que desarrollaban su propia identidad (1992: 19, emphasis added).

[In Latin America there are many more nations than nation states. The immense majority of the so-called nation states contain in their interior, not one but many different nations. They are, therefore, plural societies. The problem is that the plural condition has not been recognized by the states, thus having many consequences. . . . Only one language, one race, one same history, a common culture: those were the requirements to consolidate a true (Napoleonic) state. And reality went a different way, making it a requirement for the state to try to constitute itself into the creator of the unified nation, culturally uniform, *nonexistent*. The stubborn reality continued being plural: There were, beyond everything, Indians; but there were also blacks and some regions that had their own identity.] (1992: 19, emphasis added)

This nonexistent Latin America, promoted by the official governments, usually encompasses the countries of South, Central, and North America and the Caribbean islands that officially speak Spanish, Portuguese, or French. In an incisive analysis of the ethnolinguistic diversity of the Americas, Darcy Ribeiro (1977) identifies three different types of national societies in the region:

1. The "witness nations" (*los pueblos testimonios*) include Mexico, Central America, and the Andean countries of Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. These nations had advanced precolonial civilizations: Incas, Aztecs, and Mayas. These groups had extensively populated the region prior to the arrival of Europeans. Darcy claims that in these countries there has been, and continues to be, a continuous process of ethnic reconstitution.
2. The "new nations" (*los pueblos nuevos*) are Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, Chile, and the nations of the Caribbean. These countries were formed

through the miscegenation of peoples of very different ethnic origins, Europeans, Africans, and indigenous groups, under a tyrannical colonial regime.

3. The "transplanted nations" (*los pueblos trasplantados*) include the countries of the River Plate (Argentina and Uruguay), as well as Anglo America. These nations were formed when Europeans arrived in scarcely populated regions and displaced the indigenous population, many times through violence.

The European colonizers in Latin America were mostly Spaniards and Portuguese. But there were also French, Dutch, and British, especially in the area of the Caribbean. And the immigrant wave of the early twentieth century included, besides Spaniards and Portuguese, Italians, Germans, and French.

African slaves were brought to the New World on a large scale, especially to Brazil and Cuba, until 1886. Approximately 2 million slaves from the western coast of Africa made their way to the Caribbean and 4 million to Brazil, where they worked on sugar plantations and completely altered the ethn racial composition of the region.

The indigenous groups of Latin America number more than 400, totaling more than 30 million people. The most numerous group speaks Quechua, the former language of the Incas. Quechua is spoken extensively today in Peru, western Bolivia, and Ecuador. Approximately one-fifth of Peruvians (5 million), living mostly in the southern states, speak Quechua as their first language (Godenzzi 1996: 240). Quechua is also spoken by over one-fourth of Bolivians (2.8 million). The variety of Quechua spoken in Ecuador is known as Quichua and is spoken by 1.5 million people.

There are at least four other Indian language groups that have more than 1 million speakers: Nahuatl, Maya, Aymara, and Guaraní. Nahuatl, once the language of the great empire of the Aztecs, is still the most important Indian language in Mexico, spoken by 1.5 million Mexicans. Maya, the language of the great Maya civilizations, exists today in different forms that can be grouped into about eight languages in Mexico and about twenty in Guatemala. Approximately one-third of Guatemala's 10 million people are Maya Indians who speak Mayan languages, the most important of which is Quiché (Richards and Richards 1996). In Mexico, around 1 million people speak Yucatec, the most important Mayan language. Aymara is spoken by more than 1.5 million people in Bolivia and another one-half million in Peru. Finally, Guaraní is spoken by approximately 75% of the 5 million Paraguayans.

Table 16-1 summarizes for the reader the situation of the major indigenous languages in Latin America.

Part of the difficulty in defining a Latin American ethnolinguistic identity stems from the contradiction between the real, mostly oral, pluralism of Latin America and the official, mostly written, posture, which states that all Latin Americans share a common origin, history, and culture. The Latin American emphasis on a legal written corpus maintained since colonial times has created what Angel Rama (1984) has called "la ciudad letrada." This lettered and learned city's sole pur-

Table 16-1. Major Indigenous Languages of Latin America

Country	Total Population (in Millions)	Language	No. of Speakers		Language	No. of Speakers	
			(in Millions)	% of Total		(in Millions)	% of Total
Bolivia	7.5	Quechua	2.8	37	Aymara	1.8	24
Ecuador	11	Quechua	1.5	5			
Guatemala	10	Maya	3.3	33			
Mexico	90	Nahuatl	1.5	2	Maya	1	1
Paraguay	5	Guaraní	3.8	75			
Peru	25	Quechua	5	20	Aymara	.5	2

pose has been to defend a written Spanish language that was and often continues to be a minority and almost secret language and to separate it from the speech of unschooled people, often a different language that is generally spoken in more rural regions or in poorer urban areas. The Latin American "linguistic culture," in the sense defined by Harold Schiffman, is derived from the distance created between the written official position advanced by government policy, legislation, literature, and essays and the daily speech of millions of Latin Americans. Despite the difficulties in defining a Latin American ethnolinguistic culture, the following traits characterize it:

1. A pluralistic cultural identity based on the concepts of *mestizaje* and *transculturación*.
2. A recognition of the region's multilingualism, despite official claims of a monolingual identity.
3. A recognition of the region's distinct linguistic identity from that of Spain or Portugal, despite an official attitude of *purismo* in the use of the European languages. In practice, Spanish and Portuguese are transplanted languages that are realized in many places as contact dialects sprung from the interaction through the centuries with Native, African, and other European languages and more recently with English. There are also significant minorities in both rural and urban Latin America for whom Spanish and Portuguese are second languages.
4. An insistence on using Spanish and Portuguese as markers of ethnolinguistic identity and in opposition to Anglo America.

In essence, however, it is only the colonial history of 500 years of *dependence*, mainly on Spain, more recently on the United States, and the resistance to it that gives cohesion to the region and is at the core of its ethnolinguistic identity (see Zea 1991). Limiting itself to Hispanoamérica, this chapter starts with a brief recounting of the encounter between the Old and the New World and identifies the different movements in identity that have been the product of sociohistorical forces in the twentieth century.

## From the Spanish of the Empire to that of Hispanoamérica

Europeans found three important civilizations when they reached present-day Latin America: the Mayan, the Aztec, and the Inca. The Mayans occupied the Yucatan peninsula, southern Mexico, and most of present-day Guatemala. The Aztecs were in the central valley of Mexico. The Inca empire stretched along the Andes from northern Ecuador through Peru to southern Chile. There were also many other Indian nations.<sup>1</sup>

Spanish was the language officially sanctioned by the Spanish Empire to convert the Indians during the first two centuries of Spain's rule. But Spanish missionaries, frustrated by the difficulty of teaching Spanish to the many Indians, started instead to spread among the Indian population those languages that were more universal. These Indian languages, called then *lenguas generales*, included Quechua, Náhuatl, Chibcha, and Tupí-guaraní.

Spanish was not generally taught until the eighteenth century. In 1770, Carlos III ordered that the Indian languages be extinguished and that only Spanish be used, a difficult task, when, for example, in Mexico City there were 8,000 Spanish residents and more than 2 million Indians.

This situation of a powerful numerical minority speaking the language of the empire and a numerical majority with little power speaking other languages characterized the beginning of the nineteenth century, when most countries in South and Central America became independent. As the eighteenth century closed, 78% of the population of New Spain were Indians (Cifuentes and Ros 1993: 135). Yet the independence movement in Spanish America that took place between 1910 and 1924 included mostly Spanish-speaking elite *criollos* (Latin Americans born of Spanish parents), led notably by Simón Bolívar, José Antonio de Sucre, and José de San Martín. Only in Mexico did the masses of Indians and others of mixed blood, encouraged by a local priest, Hidalgo, participate in a revolution that was both for independence and social improvement. Yet independence in Mexico was only achieved when Hidalgo was shot, the popular movement squelched, and an elite *criollo*, Iturbide, declared himself emperor of Mexico and of the Capitanía de Guatemala, which included most of present-day Central America.

The cultivation and spread of Spanish for its homogenizing nationalist effects became an important agenda of the first independent governments. In 1835, Mexico founded its first Language Academy, followed in 1875 by a Mexican Academy of Language that corresponded to the Real Academia Española in Spain. As early as 1847, Andrés Bello, born in Caracas before independence, wrote *Gramática de la lengua castellana* to avoid the degeneration of the Spanish of Spanish America into "dialectos irregulares" and to maintain "unidad nacional" (Ripoll 1966: 56). When, in 1877, José Pedro Varela declared that education in Uruguay was to be free, required, and under secular control, he stipulated that Spanish, as the national language, had to be used in all schools of the country. Spanish spread quickly, although not entirely. By 1898, when Spain lost its last colonies, including Cuba and Puerto Rico in the Caribbean, only 17% of the entire population

were monolingual speakers of indigenous languages. In 100 years, Spanish had gone from being the minority language of the powerful elite to the vehicular language for much of the Latin American population and the officially sanctioned language of Spanish American identity.

During this entire period, native non-European elements of Spanish American culture were recognized and sometimes even idealized during the romanticism of the late nineteenth century. In fact, a budding Spanish American literature started distinguishing itself from the peninsular one by introducing native groups such as the "gaucho" (*Facundo*, 1845, by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento; *Martín Fierro*, 1872, by José Hernández) and the "Indian" (*Tabaré*, 1886, by Zorilla de San Martín; *Enriquillo*, 1879, by Manuel de Jesús Galván). But despite this pluralistic recognition, the official cultural identity of Spanish America remained mostly European. In an important essay called "Conflicto y armonías de las razas en América" the Argentinean Sarmiento, author of *Facundo*, expresses the reigning attitude toward those whom he calls "the savages":

La masa indígena absorbe al fin al conquistador y le comunica sus cualidades e ineptitudes, si aquél no cuida de transmitirle, como los romanos a galos y españoles, a más de su lengua, sus leyes, sus códigos, sus costumbres.

[The indigenous mass finally absorbs the conqueror and communicates to him its qualities and ineptitude, if the conqueror is not careful to transmit to him, as the Romans did with the Gauls and the Spaniards, besides its language, its laws, its codes, its customs.] (Sarmiento 1883, cited in Ripoll 1966: 99)

The year 1898 is important not only because it represents political independence from Spain and the accompanying fear that the Spanish of Latin America would further degenerate but also because it marks the second successful attempt by the English-speaking United States to officially take over the Latin American world. In 1848, through the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the United States had taken half of Mexico's territory, from present-day Texas to California. In 1898, the previous Spanish possessions of Puerto Rico and Cuba became U.S. possessions. The ethnolinguistic identity of Spanish America was now threatened on two fronts, not only because of its further political and emotional distance from Spain, "La Madre Patria" [The Motherland], but also because of new contact with another powerful language, that of the United States.

In the late nineteenth century, the political and literary contributions of the Puerto Rican Eugenio María de Hostos and the Cuban José Martí did much to promote Latin American unity and nationalism. In the essay that was to become the ideal of that era, "Nuestra América," José Martí declares with pride: "El vino, de plátano; y si sale agrio, ¡es nuestro vino!" [Wine, of banana; and if it comes out bitter, it's our wine!]. In search for an identity different from that of Spain, the first truly independent literary movement of Spanish America, the *modernismo*, had taken refuge in the exotic and French climates of the Nicaraguan Rubén Darío's *Azul* (1888). José Martí brings back the "preciosismo modernista" to the reality of peasants, of the "Guántamera," popularly sung today to Martí's "Versos sencillos."



The end of the nineteenth century is marked with the publication of José Enrique Rodó's "Ariel," in which the Uruguayan praises Spanish America for its idealism in the face of Anglo America's utilitarianism. Spanish America's ethnolinguistic identity now seems firmly set, openly claiming Spanish, in the face of Theodore Roosevelt's "big stick" policy, as the differentiating element from the English-speaking "Colossus of the North."

### Twentieth-Century Indigenismo and Afro-Antillanismo in Spanish

The late nineteenth century work of the *caribeños* Eugenio María Hostos and José Martí had already acknowledged the *mestizaje* of Latin America. In an essay titled "El Cholo," Hostos had said: "América deberá su porvenir a la fusión de razas. . . . El mestizo es la esperanza del futuro" [America will owe its future to the fusion of races. . . . The mestizo is the hope of the future] (Hostos 1870, quoted in Ripoll 1966: 164). And Martí in "Mi raza" had said: "El hombre no tiene ningún derecho especial porque pertenezca a una raza o a otra: dígase hombre, y ya se dicen todos los derechos" [Man doesn't have any special right because he belongs to one race or the other: call it Man, and all rights have already been mentioned] (Martí 1893, quoted in Ripoll 1966: 250).

While Hostos and Martí preached racial fusion and harmony in the Caribbean, the rest of the continent, which often considered racial differences equivalent to linguistic differences, held a white and Spanish-only supremacy racist attitude toward its identity. For example, in an essay published in 1910, the Argentinean José Ingenieros wrote about the Latin American "malady," "the preponderance of 'inferior' non-European races in our midst." And he proposed the cure: "European immigration, absorption of the colored races, education, and utilization of the nonwhite within the restricted limits of his abilities" (quoted in Stabb 1967: 32).

The struggle for a definition of ethnolinguistic identity that included the indigenous population of the Americas came to the forefront during the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920), portrayed in what was to become the first novel of social protest in Latin America, Mariano Azuela's *Los de Abajo* (1915). As a result, a national Mexican ideology came into being, grounded in the symbiosis of two races and cultures, those of Spain and of the New World Indian, and its ensuing *mestizaje*. This ideology of inclusion of all races in a Latin American identity now became prevalent throughout the continent. And this pride in a Latin American *mestizaje* expressed in Spanish became the differentiating symbol from an Anglo America that watched over Cuba through the Platt Amendment and had taken over Puerto Rico.

In Puerto Rico, English and Spanish had been declared official languages in 1902, and English became the preferred language of instruction until 1948. As a reaction, Spanish and a Hispanic culture became the symbol of Puerto Rican identity. Antonio Pedreira, in his 1931 essay "Insularismo," says: "Nosotros fuimos y seguimos siendo culturalmente una colonia hispánica" [We were and continue to be culturally a Hispanic colony].

During this period of intense opposition to an English-speaking Anglo America, the Latin American identity, affirmed in Spanish, started expressing a sympathetic awareness of native Americans and an increased consciousness of African elements, especially in the Caribbean, where the African slave trade had proliferated.

The maximum exponent of the sympathetic view of the Indians in the movement that became known as *Indigenismo* was José Vasconcelos, who, in his two monumental works *La Raza Cósmica* (1925) and *Indología* (1929), expressed his hope for Latin America in opposition again to Anglo America:

Solamente la parte ibérica del continente dispone de los factores espirituales, la raza y el territorio que son necesarios para la gran empresa de iniciar la era universal de la humanidad.

[Only the Iberian part of the continent has the spiritual factors, the race, and the territory that are necessary for the great enterprise of initiating the universal era of humanity.] (quoted in Ripoll 1966 336)

The Latin American left also espoused this new optimism. This was the case, for example, of the father of the Peruvian social reform party, the APRA (Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana), Manuel González Prada, and of José Mariátegui, author of "Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana" (1928), in which the economic exploitation of Peruvian Indians is denounced. And in literature, the Ecuadorian Jorge Icaza wrote *Huaspungo* (1934), a novel portraying Indians not as silent partners in a romantic vision of Latin America but as peasants voicing their social protest in a white European Latin American world. In 1940, the First Inter-American Indigenista Congress took place in Pátzucaro, Mexico.

In the Caribbean, the ethnologist Fernando Ortiz worked on identifying the ethnocultural formation of Cuba around this time. In 1906, he had published *Los Negros Brujos*, in which for the first time he made reference to "lo afrocubano" (p. xviii). By 1940, in his *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*, Ortiz acknowledged the "tranculturación" of Cuban culture, the synthesis of the complex cultural transmutations that were present in Cuba. The Cuban Nicolás Guillén and the Puerto Rican Luis Palés Matos filled their Spanish-language poetry with African sounds in expressions of "lo afro-antillano" during this period.

But despite the acknowledgment of the Indian and African cultures and languages in the forging of the Latin American ethnolinguistic identity, a voice was not given to those who did not speak or write anything but formal Spanish. In 1928, the Dominican Pedro Henríquez Ureña, in his "Seis ensayos en busca de nuestra expresión," identified Spanish as the only valid language identity of a Latin American writer. He referred to the few works written in Indian languages as lacking "propósitos lúcidos" (clear proposals). And he concluded:

No hemos renunciado a escribir en español, nuestro problema de la expresión original y propia comienza ahí. Cada idioma es una cristalización de modos de pensar y de sentir, y cuanto en él se escribe se baña en el color de su cristal.

[We haven't renounced writing in Spanish, our problem of expression that is original and autochthonous starts there. Each language is a crystallization of ways

of thinking and feeling, and whatever is written in it is bathed in the color of its glass.] (1928: 382).

Only Spanish was valid, but the European language molded the Latin American identity, repressing and silencing that of those who were not Europeans and who spoke other languages.

Henríquez Ureña (1940) was also responsible for first identifying the five dialect areas of Latin American Spanish, based on common history and substrata of indigenous languages:

1. The Caribbean, including not only Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic but also much of Venezuela and the Atlantic coast of Colombia.
2. The Andes (Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, northwest Argentina, most of Colombia, and part of Venezuela)
3. The River Plate (Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay)
4. Mexico (Mexico and Central America)
5. Chile

The silencing of the "other" Latin America—that of the countryside rather than the city, that of the Indian rather than the white European, that of speakers of languages other than Spanish—became the subject of essayists searching for identity as the twentieth century unfolded. In a 1952 essay, the Colombian Germán Arciniegas said:

There are two (Latin) Americas: the visible and the invisible. The visible (Latin) America . . . of presidents and embassies, expresses itself through official organs, through a controlled press. . . . And there is the mute, repressed America, which is a vast reservoir of revolution. . . . Nobody knows exactly what these 150,000,000 silent men and women think, feel, dream, or await in the depths of their being. (quoted in Shapiro 1963: 1)

The Chilean Nobel Prize-winning poet, Pablo Neruda, wrote his *Canto General* (1950) as an elegy to Latin America, and in the act of naming its geography, history, and heroes, he gave voice to the poor and the suffering. In his essay titled, significantly, "Nosotros los indios" [We the Indians], Neruda referred to the contradiction between idealizing the indigenous Araucano warriors portrayed in *La Araucana*, the first Latin American epic poem written by the Spaniard Alonso de Ercilla in the mid-sixteenth century, and silencing the Araucano heritage of all Chileans:

Nuestros recién llegados gobernantes se propusieron decretar que no somos un país de indios. Este decreto perfumado no ha tenido expresión parlamentaria, pero la verdad es que circula tácitamente en ciertos sitios de representación nacional. *La Araucana* está bien, huele bien. Los araucanos están mal, huelen mal. Huelen a raza vencida. Y los usurpadores están ansiosos de olvidar o de olvidarse. En el hecho, la mayoría de los chilenos cumplimos con las disposiciones y decretos señoriales: como frenéticos arribistas nos avergonzamos de los araucanos. Contribuimos, los unos, a extirparlos y, los otros, a sepultarlos en el abandono y en el olvido.

[Our recently arrived governors decided to decree that we are not a country of Indians. This perfumed decree has not had parliamentary expression, but the truth is that it circulates tacitly in various places of national representation. *The Araucana* is fine, smells fine. The Araucanos are rotten, smell rotten. They smell as a conquered race. And the usurpers are anxious to forget or to forget themselves. In fact, the majority of Chileans are faithful to the ruling dispositions and decrees: As frenetic upwardly mobile people we're ashamed of the Araucanos. We contribute, some to remove them, others to bury them in abandonment and forgetfulness.] (quoted in Skirius 1994: 259)

### The 1960s and Beyond: Multilingual Attempts

The demand for a voice for the Araucanos, the poor, and the silent America was answered by the Cuban Revolution of the early 1960s. Fidel Castro's revolution reconnected with the nationalist identity that had been espoused much earlier by José Martí. And this socialist reality for an "hombre nuevo" created a different definition of ethnolinguistic identity as Latin Americans. Che Guevara explained it thus:

En este continente se habla prácticamente una lengua. . . . Hay una identidad tan grande entre las clases de estos países que logran una identificación de tipo "internacional americano," mucho más completa que en otros continentes. Lengua, costumbres, religión, amo común, los unen. El grado y las formas de explotación son similares en sus efectos para explotadores y explotados de una buena parte de los países de nuestra América.

[In this continent practically only one language is spoken. . . . There is such a great identity between classes in these countries that they realize an identity of an "international American" type, much fuller than in other continents. Language, costumes, religion, common master, unite them. The degree and the form of exploitation are similar in their effects for exploiters and those who are exploited in a good part of the countries of our America.] (1971: 136)

The new ethnolinguistic identity of Latin America is now based on its exploitation by a common master, the United States. And this sense of being exploited, first by the Europeans, then by the United States, is the core of the reinterpretation of a bleeding Latin American identity made by Eduardo Galeano in his famous *Las Venas abiertas de América Latina* (1971).

The *hispanidad* (the turning toward Spain and the Spanish language) of a Latin American identity was transcended and attacked during this period. The Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier, noted for creating, in opposition to the European artificial "surrealism," the "real maravilloso" that already existed in Latin American reality, attacked the concept of *hispanidad* in a 1961 essay:

Tras de la hispanidad se oculta un racismo solapado; se acepta que el negro, el indio, aquí, allá, hayan añadido su acento, su genio rítmico, al romancero de los conquistadores. Pero lo universal americano, lo ecuménico, sigue siendo lo que

trajeron los conquistadores. . . . Ni el 'nuestramericanismo' . . . ni el mito de una latinidad, de una hispanidad . . . vendrán a resolver nuestros problemas agrarios, políticos, sociales. . . . La Revolución Cubana, con los medios de expresión que pone y pondrá en nuestras manos . . . ha dado un sentido nuevo a nuestros destinos.

[Behind the *hispanidad* there is a hidden racism; it is accepted that blacks, Indians, here, there, have contributed their accent, their rhythmic genius, to the *romancero* of the conquerors. But what is universally American, what is ecumenical, is still what the conquerors brought. . . . Neither the "nuestramericanismo" nor the myth of a Latinness, of an *Hispanidad* . . . will solve our agricultural, political and social problems. . . . The Cuban revolution, with the modes of expression that it has put and will put in our hands . . . has given our destinies a new sense.] (1966: 84, 88)

This faith in the new Latin American society based on a socialist revolution and the need to transcend *la hispanidad* and the Spanish language that expressed it was responsible for the "boom" of the Latin American novel of the 1960s. In language and images that were playful and risky, the Argentinean Julio Cortázar, the Colombian Gabriel García Márquez, the Peruvian Mario Vargas Llosa, and the Mexican Carlos Fuentes exported a vision of a vigorous, fresh, and modern Latin America, no longer "underdeveloped," but the future just society. But the boom, the noise, and the energy were short-lived. By the mid-1970s, most Latin American countries were immersed in the silence of dictatorships.

The process in Peru is indicative in this regard. From 1968 to 1975, Peru was ruled by a progressive military regime under Velasco Alvarado. Besides the social reform program that included the expropriation of land and estates, a voice was claimed for the indigenous population of Peru. In 1972, Quechua was officialized, and bilingual education was encouraged. But there was a violent reaction from the white and mestizo Spanish-speaking bourgeoisie. In 1980, under the regime of Morales Bermudez, Quechua once again lost official status, and bilingual education was deemphasized. Today Quechua and Aymara are recognized as national languages, with coofficial status in certain territories and sectors, although only Spanish is official.

This process was repeated throughout Latin America. As military dictatorships became entrenched, the gains made by the indigenous populations in the 1960s and 1970s were repressed. This silencing of the indigenous population was promoted as a struggle against anarchist guerrillas and for democracy.

For example, in Bolivia there were three symposiums on "lenguas nacionales" in Cochabamba between 1973 and 1979. However, after the coup d'état in 1980, teaching in Aymara was prohibited. The government issued a statement indicating that insistence on doing so would be taken as evidence of leftist sympathies.

Nevertheless, since the 1960s, there has been a progressive awareness in Latin America of the role that the cultures and languages of indigenous groups have had in the gestation of a Latin American identity. And this greater consciousness has been accompanied at times by efforts to obtain official recognition for these languages and cultures. The indigenous groups themselves have been responsible for many brave attempts at what Hornberger (1996) has called (in the title of her

book) "language planning from the bottom up." Indigenous communities have developed projects to support their *etnodesarrollo*—the development of their identity as different social, cultural, and historical units that have been dominated by the nation states—and their struggle for official recognition by those nation states.

The efforts for *etnodesarrollo*, a concept promoted by UNESCO, has been accompanied by the development of many bilingual education programs. A specific example has been the development and teaching of the Zapotec alphabet (widely spoken in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico) as a symbol of linguistic and social resistance. Javier Castellanos explains:

Impulsamos y fomentamos la escritura del zapoteco porque si no, se muere. . . .  
Escribimos para ganarle espacios al español, . . . para arrebatarle aquellos espacios  
que día con día se va adueñando.

[We push and promote writing in Zapoteco because otherwise it would die. . . .  
We write to gain spaces from Spanish, . . . to take away from it those spaces that  
day by day it gains.] (quoted in Pardo 1993: 122)

Writing a language other than Spanish in the "ciudad letrada" is in itself a way of making inroads into an identity that has been constructed mostly through the written Spanish word.

In Mexico throughout the 1980s, the indigenous population had a recognized voice. For example, from 1982 to 1988 there was a Dirección General de Educación Indígena, and in 1983 the Consejo Nacional de Defensa de Idiomas Originarios de Mexico was established. The wording of the Mexican Constitution of 1991 granted formal equality to the indigenous communities for the first time:

The Mexican nation has a multicultural composition, stemming originally from its indigenous communities. The law will protect and promote the development of their languages, cultures, usage, customs, resources and specific forms of social organization and will guarantee to the members of those communities effective access to the jurisdiction of the state. (quoted in Salinas Pedraza, 1996: 171)

Yet even in Mexico, the teaching of literacy by using the students' first language has been questioned since 1990. Increasingly, the state has used the argument that the modernization required under the North American Free Trade Agreement can only be achieved through education in Spanish. Hamel comments on the situation of bilingual education programs in Mexico in the present: "In 1991 alphabetization in vernacular languages is not the real policy in public Indian education, and in probably more than 90% of the schools in the bilingual system it does not take place" (1994: 286).

By the late 1980s, there had been a return to discussion of the integration of Indians into "civilized life" and a growing defense of the Spanish legacy. As early as 1980, there was a Symposium of the Academias de la Lengua Española in Lima, Peru, at which Latin American countries were asked to defend the Spanish language legally (Lara 1993: 164). From 1981 to 1983 Mexico established a "Comisión para la Defensa del Idioma español," with the explicit purpose of collaborating with Spain to defend the Spanish language. Using the avalanche of English as an

excuse, Mexico reacted against its own indigenous languages. Representative of this attitude is the one expressed in *Novedades* (September 15, 1981): "El español de México está asediado por el inglés. Algo tiene que hacerse . . ." [The Spanish of Mexico is threatened by English. Something has to be done . . .]. In 1997, Mexico hosted the First International Congress on the Spanish Language, with the dual purpose of improving the status of the Spanish language while at the same time claiming linguistic independence from Spain.

Pardo (1993) explains this affirmation of the Spanish legacy in studying the situation in Oaxaca, the Mexican state that has the greatest number of Indians and the most linguistic and cultural diversity and in which one-half of the population speaks indigenous languages and inhabits three-fourths of the territory. Pardo states: "From the integrationist perspective and the neoliberal current of development that is sustained by the hegemonic sectors of the state society, the indigenous presence in Oaxaca is assumed as one of the causes of the backwardness and socioeconomic marginalization of that entity" (1993: 114).

The ethnolinguistic identity of Argentina and Uruguay, countries of the River Plate that had a small indigenous population, is instructive in understanding the forging of a Latin American ethnolinguistic identity. Both countries had huge migratory waves made up of Italian speakers, as well as Spanish speakers. And although both countries are fiercely proud of the distinguishing characteristics of their Spanish, standardized through the efforts of the Argentinean Spanish Language Academy, there is a strong national conscience of Spanish monolingualism. As a result, for example, the language situation of the border region between Uruguay and Brazil was officially ignored until recently, when the work on the sociolinguistic situation of the *Dialectos Portugueses del Uruguay* and the impact of the long-standing educational policy of Spanish-only in the border region has been extensively studied (see, for example, Elizaincín, Behares, and Barrios, 1987).

Today, some limited recognition of the indigenous languages of Latin America remains. Peru, Ecuador, and Nicaragua have established Spanish as the only official language, although they have granted specific status to the indigenous languages. In Ecuador, Quechua and Aymara have been recognized as belonging to the national culture. And in Paraguay, where 40% of the population are monolingual Guaraní speakers, Guaraní has been granted status as a national, although not official, language (Hamel 1994: 291).

While Latin America has been slowly silencing the indigenous voices that have sprung up, Puerto Rico, where Spanish for the first time became official in 1981, once more claimed Spanish and English as official in the 1990s. As in the rest of Latin America, the official ethnolinguistic position in Puerto Rico is clearly out of synch with its linguistic reality (that of being Spanish speaking) and with its attitudinal culture (the desire to speak Spanish).

Lara's words regarding the situation in Mexico explain that, although there have been changes in social values in Latin America, little has been altered in ethnolinguistic identity:

En el campo de lengua, por el contrario, no hay cambios de valores apreciables; los valores puristas siguen siendo los únicos inteligibles para la mayor parte de

los mexicanos. El valor central de la lengua, que reúne la española y las amerindias en el campo de la legitimación identitaria, no admite, en realidad, el plurilingüismo de la nación (1993: 171).

[In the field of language, however, no real changes in value have taken place; the purist values continue to be the only ones understood by most Mexicans. The central value of language, which encompasses both the Spanish one and the Indian ones in terms of a legitimate identity, does not truly admit the nation's multilingualism.] (1993: 171)

Recently, in 1994, the rebellion among the indigenous people of Chiapas in Mexico sparked the renewal of ethnic and indigenous movements. Yet it is instructive to remember that the person who emerged as the leader of the Chiapas resistance, General Marcos, was not from Chiapas; his Spanish-speaking ability was certainly helpful in his leadership role. And Rigoberta Menchú, a recent winner of the Nobel Peace Prize because of her resistance to an oppressive Guatemalan regime and her work on behalf of Indian languages and cultures, only acquired a voice after her own language and culture were silenced.

The Mexican Nobel Prize Winner, Octavio Paz, has been an incisive thinker about Latin American ethnolinguistic identity. His famous 1950 essay titled *El Laberinto de la Soledad* reviews Mexico's cultural history and psychology and identifies the *máscara* (mask) which the Mexican wears because "no quiere o no se atreve a ser él mismo" [(he) doesn't want to or doesn't dare be himself] (Paz 1959: 66).

In 1950, Paz wrote: "Escribir, equivale a deshacer el español y a recrearlo para que se vuelva mexicano, sin dejar de ser español" [To write is equivalent to undo Spanish and recreate it so that it turns Mexican, without letting it be anything else but Spanish] (1950: 148).

In 1991, in "La Búsqueda del Presente," he repeated:

Arrancadas de su suelo natal y de su tradición propia, plantadas en un mundo desconocido y por nombrar, las lenguas europeas arraigaron en las tierras nuevas, crecieron con las sociedades americanas y se transformaron. Son la misma planta y son una planta distinta. . . . Mis clásicos son los de mi lengua y me siento descendiente de Lope y de Quevedo como cualquier escritor español . . . pero no soy español. El México precolombino, nos habla en el lenguaje de mitos y leyendas. Ser escritor mexicano significa oír lo que nos dice ese presente—esa presencia (quoted in Skirius 1994: 432).

Torn from their birthplace and their own tradition, planted in an unknown world yet to be named, the European languages took root in the new lands, grew with the American societies and were transformed. They are the same plant and they are a different plant. . . . My classics are those of my language and I feel a descendent of Lope and Quevedo just as any other Spanish writer . . . but I'm not a Spaniard. . . . Pre-Colombian Mexico speaks to us the language of myths and legends. To be a Mexican writer means to hear what that present tells us—that presence.] (Skirius 1994: 432)

Despite the multilingual and pluralistic rumblings, little has changed in the official position of Latin American nation states in the last fifty years, as expressed by Paz. The myths, legends, and history of pre-Colombian civilizations and of African



slaves are present in Latin American consciousness, much more so than in the early part of the century, and all Latin Americans claim them as their "ethnolinguistic culture." But pride in past glorious civilizations has little to do with giving voice to poor and marginalized indigenous groups, who remain, despite constant efforts, mostly excluded from participating in this Latin American identity.

### Summary

As before the ethnic boom of the 1960s, Latin American ethnolinguistic identity continues to cluster around two poles that remain distant:

1. Its identification with the Spanish language and *hispanidad* as the contrastive marker with Anglo America.
2. Its differentiation from Spain through its identification with the autochthonous languages of the Americas, the languages of African slaves, and those spoken by colonizers and, more recently, immigrants who speak languages other than Spanish.

Depending on sociohistorical conditions, attitudes cluster around one or the other pole. In between the two identity poles, however, lies reality, a linguistic reality which in its oral manifestation is less Spanish speaking than the attitudes clustered around the first pole and in its written manifestations is more purist than the attitudes represented by the second pole. It is this lack of fit between attitudes and reality, between the oral and the written word, that creates the hole, the sense of "agujero," which Juan Luis Guerra triumphantly fills with the sounds of his merengue.

---

### Questions for Further Thought and Discussion

1. Why could this chapter be entitled "Latin American Ethnolinguistic Identity: Between the Written and Oral Word"?
2. Define the term "transculturation" and trace its historical origins. How is the Latin American concept of transculturation different from Anglo American acculturation?
3. Trace the evolution of Latin American ethnolinguistic identity from the formation of nation states to today.
4. Explain the situation and the role of indigenous languages in Latin America today.
5. What characterizes a Latin American ethnolinguistic identity?
6. Trace the role of Spanish from conquest to Latin American national formation.

7. What has been the impact of the United States and English on Latin American ethnolinguistic identity?
  8. Trace the development of Indigenismo and Afro-Antillanismo in twentieth-century Latin American essay and literature.
  9. Explain the impact of the Cuban Revolution on Latin American ethnolinguistic identity.
  10. Define the concept of *etnodesarrollo* (ethnodevelopment) and explain the impact it has had in Latin American indigenous communities.
  11. Explain how Latin America has used language both to differentiate itself from Spain and from the United States. What have been the linguistic consequences of this differentiation?
  12. Select a country in Latin America. Explain in depth its sociolinguistic reality. How does that reality differ from the official linguistic position?
- 

#### Note

I am grateful to Ricardo Otheguy for his comments on this paper.

1. The term "Indian" has been vindicated by the Latin American indigenous minorities. It is used in this article interchangeably with "indigenous."

#### Selected Bibliography

- Albo, Xavier (1988). El futuro de los idiomas oprimidos. In Orlandi, pp. 75-104.
- Bonfil Batalla, Guillermo (1992). *Identidad y pluralismo cultural en América Latina*. San Juan: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico.
- Carpenter, Alejo (1966). *Tientos y diferencias*. Montevideo: Arca.
- Che Guevara, Ernesto (1971). *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba*. Mexico City: Editorial Grijalbo.
- Cifuentes, Barbara, and María del Consuelo Ros (1993). Oficialidad y planificación del español: Dos aspectos de la política del lenguaje en México en el siglo XIV. *Iztapalapa* 13(29): 135-146.
- Elizaincín, Adolfo, Luis Behares, and Graciela Barrios (1987). *Nos falemo brasileiro: Dialectos portugueses en Uruguay*. Montevideo: Amesur.
- Godenzzi, Juan Carlos (1996). Literacy and modernization among the Quechua speaking population of Peru. In Hornberger, 237-250.
- Hamel, Rainer Enrique (1994). Indigenous education in Latin America: Policies and legal frameworks. In *Linguistic Human Rights: Overcoming Linguistic Discrimination*, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Phillipson (eds.), 271-287. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Henríquez Ureña, Pedro (1926). El descontento y la promesa. In Ripoll, 376-390.
- Henríquez Ureña, Pedro (1940). *El español en Santo Domingo*. Buenos Aires: La Universidad de Buenos Aires.

- Hornberger, Nancy (ed.) (1996). *Indigenous Literacies in the Americas: Language Planning from the Bottom up*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Hostos, Eugenio María de (1870). El cholo. In Ripoll, 163-165.
- Lara, Luis Fernando (1993). Crónica de una política del lenguaje abortada: La Comisión para la Defensa del Idioma Español. *Iztapalapa* 13(29): 147-176.
- Martí, José (1893). Mi raza. In Ripoll, 250-252.
- Orlandi, Eni Pulcinelli, ed. (1988). *Política lingüística na America Latina*. Campinas: Pontes Editores.
- Ortiz, Fernando (1973 [1906]). *Los negros brujos*. Miami: Ediciones Universal.
- Ortiz, Fernando (1978 [1940]). *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*. Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho.
- Pardo, María Teresa (1993). El desarrollo de la escritura de las lenguas indígenas en Oaxaca. *Iztapalapa* 13(29): 109-134.
- Paz, Octavio (1959). *El Laberinto de la soledad*. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- Paz, Octavio (1991). *La búsqueda del presente*. In Skirius, 431-442.
- Rama, Angel (1984). *La ciudad letrada*. Hanover, N.H.: Edición del Norte.
- Ribeiro, Darcy (1977). *Las Américas y la civilización*. Mexico City: Colección Latinoamericana.
- Richards, Julia Becker, and Michael Richards (1996). Mayan language literacy in Guatemala: A socio-historical overview. In Hornberger, 189-212.
- Ripoll, Carlos (ed.) (1966). *Conciencia intelectual de América: Antología del ensayo hispanoamericano (1836-1959)*. New York: Las Américas.
- Salinas Pedraza, Jesús (1996). Saving and strengthening indigenous Mexican languages: The Celiac experience. In Hornberger, 171-185.
- Sarmiento, Domingo F. (1883). Conflicto y armoníos de las razas en América. In Ripoll, 94-100.
- Shapiro, Samuel (1963). *Invisible Latin America*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Skirius, John (ed.) (1994). *El ensayo hispanoamericano del Siglo XX*. Mexico City: Fondo de cultura.
- Stabb, Martin (1967). *In Quest of Identity. Patterns in the Spanish American Essay of Ideas, 1890-1960*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Vasconcelos, José (1925). *La Raza Cósmica*. In Ripoll, 321-327.
- Vasconcelos, José (1927). *Indología*. In Ripoll, 337-345.
- Zea, Leopoldo (1991). La identidad cultural e histórica de América Latina y la universidad. *Cuadernos Americanos* 6(24): 181-191.
- Zuniga, Madeleine, Ines Pozzi-Escot, and Luis Enrique Lopez, eds. (1991). *Educación bilingüe intercultural*. Lima: Fomciencias.
- Zuniga, Madeleine, Juan Ansión, and Luis Cueva, eds. (1987). *Educación en poblaciones indígenas: Políticas y estrategias en América Latina*. Santiago de Chile: UNESCO.