Transferring, switching, and modeling in West New York Spanish: an intergenerational study

RICARDO OTHEGUY, OFELIA GARCÍA, and MARIELA FERNÁNDEZ

Introduction

This paper provides a description of English contact features in the Spanish of Cuban Americans in West New York, placing special emphasis on the phenomenon known as modeling (Weinreich 1974 [1953]: 30–31), and offering a comparison between modeling and other types of contact phenomena, both within and across different generations of speakers. In addition, particular attention is paid to whether the innovations found in the speech of these Cuban Americans can be interpreted as providing internal evidence of stable bilingualism or of language shift.

Method and corpus

The study is based on a corpus of approximately 13,000 spoken words gathered in taped conversations with 12 informants. The interviews, carried out and transcribed by Mariela Fernández, were conducted entirely in Spanish. Subjects were all Cuban Americans residing in the town of West New York, New Jersey. Six interviews were conducted with United States-born, second generation informants. Another six were conducted with Cuban-born, first-generation informants. The second generation informants were all young adults, ages 15 to 21, born in the United States of Cuban parents. The first generation informants were all born in Cuba, and all but one lived there until at least the age of 40. At the time of the interview, some had been in the United States for as long as 18 years, others for as little as two years, and they were all mature adults.

Transferring and switching

Although Weinreich's categories of transferring, switching, and modeling have proven durable and useful, they are not as clear as they might first
switched words in only two events of switching.) We will present the data below in terms of number of switching events, irrespective of whether these events contain one or many words.

**Loanwords**

1. A veces tengo oportunidad de hacer overtime [oBertain] y ganar un extra money.
   'Sometimes I get a chance to do overtime and earn some extra money.'

2. La casa tiene un basement [bEylumEn] que no está en muy buenas condiciones.
   'The house has a basement that's not in very good condition.'

**Code switches**

2a. [The conversation deals with school rules.] Si tú eres un senior y estás absent más de quince días, te aguantan los credits y no te puedes graduas, así son bien estricto.
   'If you're a senior and you're absent more than fifteen days they hold back your credits and you can't graduate, so they are pretty strict.'

2b. [The conversation has to do with cheerleading.] Porque unas veces nos fajamos, tú sabes, no somos we don't agree on one thing, y todo el mundo quiere ser lo que quiere, y no puede ser.
   'Because sometimes we fight, you know; we aren't, we don't agree on one thing, and everybody wants to be what they want to be, and that can't be. And if we want to be, to be good, we would have to agree on one thing, and it's not like that.'

**Modelling**

The study of modelling, which Weinreich defined as the use of the influenced language's own elements in a manner that replicates, or models, features of the influencing language, is beset with terminological and conceptual difficulties. The terms calque, semantic loan, semantic extension, loan shift, and loan translation have all been in circulation for many decades, all referring essentially to the same modeling phenomenon. In addition, the much larger problem exists of confusing, within the category of loan translation, cases where evidence of language contact is detectable with cases where cultural innovation is present but with no apparent systemic linguistic alteration. Given the present state of research into these questions, the only items in which clear evidence of modeling
can be discerned are individual words. In longer phrases and sentences, what appear many times to be cases of modeling are instances of cultural, not linguistic, contact. Consequently, all potential cases of modeling that involve multiple-word stretches have been set aside here, and only those utterances where modeling can be reasonably ascribed to a specific lexical item have been included. With regard to terminology, calque has been selected as the best term, and the one that can be most flexibly handled in English, for the description of modeling phenomena.

**Word calques**

(3) a. *A mí me gustan las cartas de béisbol para colectarlas.*
   *I like baseball cards because I can collect them.*
   b. *Cuando no tengo nada que hacer, juego música para olvidar.*
   When I don't have anything to do I play music to listen to it.
   c. *Para coger una botella de leche, suponiendo, o un cartón de leche, suponiendo que de momento te verás sin él.*
   *To pick up a bottle of milk, say, or a carton of milk, assuming that all of a sudden you find you're out of it.*

**Three types of word calques**

In Weinreich (1974 [1953]) calques were conceived of as lexical items of the replica language being used in the manner of the model language. But in the present study calques are seen as word forms of the replica language into which meanings from the model language have migrated. Under this conceptualization juego música is not a case of using Spanish jugar in the model of English play, but an instance of one of the senses of play—an act of briskly handling or using an instrument for the purpose of making music—having migrated into Spanish jugar. In this view, modeling is a kind of transferring, but one in which word meanings are borrowed alone, and not, as in true transferring, together with their word forms. There is then a clear parallel between calques and loans: loans are the transferring of meanings and forms, calques the transferring of meanings without forms. In order to reflect this similarity, we will refer to word calques, based on the now widely accepted term loanword, as calque words.

Based on considerations that will be discussed presently, calque words in the corpus were subdivided according to a semantic criterion into similar-sense versus different-sense calques; according to a phonological criterion into merged-form versus independent-form calques; and according to a communicative criterion into duplicating-message calques versus innovating-message calques.

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**Similar-sense versus different-sense calque words.**

A distinction should be drawn between those calque words where the migrating sense are similar to already existing senses of the host word, and those where the migrating senses are totally different. Examples of similar-sense calque words would be **carta** and **colectar** in (3a). The English sense of **card** that has come into **carta,** 'a flat, stiff, usually small and rectangular piece of thin paperboard' is, while not the same, in many ways similar to one of the already existing senses of traditional Spanish **carta,** 'each of the pieces used to play cards'. Likewise, the English sense of **collect** that has migrated into **colectar,** 'to gather together objects,' is also similar to a traditional sense of **colectar,** 'to gather funds'.

In contrast, an example of a different-sense calque word would be (3b), where the sense of English **play** that has been introduced into **jugar** is not similar to any of the existing senses of **jugar,** none of which have anything to do with the handling of musical instruments.

**Merged-form versus independent-form calque words.**

In some calque words, the word form in the influenced language that becomes host to a migrating sense is similar in its phonological shape to the word from which the migrating sense originated in the influencing language. In calque words of this type the form of the originating word is seen as merging with the form of the host word. Examples of such merged-form calque words are found in (3a), where **carta** is similar in phonological form to **card,** and **colectar** is similar to **collect**. In other cases, however, the host word and the originating word are totally different in form. An example of such an independent form calque word is (3b), where **jugar** bears no phonological resemblance to **play** (for a similar classification, see Pratt 1980: 160 ff.).

**Duplicating- versus innovating-message calque words.**

Calques are seen here as resulting from the introduction of a message type from the influencing society into the communicative routines of the influenced society. Based on this conceptualization, a distinction can be drawn between duplicating calque words and innovating calque words. Duplicating calque words introduce message types that appear to be unnecessary on strictly cognitive-referential grounds, since the newly introduced message types are not objectively very different from the
existing Spanish types they replace. (For how these message types may be, nevertheless, quite different in the perception of the bilinguals, see the very insightful remarks of Haugen [1938: 19 ff] and the discussion, based on Haugen, in Otheguy [1983] and Otheguy and Garcia [1988].) An example of such a duplicating calqueword is colectar cartas, where the newly introduced sense of colectar contributes to conveying a message that is almost identical to the existing message conveyed by coleccionar cartas. An innovating calqueword, on the other hand, is one where the introduction of the new sense appears motivated by the need to communicate in Spanish notions that would not be readily communicable by means of unaltered traditional words. One such example is cortar de leche, where the sense newly introduced into cortar is pressed into the service of communicating a notion—in this case, identifying a referent—that is not readily manageable in the traditional form of the language.

The categories of analysis for the West New York data will therefore be (a) transferring, represented by phonologically integrated loanwords, that is, single-word items from English that show a fair measure of formal adaptation to Spanish; (b) code switching, represented both by multipletword items and by single-word items that preserve English phonology, both counted as single events in our calculations; and (c) modeling, represented by calquewords, subdivided according to a semantic criterion into similar sense and different sense, according to a phonological criterion into merged form and independent form, and according to a communicative criterion into duplicating message and independent message.

Overall level of English lexical influence

Table 1 displays the number of events of transferring, switching, and modeling found in our corpus. For transferring and modeling, the number of events is equivalent to the number of loanword and calqueword tokens respectively. For switching, the number of events is naturally lower than the number of switched word tokens in the corpus, since some switching events involve several words.

For each innovation, a percentage figure shows the proportion that each represents of the total number of words in the corpus. For transferring and modeling, this percentage figure is simply the proportion of loanwords and of calquewords to total words. For switching, the percentage figure is less straightforward, representing the proportion of switching events to total words. All three percentages are comparable, however, in that they all give the number of contact events (of transferring, modeling, and switching) per 100 words in the corpus.

The results shown in Table 1 are surprising because of the low percentages involved. Taking both generations together, the figure for transferring is less than 1 percent, and the same is true of modeling. For switching, where the higher percentages appear, the figure is still only 2.5 percent. The total number of innovating events in the entire corpus is a low 4.1 percent. And even if we take this total from the second generation alone, which is naturally where the greatest amount of English influence is found, the figure is still only 6.9 percent.

Differences between the innovations

The findings displayed in Table 1 make it possible to start to institute comparisons between the three types of lexical innovations, and to begin to establish which of them has the greater impact on Spanish. Table 1 shows that code switching, at 2.5 percent, is by far the most prevalent type of innovation regardless of generation, with loanwords and calquewords exercising a smaller impact on US Spanish.

The findings also make it possible (a) to start documenting the differences in level of English influence between the first and second generations, both globally and with regard to each particular type of innovation, and (b) to start asking whether these data contain any evidence regarding the extent to which the Spanish of Cuban Americans is a permanent or a receding feature of this community.

As expected, a higher level of English influence is found in the second than in the first generation. But the increase is not the same in all innovations. Transferring continues to be under 1 percent in the second
Table 2. Percentage point increase, and percentage rate of increase, of innovations between the generations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage point increase between generations (points)</th>
<th>Rate of increase between generations (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nouns</td>
<td>0.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>adjectives</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>actual words</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>innovations</td>
<td>3.1</td>
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data are subject to contradictory interpretations in this regard. In a well known attempt at generalization, Weinreich, citing work by Emilio Wills among German-Portuguese bilinguals in Brazil, does suggest that stable bilingualism is marked by modeling, whereas situations of language shift are characterized by transferring (1974 [1953]: 109). The importance of calquing as a differentiating factor between the generations in West New York would thus point to elements of stability in the bilingualism of second generation Cuban Americans. We will see, however, that other factors point in the opposite direction.

A distinction was drawn above between duplicating and innovating calquing in terms of whether or not there appeared to be some objective, cognitive-referential need for the calque. We think, although with some reservations, that duplicating calquing are more indicative of language shift than innovating calquing. We reason that whereas the innovating calque represents the natural, creative adaptation of the traditional language system to its new environment, the duplicating calque reflects the gradual forgetting of traditional Spanish message formulations and their replacement by English ones. Much more so than in innovating calquing, the adoption of English messages embodied in duplicating calquing may be moving contact speakers toward the point where English itself will be adopted for these messages. An alternative interpretation, to which we cannot do justice here for reasons of space, would regard duplicating calquing as reflecting a tenacious insistence on using Spanish even for the communication of highly Anglicized messages. This insistence would then be interpretable as a sign of stability rather than of shift.

Only 5 percent of calquing in our corpus are of the innovating kind, the rest being of the duplicating kind, the kind that displaces an existing Spanish formulation. Furthermore, the 5 percent calquing that are innovative are all found in the speech of the Cuban-born, first generation respondents. These findings suggest that Cubans of the first generation engage in modeling in circumstances where an unaltered form of traditional Spanish would not meet basic cognitive-referential needs. Their use of innovating calquing appears as a motivated, vigorous use of a Spanish lexical system that they know well and adapt successfully to their changing communicative needs. In contrast, Cubans of the second generation use duplicating calquing that displace existing, traditional Spanish message formulations. Their calquing appears to reflect a diminishing command over the Spanish lexical system, which in turn, and with the reservations already expressed, appears to be a harbinger of language shift.

A distinction was made above between independent-form and merged-
form calque words in terms of whether or not the originating word in the model language and the host word in the replica language showed phonological similarities. In our data, 80 percent of calque words are of the independent-form variety such as jugar, which bears no phonological resemblance to play, and only 20 percent are of the merged form type, such as colectar, which does have a formal resemblance with collect.

Through the use of questionnaires, we have documented elsewhere (Otheguy and Garcia 1983) that independent-form calque words like jugar appear to informants as a more radical type of modeling, and as greater evidence of diminished control over the traditional system, than do merged-form calque words like colectar. Since calque words of all types appear mostly in the speech of informants born in the United States, the preponderance of independent-over merged-form calquing can be interpreted as further evidence of declining mastery over the Spanish system as one passes from the first to the second generation.

A distinction was also made above between different-sense and similar-sense calque words in terms of whether or not the incoming sense from the model language was similar to existing senses of the host word of the replica language. In our data, 90 percent of calque words are of the similar-sense variety, like colectar, whose traditional meaning is similar to the meaning it has acquired under the influence of English, only 10 percent being different-sense calques like jugar whose traditional meaning does not resemble the one acquired in the contact situation.

Similar-sense calque words are regarded here as a less radical form of language contact than different-sense calque words. We reason that the changes undergone by similar-sense calque words under pressure from the model language represent the sort of mild semantic drift to which words are subjected as part of the natural evolution of language even outside contact situations. In contrast, we see the changes undergone by different-sense calque words as representing a more dramatic alteration, one perhaps less likely to be found in traditional dialects and more typical of contact settings.

It was suggested earlier that the greater frequency of duplicating-over innovating-message calque words, and of independent-form over merged-form calque words, pointed to a certain deterioration of competence in Spanish, and to the creation of conditions favorable to language shift. But the greater frequency of similar-over different-sense calque words suggests the opposite. That is, the prevalence of similar-sense calquing highlights areas of strength still found in the Spanish of second generation Cubans in West New York. For even though these Cubans are calquing without any objective communicative justification, as well as without regard for phonological similarities across the languages, they nevertheless appear for the most part to bring into the Spanish word forms only those new English senses that are highly compatible with existing senses of the word. This considerably greater preponderance of similar-over different-sense calquing suggests a still significant level of Spanish proficiency among second generation speakers, a fact that can be interpreted as more conducive to stability than to shift.

**Summary and conclusions**

In an effort to correct the imbalance in studies of language contact in favor of transferring and switching to the neglect of modeling, the Spanish of Cuban Americans in West New York has been studied taking all three forms of innovation into account.

It has been tentatively established that the extent of total English influence in the speech of Cuban Americans is on average around 4 percent. Evidence has also been provided to show that the major differentiating factor in the Spanish of second generation Cuban Americans is not their greater use of loanwords, and not even their greater willingness to switch to English. Rather, what sets apart North American-born from Cuban-born informants in West New York is their much greater use of modeling.

As part of the attempt to remedy the lack of theoretical attention paid to modeling in contact situations, we have provided a taxonomy of calque words ranging along three parameters, namely their use for creative or repetitive message types, their form, and their meaning. And an attempt has been made to use this taxonomy to shed some light on whether Cuban Americans in West New York find themselves in a situation of stable or transitional bilingualism. The results of this line of inquiry have been inconclusive, as some of the indicators point in the direction of stability while others point in the direction of shift.

It has been tentatively established that from a strictly cognitive-referential point of view most calque words used by Cuban Americans are superfluous, since there exist in traditional Cuban Spanish other familiar and serviceable formulations of the message types for which the calque words are used. This wholesale introduction of North American message types points to a fading collective memory of the traditional norms of the language among Cuban Americans in the United States, particularly among the second generation, which can reasonably be interpreted as creating conditions conducive to shift.

It has also been shown that the most calque words used by Cuban Americans bear no formal resemblances to the English words from which
meanings have been taken. This finding suggests too, although perhaps less clearly, a diminished competence in Spanish and points in the direction of shift.

In contrast, evidence has been provided that even among the second generation the meanings that are coming from English as part of the calquing process are being lodged in Spanish words whose existing meanings are highly compatible with the new ones being acquired. This pervasive semantic similarity between contact and traditional senses suggests that Cuban Americans born in the United States still possess a fairly clear grasp of the traditional meanings of Spanish words, which would allow, under appropriate social conditions, stable and continuous use of Spanish.

The City College of New York

References


