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Written Spanish in the United States: an analysis of the Spanish of the ethnic press

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1. Introduction

The 13 million Hispanics who live in the United States listen to, speak, read, and write Spanish frequently in their daily lives. Recent sociolinguistic research has focused on the Spanish spoken in the United States (Aguirre 1982; Elías-Olivares 1977, 1979; Klein 1982; Language Policy Task Force, Center for Puerto Rican Studies 1977; Lavandera 1981; Milán 1981; Ornstein and Valdés-Fallís 1979; Otheguy 1982, 1983; Poplack 1979, 1981; Pousada and Poplack 1979; Sánchez 1983; Silva-Corvalán 1982; Valdés-Fallís 1978; Zentella 1978, 1981). However, only a few researchers have shown an interest in the written language (Franqui 1979; Myers and Cortina i.p.). This paper presents the quantitative results of a preliminary trend study on written Spanish in the United States.

Our study uses the Spanish language press as the source of our written corpus. We have analyzed the language in the three major Spanish dailies of the United States: *La Opinión*, published in Los Angeles; *Diario Las Américas*, published in Miami; and *El Diario La Prensa*, published in New York.

The decision to use the press as the source of our written corpus is based on the nature of our analysis. We had previously conducted a content analysis of the Hispanic press in the United States (García et al. 1984). Our linguistic analysis now is not just a descriptive study of regional characteristics or interferences from English. Following sociolinguistic and language planning theoretical underpinnings (Fishman 1966, 1968, 1970, 1971, 1972), our study views United States Spanish as the *instrument of communication* among Hispanics in the United States and also between Hispanics here and in the countries of origin. Whereas other Spanish print, such as notices, letters, ballots, etc., is often used *only* to integrate the Hispanic community to the social life of the United States, the Spanish language newspaper serves this function, while at the same time it establishes continuity with life in the old country. It is precisely for this reason that we use the Spanish language newspaper as the source of our analysis of written Spanish in the United States.

The Spanish language dailies provide a stable written corpus, since the language they use serves to communicate messages from both the new and the old country.

In addition, the use of the press enables us to compare the United States norm with that of monolingual countries. Thus, our study also includes a linguistic analysis of a Mexican daily (*Excelsior*), a Cuban daily (*Gramma*), and a Puerto Rican daily (*El Mundo*).

We believe that United States Spanish is an adaptable, useful, and important instrument of communication. We acknowledge the capacity of United States Spanish to function as a language in its own right. Thus, our study goes beyond the usual question of influences from English. We hypothesized that the written norm of Spanish in the United States press would differ from that of Spanish in a monolingual country along four dimensions:

1. There would be the same degree of influences from English.
2. There would be more orthographic and grammatical errors even when not due to English influence.
3. There would be less use of regionalisms.
4. There would be fewer neologisms from sources other than English.

Our sample consisted of five 1980 issues of *La Opinión* (Los Angeles), *Diario Las Américas* (Miami), *Diario La Prensa* (New York), *Excelsior* (Mexico), *Gramma* (Cuba), and *El Mundo* (Puerto Rico). Three weekday and two weekend issues were selected in each case. Only the following items in each issue were subjected to our analysis: translations of UPI releases, columns signed by local ethnics excluding sports columns, social items about individual Hispanics, and paid advertisements excluding classified ads.

2. Written Spanish in the United States: a comparison with Spanish written in monolingual countries

A. English influences

Table 1 presents the results of our linguistic analysis of the Spanish language dailies in the United States, as well as in the monolingual countries. These results correspond to the four variables included in our hypothesis; namely, influences from English, grammatical and orthographic violations independent of English, regionalisms, and independent neologisms. Although we provide a composite result representative of the Spanish norm in the United States and that in monolingual countries, we include the individual results obtained for each of the three cities in the United States, as well as for each of the three

Table 1. Linguistic analysis of Spanish language dailies

	A		B			C		
	U.S. (%)**	Mono (%)***	L.A. (%)	Miami (%)	N.Y. (%)	Mexico (%)	Cuba (%)	P.R. (%)
English influences*	1.36	.81	.92	1.58	1.84	.72	.17	1.54
Gram. and orth. violations	1.17	.12	.44	.70	2.97	.06	.14	.15
Regionalisms	.28	.40	.43	.11	.32	.55	.28	.36
Neologisms	.04	.11	.01	.01	.02	.14	.10	.11
Rest	97.15	98.56	98.20	97.60	94.85	98.53	99.31	97.84
N = Total no. words read	92,300	116,100	33,250	36,125	22,925	41,800	14,425	59,875

* Influences from English include loans and calques.

** This is a composite result of the three Spanish language dailies in the United States: *La Opinión* (Los Angeles), *Diario Las Américas* (Miami), *Diario La Prensa* (New York). The individual results are shown in column B.

*** This is a composite result of the three dailies in monolingual Spanish countries: *Excelsior* (Mexico), *Gramma* (Cuba), *El Mundo* (Puerto Rico). The individual results are shown in column C.

monolingual countries. Perhaps the most interesting finding of our study is the great variability that exists in the Spanish written in Cuba, Mexico, and Puerto Rico. Indeed, as we will see later, there seems to be greater distance between the Spanish written in the three monolingual countries than between the composite figures for Spanish written in the three home countries and the composite for the United States.

An analysis of the first variable in Table 1 (English influences) reveals that English does impact more on United States Spanish than on Spanish written in monolingual Spanish countries. This finding negates the first part of our hypothesis which stated that the influence from English on Spanish in the United States would not be greater than that on Spanish in a monolingual country. We had originally adopted this hypothesis following the conclusions of Pousada and Poplack (1979) with regard to spoken Spanish in the United States. However, in our study, 1.36% of the total number of words in the United States sample showed English influence, whereas in the monolingual sample only .81% of the words were influenced by English. In effect, English influences were much more extensive in the United States sample.

The difference between our results and those of Pousada and Poplack (1979) could be due to the fact that we did not limit ourselves to a study of syntax. As Klein (1980) has proposed, syntax is least subject to influence from English, whereas lexicon is the most readily influenced. Our study of English influences included, as we will see later, adaptations of signifiers, of meanings, of syntax, and of messages.

It is instructive to realize that of the 92,300 words read in the United States sample, only 1.36% of the words show English influence. This, in fact, corroborates some of the findings of Pousada and Poplack (1979). There is indeed no case for convergence of Spanish and English in the United States. Furthermore, our study confirms that there is no evidence of a degenerative interference of English on Spanish written in the United States.

An analysis of the results of this first variable (English influences) in the three monolingual Spanish countries reveals the great disparity in the way in which English impacts the Spanish written in the three countries (.72% of total words read in Mexico, .17% in Cuba and 1.54% in Puerto Rico). The degree of diffusion of English influences is closely related to the degree of contact of the United States with the monolingual country. Where the political, economic, and social climate of the United States is closely linked to that of the monolingual country (as in the case of Puerto Rico), English influences abound. Since Spanish is used in Puerto Rico to communicate many messages of United States society, the impact of the English language is greater. However, in Cuba, Spanish is seldom used to communicate messages of a North American society. For example, the Cuban newspaper that we analyzed does not contain any classified ads. Consumer goods sold in

the United States are most often the source of the English influence which we discover in the written Spanish of monolingual countries. However, since Cuban society does not partake of the same social system, English influences seldom enter the language.

According to our results, the degree of difference of written Spanish in Mexico, Cuba, and Puerto Rico with regard to English influence is tremendous. Taking Cuban Spanish as our reference point (.17% of words influenced by English), Mexico has four times the English influences (.72%), whereas Puerto Rico has nine times the amount (1.54%). The composite figures which make up our United States and monolingual norms differed by one and a half times (1.36% vis-à-vis .81%). Thus, it would be important for us to ask ourselves why, in the case of Spanish in the United States, many analyses point to a 'degeneration' of Spanish because of English influence, whereas in the monolingual context the same point is seldom made. We propose that it has to do with the official status of the Spanish language in the home countries, and the fact that it is the language of the majority and of all social classes. Spanish in the United States is downgraded not merely because English impacts on it much more than it does in monolingual societies, but because it is the language of a poor minority.

It is also interesting to note that when the ethnic community in the United States is in close social contact with the country of origin, the Spanish written in the United States closely resembles that written in the monolingual country. That is, we find that Spanish written in Los Angeles and in New York is affected by English to a degree that closely resembles the impact of English on Spanish in Mexico and Puerto Rico (compare, for example, the fact that .92% of the words in Los Angeles show English influence, with .72% in Mexico; and 1.84% in New York, with 1.54% in Puerto Rico). However, the difference between the Spanish written in Miami and that in Cuba with regard to English influence is enormous. In the Cuban daily only .17% of the words showed English influence, whereas in the Miami newspaper 1.58% do. This points to the great discontinuity between the life of Cubans in the United States and in Cuba. The linguistic difference is another outward manifestation of the social, political, and economic cleavage that has divided the group. In short, except in the Cuban case, English has influenced Spanish in the United States in a way which seems closely related to the way it has done so in the country of origin.

B. *Loans vs. calques*

However, we felt that there was also a qualitative difference between the way that English impacted Spanish in the United States and Spanish in mono-

lingual countries, even in the case of Puerto Rico and Mexico. We adopted the hypothesis offered by Otheguy (1983) that calques, and not loans, are the definitive characteristic in differentiating United States Spanish from that of monolingual countries. Following the categorization proposed by Otheguy (1982) we divided English influences in Spanish into two major categories:

1. *Loans*. Those that use English signifiers (ex. 'dealer', 'frozen', etc.)
2. *Calques*. Those that use Spanish signifiers but that violate either
 - a. The semantic content (Haugen had identified these as 'loanshifts') (ex. 'Busca la *aplicación* para atender al curso' for 'Busca la *solicitud* para asistir al curso').
 - b. The syntactic system (ex. 'Todos pueden conocer de sus derechos en el período comenzando enero 6' for 'Todos pueden averiguar sus derechos a partir del 6 de enero').
 - c. The pragmatics, that is, the semiotic system of communication which transmits the message in a monolingual community (ex. 'La casa tiene comedor hundido' for 'La casa tiene comedor a desnivel').

Table 2 presents the results of the categorization of all cases of English influences divided into the two major categories proposed above: loans and calques.

An analysis of Table 2 reveals that loans are more common than calques both in the Spanish written in the United States and in that written in the monolingual countries. Whereas .99% of the words read in the United States sample are loans, only .37% are calques. Whereas .69% of the words read in the Spanish speaking country are loans, .12% are calques. Indeed the journalists in the United States and in the monolingual Spanish countries prefer to incorporate signifiers from English rather than violate the linguistic and semiotic structure of Spanish.

Although there are more loans than calques in both the United States and Spanish speaking countries, calques are much more diffused in the United States context than in the Spanish speaking context. That is, although there are three times more calques in the United States context than in the home country context (compare .37% of words in the US sample with .12% of words in the monolingual countries), there are only one and a half more loans (compare .99% of words in the US with .69% in the home countries). This confirms Otheguy's hypothesis that the definitive characteristic of United States Spanish is its extensive use of calques in an effort to transmit the same messages and the same conceptual framework of United States society with signifiers from Spanish. Spanish written in the United States is distinguished from that of the Spanish speaking countries not so much by its use of English signifiers (i.e. loans), but by its use of Spanish signifiers which convey signifieds from English (i.e. calques). It is precisely the use of the Spanish

Table 2. Use and diffusion of loans and calques in written Spanish (detail of variable I, English influences, in Table 1)

	A		B		C			P.R. (%)
	U.S. (%)*	Mono (%)**	L.A. (%)	Miami (%)	N.Y. (%)	Mexico (%)	Cuba (%)	
Loans	.99	.69	.63	1.29	1.19	.58	.15	1.34
Calques	.37	.12	.29	.29	.65	.14	.02	.20
N = total no. words read	92,300	116,100	33,250	36,125	22,925	41,800	14,425	59,875

* These are composite figures based on the three Spanish language dailies in the U.S.: *La Opinión* (Los Angeles), *Diario Las Américas* (Miami), *Diario La Prensa* (New York). The individual results are shown in column B.

** These are composite figures based on the three dailies in monolingual Spanish countries: *Excelsior* (Mexico), *Gramma* (Cuba), *El Mundo* (Puerto Rico). The individual results are shown in column C.

language within the semiotic communication system of a North American society that determines the difference between the Spanish from here and there.

Our study of English influences on United States Spanish adds to the existing literature. Since we view language not as a system of structures, but as an instrument of communication, our study has identified many items in United States Spanish that are not direct violations of the structure of the Spanish language, but of the communicative system of messages prevalent in a monolingual Spanish speaking society (*comedor hundido* in the United States for *comedor a desnivel* in the home countries is a good example). As Otheguy (1983) had suggested, it is precisely this last type of calque which differentiates United States Spanish from Spanish in monolingual contexts. This message type of calque, prevalent in our United States press sample, awaits further study.

We have thus far shown that Spanish in the United States is quantitatively similarly impacted by English as is Spanish in monolingual contexts. The main difference between Spanish here and there is not one of degree of impact but one of the *quality of the impact*. Whereas English loans are rapidly being assimilated into Spanish in monolingual contexts, calques from English are not diffused as rapidly as they seem to be in the United States. Spanish in the United States is mostly used to communicate messages of an English speaking society. Thus, Spanish, as an instrument of communication, adapts by calquing from English. United States Spanish is not degenerated by the influence of the linguistic structure of English. Rather, United States Spanish is an example of the positive adaptability of language as an instrument of communication to also convey messages of an English speaking society.

C. *Violations not due to English influence*

Yet another difference between United States Spanish and Spanish in monolingual Spanish countries has to do with the second variable included in our hypothesis; namely, the violation of orthographic and grammatical rules of the written Spanish norm without linguistic or semiotic influence from English. An analysis of this second variable in Table 1 above reveals the great difference obtained for our United States sample and our monolingual sample. Although 1.17% of the words analyzed in the United States sample showed deviations of this kind, only .12% of those in the monolingual sample did. Thus, in the Spanish written in the United States we found almost 20 times more deviations from standard written Spanish than in the monolingual countries. This seems to confirm the thesis proposed by Klein (1982) that the

predominant use of English in the United States prevents the normal learning of some structures of Spanish.

Attacks on United States Spanish usually propose that the influence of the English structure has degenerated the system. Our study disproves this claim, as we have seen. However, the analysis of this second variable seems to confirm that the main difference between United States Spanish and the Spanish of monolingual contexts is not the presence of English, but the absence of Spanish as a language of prestige.

It is instructive to realize that the orthographic and linguistic deviations which we have categorized under our second variable mostly include linguistic characteristics of the written rather than the spoken language. For the most part, these include accents, punctuation, capitalization, orthography, and grammatical deviations that would be undifferentiated in spoken language. This finding seems to indicate that the written modality of a minority language suffers much more than its oral modality. It suggests that if a language such as Spanish is to survive in the United States, the oral use of the language must be accompanied by the development of literacy standards in Spanish among its speakers.

D. *Regionalisms*

Many linguists have studied Cuban Spanish (Guitart 1978; López Morales 1971; Revest 1966; Terrell 1976), Mexican Spanish (Lope Blanch 1982; Moreno de Alba 1982), and Puerto Rican Spanish (De Granda 1968; López Morales 1979; Llorens 1971; Navarro Tomás 1974; Pérez Sala 1973). In the United States many studies have described the characteristics of Spanish within each region of the United States. The peculiarities of Puerto Rican Spanish (Milán 1981; Zentella 1981), Mexican Spanish (Craddock 1978; Foster 1976; Hensey 1978; Peñalosa 1980; Reyes 1978), and Cuban Spanish (Beardsley 1979; Solé 1979) in the United States have certainly been well documented. However, there are no studies that determine whether these various regional varieties of Spanish have achieved wider (inter-Hispanic) currency or are being displaced.

Our study also included an analysis of lexical regionalisms found in United States Spanish and in the Spanish of monolingual Spanish countries. Table 1 also shows the results for this third variable. Only .28% of the words analyzed in the United States sample were categorized as regionalisms. In the monolingual sample .40% of the words read were classified as regionalisms. There were then almost twice as many regionalisms in the monolingual sample than in the United States sample. Our results thus prove the thesis suggested by

Ornstein and Valdés in 1979. They had suggested that regionalisms were becoming rare in United States Spanish.

It seems to us, however, that this interregional leveling of Spanish in the United States is due to sociological rather than purely linguistic reasons. Recent demographic data confirm the great geographic mobility of Hispanics in the United States. In an effort not to alienate any particular Hispanic group and to ensure communication, journalists in the United States write in a language that does not emphasize regional differences. This tendency to avoid regionalisms is also followed by nationwide advertisers that write in a neutral Spanish. Communication with the greatest number of Spanish speakers is thus guaranteed.

It is important to point out that this leveling of regionalisms is not unique to United States Spanish. Similar demographic processes have decreased regionalisms in other societies (Ammon 1979 for German; Berliner 1981 for Yiddish; Hall 1980 for Italian).

E. *Neologisms*

In 1980 Pratt claimed that neologisms in Peninsular Spanish are always the result of English influence. Our experience with American Spanish led us to believe that neologisms are for the most part, but not exclusively, dependent on English. Our fourth variable focused on neologisms independent of English. By comparing the incidence of independent neologisms in United States Spanish and in monolingual Spanish contexts, we provided another dimension for comparison.

An analysis of this fourth variable in Table 1 reveals that neologisms other than those dependent on English are almost nonexistent in the United States sample (0.4% of the words read). Although they are also rare in the monolingual sample, independent neologisms occur almost three times more often than in the United States sample (.11% in the monolingual sample).

In 1981 Lavandera proposed that the specialization of two languages in a bilingual community impedes the development of the stylistic variation of the minority language. Spanish in the United States is constantly forced to adapt in order to communicate messages of an English speaking society. In this respect Spanish in the United States has much more stylistic variety than Spanish in a monolingual context. However, Spanish in the United States depends much more on structures and messages from English for its creativity. Spanish in a monolingual context uses or creates its own expressive resources within its own structural or semiotic perimeter.

3. Conclusions

What then are the characteristics of journalistic Spanish in the United States that differentiate it from Spanish in a monolingual context? Our findings are the following:

1. Although there is a slight increase of English influences in United States Spanish over Spanish in monolingual contexts, the difference is more qualitative than quantitative. That is, Spanish in the United States is not much more impacted by English, but is impacted differently, from Spanish in the home countries. Whereas loans are readily diffused in both a bilingual and a monolingual context, calques are much more rapidly diffused in a bilingual context. This has to do with the necessity of using Spanish in order to communicate messages of an English speaking society.

2. Spanish in the United States shows much more incidence of orthographic and grammatical violations independent of English than Spanish in monolingual contexts. Indeed, United States Spanish differs more from Spanish in the home countries because of the inconsistent use of its written as well as oral modality and lack of prestige, rather than because of the presence of English.

3. United States Spanish uses fewer regionalisms than the Spanish of monolingual contexts. This again has to do with the need for Spanish to be an instrument of communication among Hispanics of different nationalities.

4. Spanish in the United States relies on English for its creativity, whereas Spanish in home countries relies much more heavily on other linguistic sources or on its own expressive adaptability.

The divergence between the United States norm and the monolingual Spanish norm does not signal the destruction and demise of the Spanish language in the United States. Our study confirms, with the exception of Cuba, the parallelism that exists between the Spanish of the community in the United States and that of the monolingual community which is also influenced by North American culture and by the English language. The presence of English affects, although differently, the Spanish of both communities. However, it is the absence of a written and public Spanish of prestige that is the decisive factor in the difference that we perceive. It is thus extremely important to stop worrying about the influence of English on the Spanish of the United States and to start using the minority language. The open and consistent use of Spanish in all public domains by both the lower and the upper classes will be the guarantee that Spanish in the United States is developed along the lines of Spanish in the monolingual contexts.

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As a response to the will of the public¹ as expressed in the 71% to 29% plurality in favor of Proposition 38, on November 21, 1984, California's Governor George Deukmejian sent to the President of the United States, to the Attorney General, and to the leaders of Congress a letter which contained the following wording:

The People of the State of California recognizing the importance of a common language in unifying our diverse nation hereby urge that Federal law be amended so that ballots, voters' pamphlets and all other official voting materials shall be printed in English only.²

California's voters thus by a great majority urged a confirmation of that particular language planning policy which is termed 'Type A' in the sociolinguistic literature on the topic (cf. Fishman 1972; Drake 1975). The inevitable consequences of adopting language policy Type A are of special interest to language planners, for this policy all but guarantees that the elites of any given polity will be sustained, and that the school system will produce a lower literacy rate and a higher dropout rate (see Drake 1975: 269). In this article I will investigate first, the nature of the arguments used by 'U.S. English', the chief interest group in charge of urging a return to a Type A policy, and second, the most intellectually useful political science perspective which might explain how California's voters (and of course those of other states as well) have come to think this way about language use and language function in America.

I

The organized political group which gathered signatures so that Proposition 38 could be placed on the ballot was called the 'California Committee for Ballots in English', but these Californians were actually a state-level subcom-