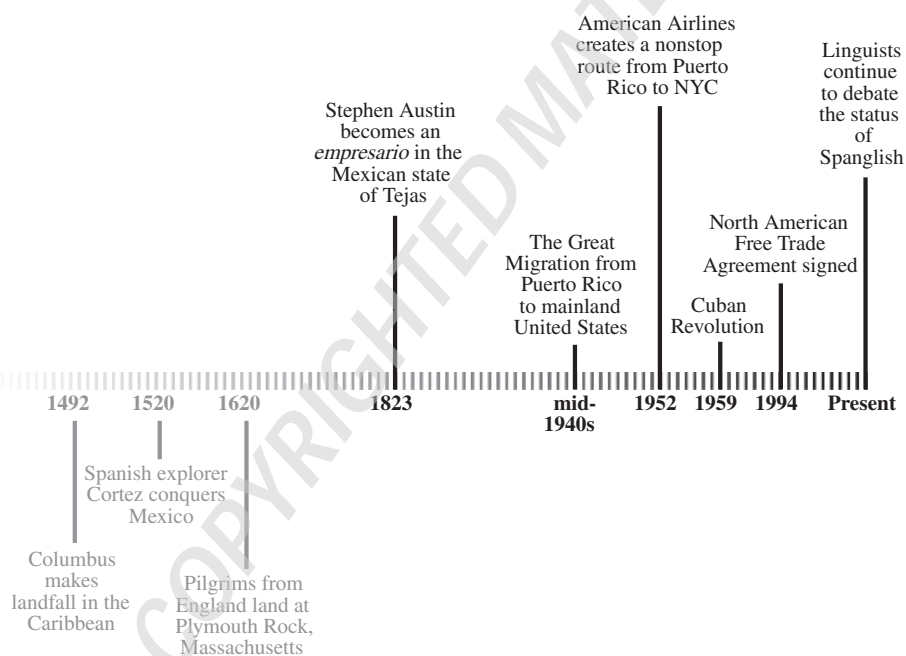


## I

# All Languages Were Once Spanglish



## The Mexican State of Coahuila y Tejas

In 1821, Mexico won its independence from Spain and came into control of territory that extended not only over present-day Mexico but also over present-day Central America, as well as large parts of present-day southwest United States. The new

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*Languages in the World: How History, Culture, and Politics Shape Language*, First Edition.

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Mexican government continued the Spanish practice of issuing land grants to stimulate settlement and to consolidate and control the native population.<sup>1</sup> After independence, two rather poor and sparsely populated states, Coahuila and Tejas, were joined together. Since Tejas was the more thinly settled of the two and subject to frequent attacks by Apache and Comanche tribes, the governors of the newly combined state were looking to boost the population there in hopes that incoming settlers could control the Indian raids. The government enacted a system that allowed agents, known as *empresarios*, to promote settlement.

In 1823, the Mexican state of Coahuila y Tejas granted a contract to Stephen Austin, an Anglo farmer, to become one of the *empresarios*, and he brought 300 families to his settlement a few years later. Increasing numbers of Anglos in search of cheap land in the wake of the first depression in the United States eventually led the Mexican government to limit immigration. However, shifts in political sentiments had already begun. In 1836, after many battles with Mexico, Tejas became the independent Republic of Texas, while Coahuila remained part of Mexico. Nine years later, when Texas joined the United States, it brought into the union an English-speaking majority and a significant number of Spanish-speaking *mestizos* who had lived in that territory for several hundred years. The border between Texas and Coahuila thus marks the place where the two main European populations to colonize North and South America drew their definitive political lines (see Map 1.1).<sup>2</sup>

The Tex-Mex border is also the place where English and Spanish met head on and started mixing, like the roiling waters of two oceans encountering one another. Now, 200 years later, the desire of English-speaking American farmers for cheaper land and an immigration law enacted by Spanish-speaking Mexican legislators have produced a *linguistic* result. We may call this result Spanglish, and it is a specific and yet inevitable consequence of how the members of a bilingual community have reformed the grammatical pieces of their dual linguistic inheritance. In order to justify the claim that all languages were once Spanglish, we need first to define language and then to provide an account of the conditions through which languages arise.

## What Is Language?

The usual answers to the question go something like this: “Language is a means by which humans communicate their thoughts and feelings through speech, although there are purely gestural languages, such as American Sign Language (ASL) used in the Deaf community.” Or: “Language is used to refer to things in the world. The word *book* refers to a particular kind of object.” The first description highlights one aspect of language, namely that it is primarily a human activity and primarily a spoken one, which seems apt enough to capture the fact that most humans around the world have tended to spend large parts of their day conducting their business, catching up on gossip, discussing politics, telling stories, flirting, fighting, and making up. The emphasis on the spoken mode is traditional but now somewhat misplaced. Most humans in nonrural parts of the world spend large parts of their day on their phones, surfing and texting. The second description is also useful as a first pass because we do often communicate about objects in our world.



**Map 1.1** Map of the states and territories of Mexico as they were from November 24, 1824 to 1830. Source: Golbez [GFDL (<http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.html>)], CC-BY-SA-3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>), via Wikimedia Commons.

In *Languages in the World: How History, Culture, and Politics Shape Language* (hereafter *Languages in the World*), we want to nudge the understanding of language in a direction that will at first feel unfamiliar. Language, as we define it, is an *orienting behavior* that orients the orientee within his or her cognitive-social domain and that arises in **phylogeny**<sup>3</sup> (history of the species) and **ontogeny** (individual development) through recurrent interactions with conspecifics. In plainer terms, we can say that when we speak, we are affecting, influencing, even manipulating – not to shy away from a suspicious-sounding word here – the interest and attention of agents who are similar to ourselves, who belong to our phylogenetic **lineage**, that is, who are our fellow human beings. These fellow human beings are also likely to be ones who belong to our particular language group. It is also the case that through our recurrent interactions with our fellow human beings in our particular language groups, we also create ourselves, our identities.

Two points are to be highlighted here. First, one person can only influence the cognitive domain – the thoughts and the coordinated actions – of another to the extent that they share a similar enough history. However, the orienting will never be the same for both parties, because one cannot literally transfer one’s thoughts and feelings to another’s head. However, with similar enough histories of interactions, the parties will be able to coordinate themselves reliably around a set of signals, be they acoustic (as in speech), gestural (as in sign language), or written (as in texting). The ability to reliably coordinate others and, in turn, be reliably coordinated by others is usually what is taken to mean to be able to speak a particular language.

Second, although language is old enough in the species to be woven into the human genome, the particular ways different communities reliably orient their fellow members and thereby coordinate their activities will necessarily vary. This is because individual groups – communities, societies, cultures – are historical products with their own trajectories. Of course, different groups can and do interact with one another, such as English speakers and Spanish speakers over hundreds of years in Texas, and when they do, they create new trajectories for the ways they orient one another and coordinate their actions. One of these trajectories may be a new language.

### How Many Languages Are There?

Another way to approach the question *What is language?* is to ask another: How many languages are there? This question gives us leverage into understanding the way we will be using the term in this book, because it reveals the complexities that the term *language* obscures when used to refer to a seemingly well-known entity such as the English language. Given these complexities, linguists estimate the number of languages in the world today to be somewhere between 4000 and 8000. They often settle on a number between 5000 and 7000. Certainly, there are practical problems in getting an accurate count. The inventory of the languages of the world is necessarily incomplete because linguists are aware of the phenomenon of so-called hidden languages. These are languages spoken, say, in the Amazon or in the highlands of Papua New Guinea, which are obviously known to their speakers but not yet known to linguists, and new languages are somewhat regularly brought to linguists’ attention. At the same time, other languages are on the point of extinction. The Celtic language Breton spoken in Brittany, France is only one of many endangered languages in the world today. It is difficult to know whether or not to continue to count it.

While the practical problems do complicate matters, the bulk of the indeterminacy stems from the fact that there are two different, equally valid criteria for determining where one language ends and another begins. Unfortunately, their results do not always coincide and are even sometimes contradictory. The two criteria are:

Criterion no. 1: Mutual Intelligibility. If the term *language* is understood from the point of view of individuals interacting with one another, then the ability of speakers to understand one another should serve as a reliable guide for distinguishing a language from a dialect or, as linguists now prefer to say, language **variety**. The preference among linguists for the term *variety* stems from the fact that the term *dialect* sometimes carries the implication among speakers of a language that a nonstandard variety,

that is, a dialect, is inferior. This being said, if speakers of two related speech varieties are able to understand one another, their speech counts as varieties of one language, not as two separate languages. If the two speech varieties are mutually unintelligible, they count as separate languages.

The criterion of mutual intelligibility is notoriously difficult to apply, because it is a scalar notion, a matter of degree. The fuzziness of the criterion is compounded by the fact that it is affected by the amount of contact individuals in the speech varieties have with one another and by the desire of those individuals to understand one another. The phenomenon of **dialect chains** does not make applying the criterion any easier. A dialect chain of A-B-C-D occurs when varieties A and B are mutually intelligible, B and C are mutually intelligible, C and D are mutually intelligible, B and D get along with difficulty, and A and D are incomprehensible. Such a chain extends across hundreds of aboriginal varieties in Australia. Europe alone has several such chains, including the continua of: German, Dutch, and Flemish; the rural varieties of Portuguese, Spanish, Catalan, French, and Italian; as well as Slovak, Czech, Ukrainian, Polish, and Russian.

Criterion no. 2: Group Identity. If the term *language* is understood from the point of view of groups in the context of their social lives, then a language is a language when the group says it is a language. Thus, Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian are respected as separate languages, although there is a potentially high degree of mutual intelligibility among them, as is the case for Czech and Slovak, Dutch and Flemish, Hindi and Urdu, Laotian and Thai, Serbian and Croatian. In other words, groups recognize political and cultural factors in distinguishing themselves from other groups. Taking the political point of view, a language can be seen as a dialect with an army and a navy.<sup>4</sup>

Distinguishing cultural factors may include visible differences, such as different writing systems, which help to confer a separate language status for otherwise mutually intelligible varieties: Hindi is written in the Devanāgarī script, while Urdu is written in the Perso-Arabic alphabet; Serbian is written in the Cyrillic alphabet, and Croatian in the Latin alphabet. The use of different scripts often has religious implications and may also line up with geopolitical boundaries. The reverse is also true: mutually unintelligible varieties can be considered as one language. Such is the case for Chinese, which is a cover term for a number of mutually unintelligible speech varieties, where Mandarin, Cantonese, and Taiwanese are among the best known. Nevertheless, it makes political and cultural sense to use the term *Chinese* in certain situations, and the logographic writing system is a powerful unifying factor that can be read by all literate Chinese, independent of their speech variety.

There is yet another factor complicating the matter of determining how many languages there are in the world today, and it is the reverse of the problem of how to count languages that are dying off. It is the problem of how to count languages coming into existence. People from different linguistic backgrounds have always been in contact with one another, and the effects of these contact situations can be found in every language of the world, most often in the form of borrowings. The most obvious kinds of borrowings are lexical. Monolingual speakers of English in the United States are likely to know many words borrowed from Spanish such as *amigo* and *sombrero*, familiar phrases such as *hasta la vista* and *yo quiero*,<sup>5</sup> and even the date *cinco de mayo*.<sup>6</sup> Reciprocally, many varieties of Spanish in the Americas exhibit the influence of English

borrowings. The recent use of *man* as a term of address in Colombian Spanish is but one example among many.

Another, more elaborated kind of language mixing is found in bilingual situations all over the world, and it is called *code switching*. Code switching can be defined as the use of two or more languages in the same discourse or the alternation of two languages within a single discourse, sentence, or constituent. There does not seem to be any restriction on the languages mixed, be they Moroccan Arabic and French, Tamil and English, Turkish and Dutch, or Quechua and Spanish. The mixing reflects an individual's and a community's experiences with the languages available to them. It is surely the case that two or more languages meet in the interactions of the community in the marketplace, so to speak. However, it is also the case that languages meet in the cognitive domain of the individual. Sometimes, the two languages will mingle and blend, especially when in the presence of another person who also knows those two languages. Sometimes, the two languages will activate a sense of contrast, such that the speaker feels that he or she has slightly or strongly differing personalities, depending on the language being used and the situation it is used in. Note that we are using the term *cognitive domain* to refer to the joining of the mental (thoughts, feelings) and the physical (actions), because the mental and the physical are in continuous feedback. We are using the term *personality* to refer to a characteristic way of behaving in given circumstances.

Code switching occurs in communities of bilingual individuals who move smoothly and often between languages, thereby interweaving two (or more) languages. A couple, one a native French speaker and the other a native English speaker, both fluent in both languages, may develop their own Franglais. If large numbers of English speakers move into a Spanish-speaking territory or vice versa, the interwoven language may become the norm in a certain place. A speech norm qualifies for the status of a language if it meets one of the two criteria described above. In the case of speech norms in, say, certain Puerto Rican communities in New York City, people who are monolingual either in English or in Spanish would have difficulty understanding a sentence such as: "Why make Carol *sentarse atrás pa'que* (sit in the back so) everybody has to move *pa'que se salga* (for her to get out)?"<sup>7</sup> This form of speech would qualify as a language in that it satisfies criterion no. 1, since it is not mutually intelligible either to English or to Spanish monolinguals. (Presumably bilingual English/Spanish individuals would have no difficulty picking up the speech norms in whatever English/Spanish community they found themselves in.) At some point, these bilingual individuals might be moved to invoke criterion no. 2 and to recognize their variety as something better than just a hodgepodge that is neither so-called good English nor so-called good Spanish. They might decide to give it a name and call it Spanglish. They might be likely to identify any number of varieties of Spanglish in the Western hemisphere.

However, as always in language matters, the case is not clear cut. Accomplished bilinguals are often not aware that they are speaking a new language. They might even deny that they are mixing languages and may identify either English or Spanish as the language (they think) they are speaking, although a linguist might observe otherwise. We might then say that a language is a language when linguists say it is a language, but even here, there is lack of agreement among linguists on the independent grammatical status of mixed forms such as Spanglish. And, of course, linguists have no greater

authority than speakers who are apt to say things like: “You [the linguist] say that I am speaking Gullah [a creolized<sup>8</sup> variety of English]. I say that I am speaking English.” The opposite also holds: many speakers who mix Spanish and English in the United States believe they speak a language called Spanglish, though some linguists believe this variety to be a variety of Spanish in the United States with many English borrowings. While linguists debate whether or not Spanglish is different from Spanish in the United States, speakers debate whether or not they speak it in the first place. The lack of consensus among linguists and speakers strikes us as completely normal, given that Spanglish – whatever it is – is clearly in its early stages of development.

The identification of a language as a language thus depends on many factors: perceptual, political, ideological, social, and even phenomenological, that is, whether interested observers, for instance, speakers of a particular variety and/or linguists, recognize (and agree) that a language has a separate identity. In this book, the term *language* refers to:

- (i) the means by which one individual more or less reliably orients another’s thoughts and actions;
- (ii) a culturally determined set of acoustic, gestural, and/or written signals;
- (iii) the trans-generational stability of these signals; and
- (iv) the functioning of these signals in an environment with artifacts and practices that support the ways the individuals living in that environment are oriented by the language(s) they speak.

This description is circular, and deliberately so. It also is meant to suggest a certain looseness or porosity in the linguistic fabric. History provides ample evidence that languages have enough “give” in them for their speakers to unknit and reknit them in response to their always-changing needs and their always-changing environments. As the linguist, Edward Sapir, once aphorized: “All grammars leak.”

Thus, we can say that the number of languages in the world is ultimately indeterminate and that the activity of counting them falls somewhere between an inexact science and a nuanced art.

## How and When Did Language Get Started?

The premise of this book is that language is always catching up to conditions. What, then, are these conditions? The example of Spanglish thriving today on the Tex-Mex border opened our discussion to illustrate how normal such mixing is. We can now add the idea that the mixing comes about as a result of decisions taken by people who neither know nor even necessarily care about linguistic causes and effects. The decisions people make are, more often than not, economic.

In the 1940s, the first significant immigration from Puerto Rico to New York City, known as the Great Migration, began as a result of depressed economic conditions in Puerto Rico. Enough Puerto Ricans came that by 1950, East Harlem had become known as Spanish Harlem. Then, in 1952, American Airlines created a nonstop route

from San Juan, Puerto Rico to New York City to bring manual labor to the garment industry. All this is to say that when Puerto Ricans moved, and an airline made a decision about flight routes, no one had any reason to think about the linguistic consequences or to imagine the kind of Spanglish now spoken in Spanish Harlem. Nor did the first wave of Cubans, namely the wealthy ones, who came to Miami just before the end of Castro's Revolution in 1959, foresee the mixed language some of their grandchildren would be speaking. (Some may be thinking of it now and lamenting the fact.) Certainly, there have been times and places when people – heads of state, national assemblies, language academies, concerned citizens – have tried to regulate who speaks and how they speak. Many societies have placed legal restrictions on the types of things that can be said and when. In the United States, for instance, we have laws concerning libel (pertaining to print) and slander (pertaining to speech). By and large, however, people do not think about language on a moment-to-moment basis. They just want to have what they want and to get through their day.

The desire to escape an unwanted political regime, the desire for a desirable mate, the desire for better land, the desire for a better job – these desires cause people to move. These are the initial conditions: the need for one group to find a new watering hole or the good berry bushes or the plentiful game, and these needs inevitably bring encounters with other groups engaged in similar searches. For these encounters to have even minimal linguistic consequences, they need to be between groups from a similar or similar enough lineage, first and foremost the primate lineage. Groups belonging to the primate lineage will have both a particular kind of social organization and a particular kind of cognitive organization, ones that include some social gesturing and the ability to make and interpret some lip smacks and grunts. From there, the kinds of encounters producing significant linguistic consequences will be between and among groups who have elaborated these manual and facial gestures, some of which have become reliable indicators of actions to be done, which is to say that the groups have leveraged gestures and sounds to affect, to influence, and to manipulate the thoughts and actions of their conspecifics, the fellow members of their lineage.

Among the important conditions that language is always catching up to are the conditions that language itself makes possible and continually puts into motion. If I promise you that I will meet you at the coffee shop at four o'clock, I have brought a certain state of affairs into existence that could not occur without language, namely one known as 'promising,' and this state constrains my future actions, as well as yours. If I do not show up at the coffee shop at the appointed time, it is not the case that nothing has happened. It is rather that I have now brought into existence a different state of affairs, namely one known as 'breaking a promise,' and this state will also have effects on our future interactions. Our days are filled with such microevents, and the world is filled with similarly structured macroevents, such as December 8, 1941, "The Congress of the United States of America declares war on the Empire of Japan." Events such as promising and declaring war are called *speech acts*, acts that perform the very act by announcing it.

In this book, we advocate what can be called an ecological account of the origin of language. We believe the instantiation and development of language arose from the perceived benefit of one human orienting a fellow human in his or her cognitive domain, the benefit being that the orienting activity was seen to be effective, that is,



to affect that person. The phrase “Please pass the salt” makes use of someone else’s muscle power. A mother speaking in a soothing voice to her infant relaxes the baby’s breathing and heart rate. In an ecological account, any cognitive benefits to the species are deemed to have occurred as a result of the development and maintenance of language. No prior cognitive advances are required to instantiate it. In other words, no cognitive advance is posited here to have bootstrapped humans into language. Theorists who do posit such a prior advance – for instance, God (or some evolutionary event) first endowed humans with the faculty of reason – subscribe to what can be called the rationalist account of the origin of language. Among theorists of all stripes, there is general consensus that human language as we know it was up and running at least 60 kya and probably well before that, easily as far back as 150 kya, if not more. For now, it is enough to point out that the other initial condition to which language is always catching up is that these encounters at the water holes, the berry bushes, or the hunting grounds must be between groups who belong to a particular lineage, namely that of *Homo sapiens sapiens*.

This brief origin sketch also serves the purpose of addressing a fundamental question concerning the origin of the languages of the world that is often cast in terms of a dichotomy: Are the living languages today a result of monogenesis, whereby all languages are descended from one source, or are they a result of polygenesis, whereby they are descended from several sources? The question can be improved upon by pointing out that the dichotomy is a false one and then answered by referring to our definition of language. As long as one human was able to orient another in his or her cognitive domain, that action counts as a linguistic action. It does not matter if they are speaking the same language or a different language. It matters only that the action had an effect and, then, was able to be repeated with generally similar effects. We have no difficulty imagining groups of humans spread out in Africa 100,000 years ago, perhaps somewhat localized in East Africa, encountering one another, and producing over time what would qualify as a dialect chain. There would have been haphazard crossings and recrossings of encounters, such that some of the similarities found in the world’s languages today (the fact that all human groups have one, to begin with) are strong enough to suggest some kind of common origin. The differences are sometimes equally striking and point toward different origins. Whatever the initial conditions may have been, enough time has elapsed since humans spread out over the globe for certain groups to have taken what might have originally been maybe more, maybe less common linguistic practices and worked them out on unusual trajectories.

When we say that ‘all languages were once Spanglish,’ we mean simply to say that all languages – from the first to have arisen in the species some 150,000+ years ago to those taking shape today – arose under a set of conditions. These conditions are necessarily evolutionary (the shape of the vocal tract), cognitive (the ability to parse information and recognize sound sequences), social-psychological (the need to orient conspecifics), and sociohistorical (Spanish and English happen to continually crisscross in parts of North America beginning around 1851). While in the historical world and that of near prehistory the evolutionary, cognitive, and psychological conditions are always given in any instance of language formation, the sociohistorical conditions are not. That is, while the English and Spanish speakers who first encountered one another in Texas were equipped with the evolutionary and cognitive skills to communicate with

each other, as well as the social-psychological need to do so, the historical facts leading to their encounter were in effect accidents of history. It is easy to see that Spanglish was not planned or predetermined in any way, but is rather an emergent phenomenon of the conditions under which it is arising. We can say the same of all other languages to have come on the scene since the very beginning of language in the species.

To support this view, we now adopt the perspective of the uniformitarian hypothesis. Uniformitarianism was first formulated at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the field of geology and as a result of interrelated observations: water moving continuously against solid matter alters and, in fact, erodes that matter's form; effects of erosion take place over large stretches of time; and this activity must have been occurring since the beginning of time. In other words, uniformitarianism assumes that the kinds of geological process happening now must have been at work through all time, and this assumption arose in deliberate contrast to catastrophism, the idea that the earth's landforms had been created by short-lived abrupt events and often one-time events. Catastrophism has Biblical overtones and easily accommodates the idea that God created the world in seven days. Uniformitarianism acknowledges that while circumstances are ever changing, the principles involved in explaining those changes are constant.

Later in the nineteenth century, the American linguist, William Dwight Whitney, was perhaps the first to apply the principle of uniformitarianism in the field of linguistics, and he used it to argue against the plentiful and often fanciful accounts of the origin of language produced in response to Darwin's *The Origin of the Species* (Darwin [1859] 1868). Whitney's great Continental rival, Friedrich Max Müller at Oxford, believed that there was a mysterious relationship between sounds and meaning<sup>9</sup> and hypothesized that language began at a time when humans were naturally percussive. That is, upon perceiving an object, a human could feel or ring with the proper word for it. Whitney wondered – rightly, we think – why humans would have had that percussive ability in the deep recesses of time but have lost it now.

In *Languages in the World*, we are following Whitney's suit. We are taking the present as the guide to the past, and we notice that the kinds of encounters humans have today and their linguistic results are likely the kinds of encounters humans have had for all time with similar linguistic results. We humans are a good 100,000 years or more down our linguistic path, and so a lot has happened to make the language dynamics active today somewhat different than those of the remote past. For one, we now have political entities known as nation-states that organize, to some degree, the flow of human movement. For another, we now have ample materials commenting on our languages – dictionaries and grammars, and, in some parts of the world, language academies – that record and sometimes regulate speech. Nevertheless, the complexities of modern life do not alter the fact that we humans have always used the linguistic resources we have at hand, to ignore or to blend as we wish or as the social situation and group practices demand, all the while putting one foot in front of the next.

In yet another way, we are taking a cue from Whitney's lead. He was, among other things, committed to educating the general public about linguistic matters, and this was a commitment that linguists lost, more or less, in the twentieth century. We take up the challenge – alongside many other linguists working today – to use the fruits of the last 150 years of language study to promote greater awareness of language in the

general public. We hope the readers of this book will also respond to this challenge. We take as a pertinent model the efforts of sociolinguist, Walt Wolfram, at North Carolina State University who, for the past several decades, has brought language awareness out of the university classroom and into public spaces, including the North Carolina State Fair and the curriculum of North Carolina public schools. In our own efforts to create language awareness in the general public, we the authors are just getting started.

## The Structure of Spanglish

Words in a language stand out in a way other features often do not. We can look words up in dictionaries, and we can hear borrowed words if they have an unusual sound or sound sequence. For instance, English speakers recognize Spanish words like *mañana* with its palatal nasal [ɲ] and *yo quiero* with the tapped [r]. If we limited our study of language to lexical items, then we might imagine that Spanglish is spoken when any English speaker or Spanish speaker peppers his or her native language with words from the neighboring language. Indeed, most people in the United States are familiar with the terms *lasso*, *rodeo*, *enchilada*, *fajita*, and *cilantro*, which come into American English from Mexican Spanish. At the same time, Spanish speakers talk about *golf*, *email*, *jazz*, *marketing*, and *música pop*. This of course does make these groups Spanglish speakers. Spanglish speakers obviously make use of the lexicon of both languages – and the degree to which they do this varies – but Spanglish is about more than words. In addition to the lexicon, we also mean to emphasize the variable arrays of linguistic elements speakers use to create a new language variety. These elements are what we call linguistic structure, and they may pertain to the following:

(i) *The sounds of a language, or phonetics.* The sound inventories of all languages are limited to the physical and mechanical possibilities of human anatomy: the length of the vocal tract, the size and shape of the oral and nasal cavities, the range of movement of the tongue, and the location of the articulators. Nevertheless, languages differ with respect to the number and types of sounds they produce. The Austroasiatic language Sedang spoken in Vietnam and Laos is said to have as many as 50 unique vowels, while the Caucasian language Abkhaz, spoken in Georgia and Turkey, is said to have just two. Rotokas, a language of Papua New Guinea, is known for having only six consonants, while the language !Xóǀ, spoken in southern Africa, has more than 100. And languages that produce the so-called same consonant may do so in subtly different ways. For example, Spanish and English both produce the sound [d], but while the English version is made by placing the tongue tip on the back of the alveolar ridge, the Spanish version is made by placing the tongue on the back of the teeth.

In the case of Spanglish, speakers may demonstrate pronunciations that are distinctive from those found in monolingual varieties of English and Spanish. Part of what may make Spanglish phonetically distinctive are its patterns of rhythm, stress, and intonation. Monolingual varieties of Spanish and English are characterized by different systems of prosodic rhythm, for example. In Spanish, syllables recur at regular temporal intervals and are of roughly the same duration, whereas in English, syllable durations vary. In the case of Spanglish, these systems may meet somewhere in the

middle. Thus, a Spanglish utterance such as “*Llovía bien fuerte, so me fui*, I went home” (It was raining really hard, so I left, I went home) may be produced with a Spanish-like rhythm over the differing lexical items, including the words taken from English, with an intermediate pattern, or with two separate systems. This all depends on the speaker and their experiences with both Spanish and English, with some speakers of Spanglish strongly favoring Spanish **prosody**, others favoring English, and others meeting in the middle.

(ii) *The sound system, or phonology.* English does not have the voiced alveolar trill [r] in its sound inventory, and although the tap [r] exists in English, as in the word **butter**, it does not form a minimal pair with another sound and is therefore not used in meaning contrasts. American English speakers may not even be aware they produce the sound, believing instead they are producing [t]. If you produce the word **butter** with [t] or [r], you don’t change the standard meaning of the word, only the pronunciation. Similarly, in Spanish, [ð] exists as an allophone of [d] depending on the phonetic environment, or location relative to other sounds. [d] occurs at the beginning of words and after certain consonants, while [ð] occurs after vowels: *diente* with [d], versus *madre* with [ð]. In the case of Spanglish, the phonemic inventory varies from speaker to speaker. While most speakers will use all four **phonemes** – [r], [r], [ð], and [d] – they may use them in ways that differ subtly from so-called monolingual varieties of Spanish and English. For example, a Spanglish speaker may say *mi diente* using the stop [d] rather than the fricative [ð]. Again, this usage is conditioned by the rate of speech, whether the speaker was speaking primarily in English or in Spanish, as well as factors related to the speech event.

(iii) *Word formation patterns, how individual words in a language are structured.* The term *word* is not useful in cross-linguistic descriptions, because the way different languages put their words together varies greatly. Instead, linguists speak of word formation patterns in terms of morphology. While English has relatively little inflectional morphology, Spanish has relatively more. For Spanglish, the weight of inflectional morphology is in favor of Spanish, such that any English verb occurring in a Spanish stretch of an utterance will be conjugated according to the Spanish patterns. For example, the English verb ‘to mop’ may replace the Spanish verb *trapear*, but will be rendered with Spanish morphology, namely, *mopear* (-*ar* is one of the infinitive marking **morphemes** in Spanish). As often happens when one language starts borrowing a lot of verbs from another language, a default conjugation is chosen. In the case of Spanglish, it tends to be the first conjugation, namely the verbs that end in -*ar*, and the personal pronoun endings from this conjugation are applied. Accordingly, the borrowed verb *janguear* ‘to hang out’ has the following regular forms:

	Singular	Plural
First person	yo jangu <b>e</b> o	nosotros jangu <b>e</b> amos
Second person	tú jangu <b>e</b> as	
Third person (he/she)	él/ella jangu <b>e</b> a	ellos/ellas jangu <b>e</b> an
Formal ‘you’	usted jangu <b>e</b> a	ustedes jangu <b>e</b> an

In addition, when one language starts borrowing a lot of nouns from another language, and if the borrowing language has a gender system, a default gender is often

chosen for the borrowed words. However, in Spanglish, English nouns are assigned gender sometimes by the phonetic form of the word, for instance, *the block* becomes *el bloque*, another word for ‘neighborhood’. Sometimes, the gender transfers from the Spanish equivalent. Because *la nariz* ‘the nose’ is feminine in Spanish, one can speak of *una runny nose* in Spanglish (*una* is the feminine indefinite article ‘a’), though at this stage no one would bat an eye if a speaker said *un runny nose* instead. English does not mark plurality on definite articles, but Spanglish does. Thus, ‘the munchies’ might be rendered *los munchies* in Spanglish. Gender for Spanish nouns is routinely assigned, but the particular assignments are not necessarily stable across Spanglish speakers or speech communities.

High-profile inflectional morphemes from both Spanish and English find their way into Spanglish. The present progressive suffix *-ing* is widespread in English. The Spanish counterparts *-ando* and *-iendo* are also common. However, as flexible as Spanglish grammar is, speakers are unlikely to put a Spanish suffix on an English verb, or vice versa. The English verb *to run* cannot by itself take the Spanish suffix *-ando* just as the Spanish verb *corer* ‘to run’ cannot take the English suffix *-ing*. However, sometimes Spanglish speakers incorporate English verbs into Spanish phonology, as we saw with *janguear*.

Similarly, reflexive verbs are common in Spanish and nearly absent in English to express activities such as ‘going to bed,’ which in Spanish is *acostarse*. The *-se* suffix is the reflexive and refers to the person doing the action, and *acostar* means something like ‘lying down.’ Thus, ‘going to bed’ in Spanish is the idea of ‘laying oneself down.’ This word turned up as a deverbal noun in the phrase *al acostarse* ‘at the time of going to bed’ in a medicine prescription issued by a Walgreens in Miami, which came with the following instructions: *Aplicar* a thin layer to scalp *y* forehead *cada noche al acostarse por 2 weeks*. (Apply a thin layer to scalp and forehead every night upon going to bed for two weeks.) An example of Spanglish earlier in this chapter included two reflexive verbs: “Why make Carol *sentarse atrás pa’que* (sit in the back so) everybody has to move *pa’que se salga* (for her to get out)?” Here the speaker nicely balances out the grammatical possibilities of the two languages, making the two Spanish utterances parallel through the use of the reflexive in both. Similarly, the speaker of the utterance: “*Apaga la televisión*. (Turn off the television.) Don’t make me say it again! *¡Ponla off!*” is able to double the force of the command by marshaling two different verb constructions for the same action.

(iv) *The restructuring of the lexicon*. In the utterance, “Man, *vamos a la marqueta pa’ comprar* doughnuts” (Man, let’s go the market to buy doughnuts), the speaker has replaced the Spanish word *tienda* and imported the English word ‘market,’ which is exactly what one expects when two languages mix. Because English has borrowed so many words from French, it so happens that Spanish and English share many cognates, given the common Latinate origin of French and Spanish. In the title of the Spanglish album *El Talento Del Bloque* by Farruko, a Puerto Rican reggaeton singer, the word *talento* is a cognate and is transparent across the Spanish divide. Sometimes, a cognate in Spanglish will adopt a meaning from English not present in Spanish. Such a cognate is *actualmente*, which in Spanish means ‘right now.’ In the Spanglish utterance: “*Fue al súper a las dos. No, actualmente fue a las tres*” (S/he went to the supermarket at two o’clock. No, actually, she went at three o’clock), *actualmente* has the English meaning

of ‘actually, in fact.’ Such an utterance makes no sense in varieties of Spanish outside of the United States.

The lexicon can also be restructured by means of **calques**. A calque is a loan translation, where the idea is borrowed but not the words. The Spanglish verb for ‘to call (someone) back’ is *llamar pa’tras*, possibly a translation of the English way to express this idea. The Spanish verb is *devolver la llamada* ‘return the call.’ *Llamar pa’tras* is widespread in the Spanglishes spoken in California, Texas, and Miami, and it is particularly reviled by monolingual speakers of Spanish as an example of the way Spanglish degrades Spanish. From a linguistic point of view, however, these types of lexical phenomena are completely normal.

(v) *Larger phrasal and sentential patterns, also known as syntax*. Because English and Spanish have the same basic word-order pattern: Subject–Verb–Object, there is not much pressure on the word order in Spanglish. However, we find that Spanglish speakers tend not to switch languages at locations where the grammars of the two languages do not line up. An important difference between English and Spanish is that in English, adjectives precede nouns, while the opposite is true in Spanish. Thus, Spanglish speakers are unlikely to make switches between nouns and adjectives. ‘Un coche blue’ is as unlikely ‘an azul car.’

(vi) *Other phenomena, generally classed as cultural, such as endearments and terms of address*. Clearly, the ‘man’ in an utterance above is borrowed from an English terms of address. In the utterance: “Don’t worry *mi’jo*, *te voy a cuidar*” (Don’t worry my son, I’m going to take care of you), the term *mi’jo* is a term of endearment from *mi hijo* ‘my son.’ The familiar/formal *tú/usted* distinction in the second singular ‘you’ forms of address in Spanish may be disappearing in Spanglish, such that speakers primarily only use *tú*. The Spanish plural *vosotros* ‘you’ is gone completely, just as it has in varieties of Spanish in Latin America. However, respectful terms of address such as *don*, *doña*, *Señor*, and *Señora* may be used by Spanglish speakers to be polite, even while speaking mostly English.

In his book *Pardon My Spanglish*, humorist Bill Santiago quips that Spanglish has “twice the vocabulary and half the grammar” (Santiago 2008). In reality, as the above examples are intended to show, the most competent speakers of Spanglish have the best command of both languages. They make their switches from one language to the other at the point where the words on both sides of the switch are grammatical with respect to both languages. Although we can say that Spanglish is grammatically flexible, the belief that Spanglish is simply a hodgepodge of words with no grammar is a misunderstanding borne out of popular beliefs about what language is or should be.

We have begun our structural review of the languages of the world with examples from Spanish, English, and Spanglish because we imagine that many of our readers are familiar with these languages. Although English and Spanish have their grammatical and vocabulary differences, they also share quite a lot due to the vagaries of history. For instance, it is a coincidence that both languages form the plural of nouns with a final *-s*; the Western Romance languages, French, Spanish, and Portuguese, share this feature, while the Eastern Romance languages, Italian and Romanian, do not. English is a Germanic language, and 1000 years ago only 35% of Old English nouns had the plural ending with a final *-s*, namely the masculine nouns. About 700 years

ago, these *-s* plurals started to spread to all nouns and stabilized about 500 years ago, leaving irregulars such as tooth/teeth, ox/oxen, deer/deer, etc. The fact that Spanish and English could both generalize *-s* plurals in the first place is because they belong to the language stock known as Indo-European. This means both have inherited a cast of structural characters particular to this stock, and the depth of these structural similarities no doubt facilitates the ease of the Spanglish mix.

Some of these Indo-European structural tendencies are exceptions to the ways most languages of the world go about their grammatical business, and so we end our review of Spanglish by describing one such exception. In English and in Spanish, the **marking** of the syntactic relation of possession is put on what is called the **dependent** noun: in the phrase *the man's house* and *la casa del hombre* the possessive morpheme *-s* is bound to the word *man*, and the possessive form *del* is determined by the gender of *hombre*. In a language like Hungarian, which belongs to the Uralic language stock, the possessive relationship is marked on what is called the **head** noun: *az ember haza*, where *az* is 'the,' *ember* is 'man,' and *haz* is 'house.' The final *-a* on *haz* 'house' marks the possession:

Dependent (Possessor) Marking	Head (Thing Possessed) Marking
the man+s house	az ember haz+a
the man+possesses house	the man house+belongs to man
la casa del hombre	the house possessed+by man

In other words, in Hungarian the thing possessed bears the grammatical mark of possession, not the possessor, and it turns out that the Hungarian pattern is the more common one among the languages of the world. To speakers of Indo-European languages this grammatical preference might seem strange. It might also seem to be relatively insignificant. However, marking preferences are structural features, as we will see in later chapters, with large implications.

### Final Note: The Encounter of Spanish and English on Television in the United States

From the earliest days of television in the United States, Spanish was heard in American living rooms through the character of Ricky Ricardo on *I Love Lucy*. He was played by Desi Arnaz, the real-life husband of Lucille Ball, who was the star of the show. Ricky/Desi was a bandleader of Cuban origin whose catchphrase was, "Lucy, you got some 'splainin' to do!"<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Lucy's antics would regularly exasperate him enough to send him off into a rant in Spanish. The sight of a handsome Latin man losing his temper with his wife while spouting a stream of incomprehensible speech always played for laughs. The comedy arising from the Spanish–English language gap is in evidence 50 years later on *Modern Family* whose character, Gloria Pritchett, played by Colombian bombshell, Sofia Vergara, regularly mangles English pronunciation to comic effect.

If Spanish is treated as an object of amused incomprehension on English-language American sitcoms, how is English portrayed on Spanish-language American programs? On the Telemundo channel, owned by NBC Universal and broadcast throughout the United States, one popular *telenovela*, *Marido en Alquiler*,<sup>11</sup> has a character named Doña Teresa Cristina Palmer de Ibarra with *la nariz respingada* ‘nose in the air.’ She is apt to say things like, “Good morning, *disculpen pero no me gusta decir buenos días en español*.” (Good morning, excuse me but I don’t like to say ‘good morning’ in Spanish.) ‘Good morning’ and *buenos días* are on the one hand equivalent salutations that perform the same social function, namely, a morning greeting. But Doña Teresa Cristina’s use of the English ‘Good morning’ while otherwise speaking Spanish indicates that in the United States, the languages are not equal in terms of social status. While many Spanish speakers in the United States feel proud to speak Spanish, many nevertheless feel that English conveys a higher social status.

The actors who play the lead protagonists on this *telenovela* also embody a European physical preference. They have light skin and light eyes, and they come from Venezuela, Colombia, and Argentina, although they do not speak their regional varieties on the show. Rather, they use a nonspecific variety with an occasional mix of Mexican slang so that their speech will appeal to the broadest segment of the viewing audience, namely the Spanish-speaking Mexicans who comprise over 65% of the overall Latino population in the United States. The question is: Why are the Mexicans now the largest overall Latino population in the United States? The answer is: the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, which had a negative effect on small farmers south of the border, thereby sending them north to find jobs.

Throughout this chapter, we have seen the persistent effects of economic pressures on human movement. Here at the end, we perceive the sometimes-subtle, always-present workings of one of the most powerful forces in language dynamics: attitudes about language in response to prestige.

## Exercises

### Exercise 1 – map making

Chicanos in the United States have an expression: “I didn’t cross the border, the border crossed me.” This is a theme we explore throughout this text, not only here in Chapter 1. Sketch a map of Mexico in 1821. Use annotations and/or different colored pencils to illustrate the events of 1836 and 1845. What does your map show about the history of Spanglish in North America? What does it show about the historical presence of Spanish speakers in the United States and English speakers in Mexico?

### Exercise 2 – code switching

Part of the beauty of Spanglish is that it is grammatically flexible. Speakers can say many things in many different ways, but it is not the case that anything goes. In an



experiment, sociolinguist Jacqueline Almeida Toribio gave the following fairy tales written in Spanglish to native Spanish/English bilinguals. One of the stories was easy for most participants to comprehend and read aloud fluently. The other was more tricky, and participants stumbled as they read aloud in many parts of the text. If you are able to read Spanish, perform the experiment on yourself – read both passages aloud and decide which is the well-formed Spanglish fairy tale and which is ill-formed. If you are not able to read the Spanish words, analyze the texts and make your best guess. Is there a difference in the type of code-mixing you can observe? What patterns can you discern?

*“Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs/BLANCANIEVES Y LOS SIETE ENANITOS”* ÉRASE UNA VEZ UNA LINDA PRINCESITA BLANCA COMOLA NIEVE. SU MADRASTRA, LA REINA, TENÍA UN MÁGICO mirror on the wall. The queen often asked, “Who is the MÁS HERMOSA DEL VALLE?” Y UN DÍA EL mirror answered, “Snow White is the fairest one of all!” Very envious and evil, the REINA MANDÓ A UN CRIADO QUE MATARA A LA PRINCESA. EL CRIADO LA LLEVÓ AL BOSQUE Y out of compassion abandoned LA ALLÍ. A squirrel took pity on the princess and led her to a PEQUEÑA CABINA EN EL MONTE. EN LA CABINA, VIVÍAN SIETE ENANITOS QUE returned to find Snow White asleep in their beds. Back at the palace, the stepmother again asked the ESPEJO: “Y AHORA, QUIÉN ES LA MÁS BELLA?” EL ESPEJO OTRA VEZ LE answered, without hesitation, “Snow White!” The queen was very angry and set out to find the CASITA DE LOS ENANITOS. DISFRAZADA DE VIEJA, LA REINA LE OFRECIÓ A BLANCANIEVES UNA MANZANA QUE HABÍA laced with poison. When Snow White bit into the apple, she CALLÓ DESVANECIDA AL SUELO. POR LA NOCHE, LOS ENANITOS LA found, seemingly dead ...

*“The Beggar Prince/EL PRÍNCIPE PORDIOSERO”* EL REY ARNULFO TENÍA UNA HIJA MUY HERMOSA QUESE LLAMABA GRACIELA. AL CUMPLIR ELLA LOS VEINTE AÑOS, EL REY INVITÓ many neighboring princes to a party. Since she was unmarried, he wanted her to choose UN BUEN ESPOSO. Princess Grace was sweet Y CARIÑOSA CON TODOS. TENÍA SOLAMENTE UN DEFECTO: she was indecisive. Surrounded by twelve suitors, she could not decide and the king SE ENOJÓ. GRITÓ, “JURO POR DIOS QUE TE CASARÉ CON EL PRIMER HOMBRE that enters this room!” At that exact moment, a beggar, who had evaded A LOS PORTEROS, ENTRÓ EN LA SALA. EXCLAMÓ, “.ACABO DE OÍR LO QUE DIJO USTED! JURÓ POR DIOS! The princess is mine!” There was no going back on such a solemn oath Y EL PORDIOSERO SE PREPARÓ PARA LA BODA. Everyone was surprised to see LO BIEN QUE SE VEÍA in his borrowed clothes. DESPUÉS DE ALGUNAS SEMANAS, the beggar made an announcement to the princess. EL NUEVO ESPOSO LE DIJO A LA PRINCESA that the time had come to leave the palace. They had to return to his meager work and a house QUE ERA MUY HUMILDE ...

### Discussion Questions

- 1 After reading this introductory chapter, has your understanding of language changed in any way? Have your beliefs about language been nudged in any particular way? How so?
- 2 Code switching is an important part of Spanglish, but it is also an important way for many bilinguals the world over to express themselves. Do you code-switch with the languages you speak? If so, in what social circumstances? If not, why not? If you are a monolingual, when have you observed others to engage in code switching? What do you make of it?
- 3 Why do you suppose linguists, speakers, and laypeople are so interested in determining whether or not Spanglish counts as a so-called separate language from Spanish? What does it say about popular views of language that the indeterminate status of Spanglish is so anxiety-producing for so many people?
- 4 Many people have strong attitudes about Spanglish and other bilingual mixed languages. Do you have any insight on the origin of these attitudes? What do the attitudes do for the person who holds them? What do they do for the Spanglish speaker who hears them articulated?
- 5 The title of this preliminary chapter is deliberately provocative. What does it mean to say that “all languages were once Spanglish?” In what sense is this true? How does that statement square with popular attitudes about Spanglish and other bilingual mixed languages?

### Notes

- 1 Large land grants were called *ranchos*.
- 2 Not without a war, of course, namely the Mexican–American War of 1846–1848.
- 3 Terms shown in bold appear in the Glossary.
- 4 The linguist Max Weinreich is usually credited with bringing this formulation to the American linguistic community in the mid-twentieth century. Earlier in the century, the French socialist leader, Jean Jaurès, is known to have said: “One names *patois* (=dialect) the language of a defeated nation.”
- 5 The late 1990s ad for the fast-food restaurant chain Taco Bell, owned by Pepsico, used this phrase with the confidence that most Americans would be able to infer its meaning.
- 6 This date is not associated with Mexico’s Independence Day, which is September 16, but rather commemorates the Mexico’s victory over the French in the Battle of Puebla. Mexican–Americans also celebrated the day as a way to honor Mexican culture in the United States.
- 7 This example comes from Shana Poplack’s ([1979] 1980) article “Sometimes I’ll start a sentence in Spanish *y termino en español*.”
- 8 For a discussion of creoles, see Final Note to Chapter Eight. For a definition, please see the Glossary.
- 9 We would now call this *sound symbolism*. If an English speaker were asked: “Which is bigger, a frip or a frope?” they would likely answer “Frope” without knowing what either thing was. That is because there is some correlation between high front vowels and small things (itsy bitsy, teeny weenie) and back vowels and big things (*drop* as opposed to *drip*). Note, however, that the word *small* has a back vowel, and *big* has a high front vowel.

- 10 This phase from the 1950s has entered American English. On the November 14, 2013 episode of *The Daily Show*, host Jon Stewart admonished the image of the crack-smoking mayor of Toronto, Rob Ford: “You got some ‘splainin’ to do!”
- 11 A *telenovela* is a kind of soap opera invented in Latin America and popular around the world. *Telenovelas*, as opposed to soap operas lasting for years and years, are of limited duration. The phrase *marido en alquiler* means literally ‘husband for hire’ and figuratively ‘my dear handyman.’

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