

Hispanics in the United States: More than *Spanglish*

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According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there were 35.3 millions of people who identified themselves Spanish, Hispanic or Latino in 2000 12.5% of the U.S. population. This reflects an increase in the Hispanic population by almost 58% since 1990, compared with an increase of 13.2% for the total U.S. population. The projections released by the Census in 2004 reveal an exponential increase for the Hispanic population in the next 45 years: an estimated 47.7 million by 2010, 73 million by 2030, and by 2050 Hispanics are expected to represent 24.4% of the total U.S. population with 102.5 million.¹

The statistics speak for themselves. The Hispanic presence in the U.S. is obvious and so is the Spanish language. The Census 2000 reports that Spanish is the language spoken at home for 28.1 million people over 5 years old, making clear that Spanish is, unofficially, the second language in the country. The inevitable consequence is a language contact situation where both Spanish and English coexist in the lives of millions. While there should be nothing exceptional about this—a very common scenario in a world where bilingualism is the norm, rather than the exception—for some reason, the alliance of Spanish and English in the U.S. has typically created much controversy and uproar among scholars, educators, and the general public alike. From strong supporters to fatalists foreseeing the end of Spanish (and/or English), everybody has an opinion about it, and few remain indifferent. I am here referring to the so-called *Spanglish*, or the language allegedly spoken by millions of Hispanics in the U.S.²

Interestingly enough, few other languages in contact appear to have caused so much debate as Spanish and English in the U.S. have done all over the world. In the

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last few years this phenomenon has become a hot topic, nationally and abroad.³ The average person has heard the word “*Spanglish*” although he/she does not precisely know what it is. In the best of scenarios, they will smile condescendingly when they hear it. In the worst, they will claim that it is the bastardized language of Hispanics in the U.S. The truth is that, within the ever-increasing amount of articles, interviews, and stories published on the subject, very few actually bother to study the phenomenon in any depth, to describe its features and its speakers. Most of the accounts are mainly anecdotal, humorous, and not serious. As a result, the reader is usually left with a vague idea of what *Spanglish* is really about, many questions remain unanswered, and, in the end, the traditional stigma that Hispanics’ way of speaking has carried for decades stays in place.

Here I will attempt to engage in a more serious discussion of the subject matter by examining the definitions of the so-called *Spanglish*, by reviewing the literature, and, most important, by making a necessary distinction among the different language contact phenomena that take place in a bilingual context such as the Spanish and English background in the U.S. My goal is to prove that Hispanic bilinguals can and do speak beyond the alleged *Spanglish*, and I also aim to make the reader aware of the different choices available to a bilingual person. Since getting rid of social stigmas and labels is out of my scope, I hope that a deeper understanding of these language contact phenomena will at least contribute to educate the general opinion on this sizzling topic.

1. TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF SPANGLISH

As I have mentioned before, references to *Spanglish* abound in the literature, newspapers and scholarly journals alike. However, few authors take the trouble to describe or define this phenomenon, either assuming that the reader already knows or because there is no official definition other than the one we can find in a dictionary. The eternal question, what is *Spanglish*? A form of English or a form of Spanish? A language or a dialect?

The *Oxford English Dictionary* describes it in a rather disapproving way as “a type of Spanish contaminated by English words and forms of expression, spoken in Latin America.” This is not an accurate definition, as it does not mention the U.S., purportedly “home of *Spanglish*.” The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines it in a more neutral way as “Spanish characterized by numerous borrowings from English.”

Most authors and articles vaguely refer to *Spanglish* as the mix of Spanish and English but then leave the reader wondering what type of mix it is, when and how

it happens. Maroney (1998) describes it as a hybrid lingo spoken by second- and third-generation Latinos and Hernández (2004) talks about “the fluid vernacular that crosses between English and Spanish” (4).

Other authors establish different categories. Alvarez (1997) claims that there are two basic approaches to *Spanglish*: switching and borrowing. Similarly, Guerra Avalos (2001) states that Spanglish “puede consistir en la combinación de palabras correctas ya sea en español o en inglés: dos idiomas se unen and they both win something” or it can also be an immigrant creation in order to survive “y consiste en que las palabras en inglés se ‘tomen prestadas’ para cambiarlas y pronunciarlas en una forma de español: *to hang out a hanguear*.”

Yet others look at *Spanglish* more as a cultural or ethnic term. Jaimes (2001) suggests that “para la nueva generación de hispanos de Miami... el *spanglish* es una marca étnica que los identifica.” And Morales (2002) says that *Spanglish* is something birthed out of necessity (25), claiming that “at the root of *Spanglish* is a very universal state of being. It is a displacement from one place, home, to another place, home, in which one feels at home in both places, yet at home in neither place... The only choice you have left is to embrace the transitory (read the transnational) state of in-between” (7).

Stavans (2003) presents his own definition: “the verbal encounter between Anglo and Hispano civilizations,” after offering jazz as an analogy of the difficulty to define *Spanglish*: “it’s not that it is impossible to define, but that people simply refuse to do it. And yet, nobody has the slightest doubt that it has arrived, que ya llegó...” (5). Along the same lines, “*Spanglish* is a strange thing. Like art (and some other stuff), you may not be able to describe it, but you know it when you see it,” declares Teck (1998), author of *The Official Spanglish Dictionary*.

2. IS IT GOOD? BAD? OR SIMPLY ABOMINABLE?⁴

As we have seen, there appears to be a certain reluctance to concisely define this linguistic phenomenon. The common denominator in all the definitions presented above is the amalgamation of two languages (and two cultures) but there is no universal agreement on what *Spanglish* really is. This lack of understanding has triggered much discussion and controversy. One thing is sure: everybody has an attitude about it —whatever “it” is. Thus, *Spanglish* has always had its detractors and its admirers while very few seem to remain neutral.

Among the critics of *Spanglish* we find journalists, translators and educators. The point of departure has always been a negative one. According to Lipski (2004a)

and others, the term was first coined in 1952 by Tío, a Puerto Rican journalist, who felt that *Spanglish* was “the deterioration of Spanish in Puerto Rico under the onslaught of English words.” (Lipski 2004a: 1) Like Tío, many language purists view it as an invasion of the Spanish language by English, a war between the two languages, and/or a threat to both. Among its detractors, we can count González Echevarría (1997), who ascribes *Spanglish* to the poor, illiterate, Hispanics and marginality. Likewise, the translator Castro Roig (2001) points out that *Spanglish* should not be labeled as a language or as a dialect: “concebirlo como una suerte de papiamento, lengua criolla o desenlace natural del idioma español en Estados Unidos, [es] peligroso.” Molinero (1998), another translator, explains the phenomenon in terms of linguistic and cultural subordination: “Es un fenómeno que ocurre en el español pero no en el inglés. Mientras que el inglés de los medios de comunicación mantiene su integridad y su nivel culto (*standard English*), los calcos innecesarios con que se salpica el español son muestra de subordinación cultural.”

Among educators, *Spanglish* appears as evil: “teach [Hispanics] *Spanglish*, and teach them to settle for substandard English and menial jobs,” concludes a columnist in the *Miami Herald*, (Artze 2001: 11) while Osio (2002) in the *Houston Chronicle* maintains that *Spanglish* users are condemned to a “lifelong state of limbo.” The same author uses terms such as “educational idiocy” and “language aberration” to refer to the language of these Latinos, while claiming that mastering both English and Spanish should be the goal of educators.

It is not surprising then for this mode of speaking to carry a stigma within the general public. Li-Hua Shan (2002) reports a University of Texas sophomore asserting “those who speak *Spanglish* expose how ignorant they are about both languages.” He also believes that if popular singers or TV networks try to reach Spanish speakers by integrating *Spanglish* in their performances “they are reaching people in the wrong way.” Another graduate student in the same institution expresses her fears that “people won’t be able to tell the difference between English and Spanish soon.”

Then, is it really that dreadful? How soon will Spanish (or English) disappear? Apparently, not everybody is as distressed as the abovementioned people. In fact, there seems to be an agreement among scholars that Spanish is not going anywhere, and perhaps we should look at the so-called *Spanglish* in a more relaxed fashion. Salaberry (2002) predicts that Spanish will not suffer any more grammatical corruption due to *Spanglish* than it would without any contact with English. According to his thesis, most of the variation we can observe in *Spanglish* belongs to lexical elements (loan words) and, at the same time, the influence of English in

Spanish happens globally, not only in the U.S. Therefore, most of the changes that would survive in the future would affect all variants of Spanish, just as we once had borrowings from Arabic inserted in Spanish and it did not cause any regression in the language.

Thus, Fairclough (2003) and others have explained that this phenomenon is not unique but a rather natural result of language contact situations around the world, such as “portuñol” (the mix of Spanish and Portuguese in the Brasil-Argentina border), “franglais” (mix of French and English in Canada) and “cocoliche” (mix of Italian and Spanish in Argentina). She also concludes that this natural process can neither be stopped nor imposed (200). A similar approach is taken by Niedzielski, Assistant Professor of Linguistics at Rice University. In an interview with Racine (2003) she claims that *Spanglish* is a natural evolution that is considered “cool slang” among youth.

Undoubtedly, the most fervent defender, admirer, and promoter of *Spanglish* is Ilan Stavans, a professor of Spanish at Amherst College whose name appears linked to the term *Spanglish* in numerous articles, interviews, and books. Stavans (2000a) admits this way of speaking generates anxiety and even xenophobia but readily defends it while accusing Nebrija’s grammar of being an imperial tool and making fun of the Real Academia Española de la Lengua’s motto (“limpia, fija y da esplendor.”)

Stavans (2000b) places the origins of *Spanglish* back in the U.S.-Mexico 1848 treaty and predicts a radical change in the Spanish language where *Spanglish* will standardize its syntax —“es la fuerza del destino” (92), he says. He claims we should celebrate the birth of a new language in a world where so many languages die. With these declarations, Stavans has earned harsh criticism in the last few years.⁵ In an attempt to acquire some legitimacy, Stavans has gone as far as compiling a *Spanglish-English Dictionary* and “translating” the first chapter of *Don Quixote de la Mancha* into *Spanglish*. His translation has been described as a joke by Garrido (in Kong 2002: 2); as manipulation by Anzaldúa (2003); and as a grotesque creation by Lipski (2004: 12).

Perhaps with deeper understanding of the diverse processes in language contact situations attitudes towards the so-called *Spanglish* would be different. Therefore, I will next look at the various types of linguistic contexts that, by themselves or in combination with others, have been referred to as *Spanglish*.

3. LANGUAGES IN CONTACT

Stavans (2000a, 2000b, 2000c, and 2003) has repeatedly compared *Spanglish* to both Ebonics and Yiddish. Although differences between *Spanglish* and Yiddish are

abundant (Yiddish drew from many different languages while *Spanglish* draws from two) he maintains they share many features, especially at the literary level. Thus, Stavans (2000c) says that “Spanglish is looked down upon by the Hispanic intelligentsia” (557), just as Yiddish was once considered an illegitimate tongue but both languages have made their way into literature. Similarly, both Ebonics and *Spanglish* serve as an intra-ethnic mode of communication and have flourished in rap music. The main differences are that Ebonics does not involve two different languages and, according to Stavans (2000a), *Spanglish* is not marked by class, while Ebonics is usually linked to lower class.

Is the so-called *Spanglish* a result of two or more languages melting (as Yiddish) or is it a result of one language being manipulated by young people as an ethnic code (like Ebonics)? None of the above? Or both? These questions take us back to the definition of *Spanglish*—or lack thereof. As we observed earlier, there is no agreement on what this mode of speaking actually is, which in turn explains the disparate attitudes towards it.

One of the few researchers who has attempted to put some order in the chaos of definitions and mayhem that surround this mode of speaking is Lipski (2004: 8), who points out that the term *Spanglish* has been typically used to describe: integrated and spontaneous borrowings in Spanish, syntactic calques and loan translations, code-switching, deviational Spanish grammar in vestigial bilingual speakers, Spanish spoken as a second language, and junk (or mock) Spanish. The reader can easily test the divergences in opinions of acceptability by assessing the following examples:

I own know what dem white folk talking bout.⁶

Everything was back to normal. Ándele!

Este Ernesto, he’s cheating.⁷

Le robaron la troca con everything. Los tires, los rines.⁸

Le voy a mandar un e-mail.

Hasta la vista, baby.

No problemo!⁹

I need a lift in your el trucko to the next towno!

Te llamo pa’tas luego.

Área dura del sombrero.

Asín que te vi a endiñá un palo que te voy a aviar.¹⁰

The acceptability judgments bilinguals and monolinguals might equally have about the previous examples will obviously range from quite acceptable, even standard,

Spanish (or English) to non-acceptable, aberrant, speech. Yet, all but (1) and (11) are or have been labeled as *Spanglish* in the literature. (1) illustrates African American Vernacular English (or Ebonics) and I included it in the list with the purpose of testing language attitudes. If social attitudes towards this type of English are in fact different to those towards standard English, by the same token attitudes towards *Spanglish* will differ, depending on what we consider *Spanglish*. The same theory holds true for (11), a case in point illustrating sub-standard Spanish as spoken by barely literate or uneducated lower classes in Spain. Thus, (1) and (11) prove that even in monolingual speech divergences can be found in terms of language attitudes.

However, when it regards bilingual speech, it would seem as if language changes were perceived in an even more unforgiving fashion due, perhaps, to the lack of understanding of natural linguistic processes. In fact, one only needs to take a look at the bulk of articles written on the topic in order to confirm Lipski's observations. In 1976, Troike expressed the following concern:

The term 'Spanglish'... is as misunderstood and misleading as the term 'Tex-Mex' in Texas, and particularly gets caught up in misunderstandings of code-switched speech as a hopeless syncretism of the two languages, in which the speakers cannot separate them. (Milán 1982: 203).

Examples of this confusion are abundant. Some authors, like Betti (2004), use the two terms indiscriminately —though acknowledging the existence of two different realities. Thus, when talking about the bilingual magazine *Latina*, the author points out that the magazine cannot be described as written completely in *Spanglish* (not clear what is meant by that) but rather as the first publication to use code-switching in their articles.

Among the authors who attempt to establish different types and/or local varieties of *Spanglish* it is not uncommon to find a distinction between code-switching and borrowing, purportedly the two main types of *Spanglish*.¹¹ Furthermore, even prominent researchers in sociolinguistics, such as Zentella (1997) do not establish a strict division between code-switching and *Spanglish*, claiming that the former term is the formal (politically correct-like) label for the latter (stigmatized, at times tabooed) term.

In light of this lack of agreement, I find it crucial to establish a distinction among the different phenomena we can observe in bilingual discourse. I will now discuss the previous examples typically marked as *Spanglish* (2-10) as they belong to very distinct realities in a bilingual setting in order to achieve a better understanding of what lies at the core of the so-called *Spanglish*.

4. CODE-SWITCHING

Let us now return to examples (2) and (3) from the previous list. Both illustrate the natural mix of languages that bilingual individuals produce, which is called code-switching. This is one of the several phenomena that have been erroneously (according to Acosta-Belén 1975: 155) labeled *Spanglish* in the literature.

Code-switching is present in every bilingual community although not all bilingual individuals necessarily code-switch. Social attitudes among bilinguals and monolinguals towards code-switching may vary, but this way of speaking has been studied for decades now and the results are conclusive in many ways. Research on this topic has become a key element in studies of bilingualism, both in formal linguistics and socio-linguistics. Fortunately, the numerous studies carried out have helped to mitigate the social stigma it once had, as well as to better comprehend this rule-governed process that was considered to be random and whimsical until not too long ago.

If one were to summarize the bulk of literature on code-switching, the two main conclusions that systematically arise are that (1) code-switching serves specific social and pragmatic functions, and (2) it does follow several grammatical restrictions. Regarding the first conclusion, the literature has been almost unanimous at pointing out the different social functions revealed in conversational code-switching: direct and indirect quotations, emphasis, clarification or elaboration, focus/topic constructions, parenthetical comments, tags, contextual switches, lexical need, triggers, idiomatic expressions, and stylistic switches among others.¹²

Even though many bilingual speakers who code-switch are not aware of it, their switching is a rather complex and meaningful strategy that Zentella (1981) perceives as a larger expressive repertoire, as opposed to a weakness or lack of knowledge of the language. Furthermore, as Valdés-Fallis (1988) suggests, code-switching requires that speakers be very proficient in the two languages, and “it is helpful to imagine that ... they are in fact using a twelve-string guitar rather than limiting themselves to two six-string instruments” (125).

I will not explore the many theories that have emerged in the last few decades regarding the grammatical constraints of code-switching but I will briefly review their results.¹³ The first attempts to formulate some grammatical restrictions in code-switching started in the 1970’s but not until Poplack (1980) proposed the *Free Morpheme Constraint* (banning switches within words, i.e. “*eatiendo*”) and the *Equivalence Constraint* (which states that both parts in a switch must be grammatical in the languages involved) did the direction of code-switching research change. These

constraints triggered the search for universal rules valid cross-linguistically, mainly based on the Generative Grammar framework. Despite the fact that, to date, cross-linguistic generalizations are still precarious, research has comprehensively shown that for an individual to code-switch, he or she must have a strong command and wide internalization of both grammatical systems, so that the switches will not violate the communicative or grammatical norms of either language.¹⁴ Moreover, researchers such as MacSwan (1999) have proposed that there are no real constraints on language switching others than the ones posed by the two grammars involved.

As I pointed out at the beginning of this section, if there is one conclusion to be extracted from the bulk of studies carried out in the last 40 years, it is that code-switching is not random, but rather a rule-governed process. This constitutes a sharp contrast with the so-called *Spanglish*, which is typically described as a capricious and anarchic phenomenon.

5. BORROWING AND COPYING

Perhaps the most relevant feature of the alleged *Spanglish* is, according to the literature, the overwhelming use of borrowed words and calques. These are illustrated in examples (4), (5), and (9) above. Since the lexicon is the bread-and-butter of every language, the lexical level is probably the most susceptible to display interaction (or interference) between two languages, and the easiest part to be manipulated by its users. This lexical interaction includes —but is not limited to— the following phenomena:

1. Semantic extension or reassignment: this phenomenon takes place when a lexical item which already exists in the first language expands its meaning from another lexical item in the second language with a similar —or not so similar— meaning. As Milán (1982) points out in his study of New York City Spanish, it mostly occurs in pairs of false cognates. Some examples are the use of “carpeta” for “moqueta” or “alfombra” (carpet), “aplicación” for “solicitud” (application), “renta” for “alquiler” (rent), or “remover” for “quitar” (to remove).

Nevertheless, semantic reassignment is likely to be part of natural language evolution, regardless of whether there is contact with another language or not. Thus, Milán (1982) explains that Spanish words such as “juego”, “casa,” and “pierna” have Latin roots with quite different meanings (“scorn”, “hut,” and “ham”) and this semantic reassignment happened spontaneously, without the influence of any other languages (198).

2. Borrowing¹⁵ takes place in any given language when there is a gap in the

lexicon of the language often due to a new reality or modernization. A loan word from the donor language is then employed to fill that lexical need. The increasing expansion of technology is faster than the ability of a language to create new words. The Internet is a perfect example of a relatively new field in which there is a need to borrow terms. Thus, we can find expressions such as “hacer click” (to click), “mandar un e-mail” (to send an e-mail), “escáner” (scanner) or “hacker” in the daily speech of Spanish speakers around the world, not only Hispanics in the U.S.¹⁶ But this is not the only reason to borrow since nonlinguistic factors also play an important role in the loan process, such as the prestige of the “lending” language, i.e. the use of the French expression “hors d’oeuvres” for “appetizers” in English.

Loan words can be either morphologically unassimilated, e.g. “*sandwich*,” “*modem*”, or assimilated into the morphology of the language, e.g. “*taipear*” (to type), “*lonchar/lonchea*” (to have lunch), “*líder*” (leader), “*troca*” (truck), “*marqueta*” (market), “*chores*” (shorts), “*droppear*” (to drop), “*biles*” (bills).¹⁷ Sometimes there is no cultural or linguistic equivalent of a word and a loan is in order. Hence, as pointed out by Lipski (in press) the term “lonchera” has no cultural translation in Spanish, just as “lonche” is actually different from “almuerzo” or “comida”.

It is precisely this type of borrowing (the morphologically assimilated one) that seems idiosyncratic to the so-called *Spanglish*. However, examples such as “me liquea el rufo” are, according to Lipski (in press) infrequent and exaggerated, sometimes used by young bilinguals in a rebellious fashion. The author estimates that most of the borrowing that takes place in U.S. Spanish is less grotesque and abundant than most people would think. Additionally, it is worth remembering that borrowing is a natural process that takes place in every language and it had occurred earlier in Spanish. In fact, Spanish once borrowed around 4,000 words from Arabic, and it is only ironic that, as Salaberry (2002) notes, “los puristas de la lengua se ven entre la espada y la pared cuando intentan sustituir el ‘anglicismo’ *renta* por el ‘arabismo’ *alquiler*” (7).

3. Calques are literal translations of words or entire phrases from one language into the other one. These are one of the key components, along with the aforementioned morphologically assimilated loans, of the purported *Spanglish*. Examples of syntactic calques that can be found in the speech of Chicanos or “Nuyoricans” follow: “llamar pa’trás”¹⁸ (to call back), “está p’arriba de ti” (it’s up to you) or “correr para gobernador” (to run for governor). However, calques are not exclusive to Spanish in the U.S. either. As Milán (1982) shows us, Spanish expressions like “si Dios quiere” or “bendita sea la madre que te parió” are literal translations from

Arabic exclamations (201). In fact, Lipski (in press) claims that if we did not know many of the calques originated in the English language they would not cause such bewilderment. We would simply treat them as interesting regionalisms such as the Colombian expression “¿te provoca?” instead of the standard “¿te apetece?”

As we have seen, borrowing, calques, and semantic extensions are natural processes in any given language, with or without the intervention of a second language. Although all these features have been identified as idiosyncratic of *Spanglish*, and while it is true that bilingualism can accelerate or encourage these changes, we can observe they are no different from other linguistic processes in the (monolingual) evolution of a language.

6. MOCK SPANISH AND BAD TRANSLATORS

At this point of the discussion the reader might have a better idea of the different processes that take place in bilingual communities affecting their linguistic performance. Thus far we have encountered two distinct behaviors: the more or less fluent alternation of both languages in the same discourse, and the insertion of borrowed items (be it single words, whole expressions or syntactic structures) from one language into the other to different degrees. While the first one is only available to truly bilingual speakers, the second one is likely to be used by bilinguals and monolinguals alike. Yet, we have not found anything that resembles a new language or dialect. In a last attempt to find out what the alleged *Spanglish* is (or is not), let us now examine three of the final examples in our initial list.

Examples (6) and (7) are now part of the collective imaginary of the U.S.' popular culture being memorable quotes in the 1991 hit *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*.¹⁹ These represent what anthropologist Hill (1995) calls “mock Spanish”²⁰, which she considers a subtle way of Anglo racism towards Spanish and its speakers in the U.S. Example (8) is taken from the movie “The Mexican”, where Jerry, the main character, in desperate need for a ride, tries to communicate with a Mexican character by faking Spanish. Not only do we find this forged Spanish in movies but, as Hill explains, in comic strips, greeting cards, restaurant menus, newspaper advertisements and mugs. The author concludes that this use (or misuse) of Spanish is effective precisely because of its subtlety and apparent innocence but Hill perceives it as discriminatory humor that only reproduces negative stereotypes.

In addition to possibly being racist, the main problem with this type of Spanish is that it contributes to give the so-called *Spanglish* a bad name. To make things worse, as Lipski (2004) points out, some of this fake Spanish has developed into

urban legends (such as the “deliberamos groserías” example) as proof of how deteriorated the condition of Spanish in the U.S. is (15). Thus, the author finds that the combination of mock Spanish and these legends are “the greatest impediments to the serious study of Spanish in the U.S. and to the determination of what —if anything— ‘Spanglish’ might actually be” (16).

Closely related to the previous illustrations, I will comment briefly on the last example of the original list (10).

It will hardly be a surprise if the reader has difficulty attempting to make sense out of this sentence. This was a sign outside a construction site that stood next to its English “equivalent” (“Hard hat area”). Along these were others such as “Mantiene desautorizado de personel fuera de” (“Unauthorized personnel keep out”) and “Area de la construcción” (“Construction area”). This type of signs can be seen all across the U.S. although it is difficult to understand how it is possible that, in a country where Spanish is the second (non-official) language, one cannot find qualified translators who can do a better job.

Not only can we see these barbarian translations in signs, but also in official documents, instruction manuals, inserts in the utility bills and other unofficial texts. Once again, this is the kind of Spanish that many people —monolinguals and bilinguals— see every day and, although it is as phony as the “mock” Spanish we just examined, the regrettable fact is that it is not meant to be humorous or even racist, but rather serious and accurate translations of English.

In an interview with Paternostro (2003), Stavans was asked about a sign in the subway that read “Vea tu paso” (“Watch your step”). The question was whether these ads were being written unconsciously into *Spanglish* by people who were convinced they were using correct Spanish. Stavans’ answer was that these ads were written “by people who don’t know sufficient Spanish, but that’s the culture we have and mistakes will become patterns.”

Will they? This phenomenon, according to Lipski (2004), stems from the fact that millions of Americans study and learn Spanish as a second or foreign language in the U.S. and many of them, with limited proficiency in their second language, are the creators of these documents. Ironically, most of these grotesque translations are never done by either qualified bilingual translators or by authentic Spanish speakers. However, they also get mixed up under the general rubric of *Spanglish*, and contribute to spread the theory that Spanish in the U.S. is disintegrating.

In this last section I hope to have proved that the final examples typically

identified as *Spanglish* are nothing but “bogus” Spanish as spoken or written by either monolingual English speakers or limited-proficiency, second-language learners of Spanish. While we had observed how code-switching was a natural resource for fluent bilinguals to draw from two languages and borrowing was a normal phenomenon practiced in any language by monolinguals and bilinguals alike, in no way can the abovementioned examples of Spanish (“mock,” “junk,” or “fake”) be considered as representative production of Spanish in the U.S. —or as *Spanglish*.

7. CONCLUSIONS

I have attempted to carefully examine the different definitions and attitudes towards *Spanglish* in the literature as well as the singular linguistic phenomena that have been labeled with this name. I have shown how the lack of understanding about bilingual speech and the confusion created by mixing it with other monolingual features are the likely cause of the negative stereotypes ascribed to the Spanish spoken in the U.S. Thus, just as a monolingual English speaker may not consider Ebonics standard English, a bilingual speaker may react differently towards code-switched discourse, a loan word or “mock” Spanish.

As we have seen, code-switching has been studied in depth for decades and proven to be a natural phenomenon in bilingual communities. These speakers have a strong command of both grammars and are able to combine both languages without violating the rules of either. Code-switching is only available to fluent bilingual speakers and it serves many socio-pragmatic functions while following specific grammatical restrictions. If this is what *Spanglish* is then there is no reason to stigmatize this mode of speaking, as it is a natural behavior in any bilingual setting which is not random, nor capricious.

Another ordinary process in any language, perhaps more noticeable in bilingual communities, is to borrow lexical items, literal expressions and syntactic structures. This process is not new to Spanish, or to English, and it will hardly threaten the integrity of either language. The main difference between code-switching and borrowing is that the latter is available to monolingual speakers as well. One needs not be a fluent bilingual in order to insert loan words into their language. This feature is in all probability the most prominent in the so-called *Spanglish* but, once again, if this is what *Spanglish* is, we are talking about a natural phenomenon of which we should not be afraid.

Lastly, I have looked at the least natural feature of *Spanglish*, i.e. “fake” Spanish. As shown, this type of Spanish is not authentic, nor representative, of

Spanish-speaking communities in the U.S. Whether it is racist or not, “mock” or “fake” Spanish is made up by monolingual English speakers with a humorous purpose. Furthermore, poor translations of signs and other documents into Spanish cannot be considered an illustration of Spanish as spoken in the U.S., nor an indicator of its health.

As proved, rather than the birth of a new language (*Spanglish*), what is at stake is the evolution of another (Spanish), just like English or Italian. Languages slowly evolve and change, and it is a perfectly natural phenomenon. Perhaps it is time that we stop fearing *Spanglish* and continue to investigate Spanish as spoken in the U.S. instead, with all of its idiosyncrasies. For all the above, I hope that further consideration and research will be devoted to the linguistic behavior of Hispanics in the U.S. in a more scientific and theoretical frame so that their mode of speaking will not be a source of disgrace any longer.

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NOTES

- ¹ "U.S. Interim Projections by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin." *U. S. Census Bureau*. March 2004. <<http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/usinterimproj/>>. 1 September 2004.
- ² Li-Hua Shan (2002) declares that "considered by some to be a dialect, *Spanglish* is now spoken by over 35 million Hispanics in the U.S." In another magazine, Artze (2001) makes the same claim: "The nearly 35 million U.S. Hispanics know it as their idioma, the language they speak on the streets and in their casas" (11).
- ³ From local newspapers to National Public Radio to the New York Times or the Washington Post much interest has been devoted to *Spanglish*. Internationally, one can find articles about *Spanglish* in British, Canadian, Argentinean, Mexican and Spanish press, just to name a few.
- ⁴ Asked once about his opinion on *Spanglish*, Nobel Prize Octavio Paz said: "ni es bueno, ni es malo, sino abominable", as quoted by Stavans 2000c: 555.
- ⁵ Stavans (2003) transcribes a piece of "hate" e-mail he received: "Me da asco saber que hay personas como usted que se siguen empeñando en tratar de acabar con un idioma tan hermoso como es el español.... No sé de dónde salió semejante monstruo pero lo que sí sé y lo tengo seguro es que es un anti-hispano como lo son muchos americanos.... Qué desgracia tener personas como usted dentro de la comunidad hispana" (48).
- ⁶ Example offered by (Stavans 2003: 42)
- ⁷ Example taken from (McClure 198).
- ⁸ Quoted in Hernández (2004: 4)

⁹ Both examples (6) and (7) are Hill's 1995.

¹⁰ Example given by Castro Roig, 1996.

¹¹ Thus, Hernández (2004) points out that the most basic part of *Spanglish* is code-switching, while a more complicated form of *Spanglish* involves making up words (his examples include calques and loan words.) Álvarez (1997) and Guerra Avalos (2001) both claim that the two main approaches to *Spanglish* are switching and borrowing. Likewise, Stavans (2003) talks about "borrowed" (his quotation marks) terms and defines code-switching as "the way the easy transit between the languages is described by specialists in the field" (13).

¹² The reader is referred to Valdés-Fallis (1976), Poplack (1980), McClure (1981), and Gumperz (1982) for further explanation of the functions mentioned here. Additionally, Zentella (1997) distinguishes three main categories of communicative strategies accomplished by code-switching: footing, clarification, and crutch-like code mixes.

¹³ The literature on syntactic constraints is vast. Among many others, the reader is referred to Hasselmo (1970), Gingras (1974), Lipski (1978), Pfaff (1979), Timm (1975), Jacobson (1977), Poplack (1980), Sankoff and Poplack (1981), Joshi (1985), Belazi et al. (1994), Rubin & Toribio (1996), and MacSwan (1999).

¹⁴ Other alternatives are offered by researchers such as Myers-Scotton (1991), who first proposed a different way of analyzing code-switching with her Matrix Language Frame Model. This theory distinguishes between the matrix and the embedded languages of the switched utterance. Lately, her Markedness Model (1998) has attempted to shed some light on this issue.

¹⁵ In his classification of intra-sentential code-mixing, Muysken (2000) defines "insertion" of material from one language into a structure from the other language as the first of the three types of code-mixing (the other two being alternation and congruent lexicalization). Borrowing is associated and included in this general category.

¹⁶ For a wide listing of "CyberSpanglish", see the controversial and much criticized web page created by Yolanda Rivas at <www.actlab.utexas.edu/~seagull/spanglish.html>

¹⁷ For an extensive discussion of this topic, the reader may consult Zamora Munne, and Guitart, 1982; Varela, 1983; and Romaine 1995.

¹⁸ According to Lipski (in press), the use of "para atrás" is the most criticized syntactic calque in the Spanish-speaking communities and it also appears in bilingual communities in Gibraltar. The reader is referred to Lipski (1985, 1987), Otheguy (1993) and Silva-Corvalán (1994) for additional documentation.

¹⁹ From the Internet Movie Data Base (<<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0103064/quotes>>): JOHN CONNOR. No, no, no, no. You gotta listen to the way people talk. You don't say "affirmative," or some shit like that. You say "no problema." And if someone comes on to you with an attitude you say "eat me." And if you want to shine them on it's "hasta la vista, baby." THE TERMINATOR. Hasta la vista, baby.

²⁰ This author also called it "junk Spanish" in her earlier works.