

**EL INGLÉS Y EL ESPAÑOL EN CONTACTO EN LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS. REFLEXIONES ACERCA DE LOS RETOS, DILEMAS Y COMPLEJIDAD DE LA SITUACIÓN SOCIOLINGÜÍSTICA ESTADOUNIDENSE**

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The year 2020 will certainly be remembered for the many challenges the whole world has had to face at many levels. And it is precisely the current convoluted cultural and racial situation in the United States—which can be broadly described as “whiteness against otherness”—, enhanced by the racial disparities present during the 2020 coronavirus pandemic and clearly exacerbated by a questionable response by the Trump administration, which makes this book<sup>1</sup> particularly relevant and significant.

*El inglés y el español en contacto en los Estados Unidos. Reflexiones acerca de los retos, dilemas y complejidad de la situación sociolingüística estadounidense*, edited by Silvia Betti and Renata Enghels, is a collection of unnumbered chapters. For the purposes of this review, these chapters could be divided into two distinguishable sections or focuses, which make up an interrelated discussion topic evolving around the English and Spanish languages in contact in the United States. Section one would feature three contributions, those of Braschi, Betti, and Zentella, which discuss the linguistic situation of the Hispanic community in the existing political context in the United States. Section two would include five chapters (López-García; Enghels, Van Belleghem, and Vande Castele; Torres; Thomas; and Serra and Moreno), which deal with the concept of ‘Spanglish’ or (*e*)*spanglish* [dual spelling],<sup>2</sup> bilingualism, and the active choice of the linguistic code (either formal Spanish, workaday Spanish aka Spanglish, or English) subject to the communication setting.

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As a whole, this book deals with the *in-between* identity, arising from the social, cultural, and linguistic mixing between Americans and Hispanics. The Spanish now present in the United States, so-called US Spanish and Spanglish, is a product resulting from the evolution and coexistence of two strong identities.

The first section of this book starts with Puerto Rican writer Giannina Braschi's chapter, who, via a deep reflection on native and foreign identities, explores the ingrained flawed concept of the corruptive linguistic action caused by foreigners speaking less-than-perfect English, and how they are compelled to suppress their native selves to fit into society. In a sense, Ana Celia Zentella's chapter analyzes that same corruptive linguistic action to the Spanish language Braschi mentioned in her chapter and asserts that Spanish speakers in the USA feel that purists deem their Spanish to be somehow inferior. These speakers consider the DRAE definition of Spanglish or *español* fails to fully convey the reality of their *in-between* daily lives. This, and the fact that they are denied access to official information in their own language, drives many US Spanish speakers to decide not to pass on the legacy of language to their children; while others, take pride in their language and become ambassadors of their *in-between* culture. As Silvia Betti states in her chapter, "[a]lthough there is no single 'Hispanic' culture, there is a common Hispanic language: Spanish" (27), my translation.<sup>3</sup> The direct result of years of Hispanic migration to the United States has left a permanent and multi-layered imprint in the "new" US identity: Spanish, the second most spoken language in the United States, is gaining strength and it only seems natural that news is progressively being presented bilingually in English and Spanish. But despite its ever-expanding speaker base, the stigmas and racial prejudices are still countless.

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According to Fernández Vítóres (2019), based on estimates made by the US Census Bureau, "[i]n 2060, the United States will be the second Spanish-speaking country in the world, followed by Mexico: almost one out of three Americans will be Hispanic". This statistical forecast can be quite shocking to all who recall the 2016 US presidential campaign and the Republican Primary debate in late 2015, when the then presidential candidate Donald Trump (criticizing Jeb Bush for speaking Spanish) stated: "This is a country where we speak English, not Spanish". Since then, not only has he got to rule the country (2017-2020), but he has also been the architect of many 'English Only' campaigns limiting the largest minority in the United States: the Spanish-speaking community. The right to freedom of speech indeed, but apparently only in English.

It is important to emphasize that despite the thus far unfruitful attempts to declare English as the official language of the United States by means of the English Language Unity Act, the United States has no official language. The English language has acted *de facto* as such, given that the vast majority of people in the

country speak English. However, what would happen if the tables were turned? Spanish is steadily and inexorably making headway in the United States, although some people would prefer this not to be the case, as Braschi, Zentella, Betti, and other authors in this book plainly convey.

The second section of this book opens with Ángel López-García's chapter, where he portrays Spanglish as a Spanish linguistic result born of a simultaneous or alternate dependency regarding the linguistic systems present in Spanish and English languages. This dependency is determined by an external force that governs the communicative context. As for Renata Enghels, Laura Van Belleghem, and An Vande Castele, they explain they “prefer the term ‘Spanglish’ to other alternatives (such as ‘popular US Spanish’), because it better captures the hybrid nature of this phenomenon” (57), my translation.<sup>4</sup> They highlight that most research and literature on the Spanglish matter show a sociolinguistics approach rather than contributing to its grammatical description. That is precisely what this chapter masterfully focuses on. Antonio Torres' contribution explores several linguistic mergers, describes a study on the implications of bilingualism —based primarily on Costa (2017) and Moreno Cabrera (2016)—, and focuses on the Spanglish phenomena in the US, offering an interesting comparison between the use of Spanish and English in the United States and the use of Spanish and Catalan in Spain. In the next chapter, Juan A. Thomas presents an engaging study on the use of either formal Spanish, workaday Spanish aka Spanglish, or English carried out with a Spanish-speaking community in Utica, New York, and their active election of the linguistic code subject to the communication context (e.g., the generation they interact with, a personal or professional setting). Lastly, Enrique Serra and Sandra Moreno (117) explain the rebellious origins of *españolish* as an act of subversion resulting from the Spanish native speakers' refusal to allow their own identity to die at the hands of that of the English-speaking foreign settlers, as well as a tool to achieve success (as a means of communication with those in the highest ranks, who hold the power), and provide an analysis of the grammatical and lexical characteristics of Spanglish.

In the epilogue, Diana Castilleja and Renata Enghels close this book apologizing for the impossibility of covering all othernesses, which is quite understandable given the vast scope of this venture. All in all, this collection provides quite a comprehensive picture of the linguistic situation of the Hispanic community in the United States and the complex idiosyncrasies resulting from two languages such as English and Spanish coming into close contact.

This book is certainly worth reading, as it reflects a diversity of views and approaches of leading experts and professionals in the field. It would merit inclusion in the syllabus of graduate Philology studies to familiarize students with the linguistic

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situation of the Hispanic community in the United States (as of the publication date) and its ever-changing political context, as well as the evolution of the concept of Spanglish. Given the dynamic and living nature of its core topics —linguistics and politics— it could be a good idea (and certainly worth reading) for this book to reflect, in a future edition, the transition and/or evolution (if any) from Trump’s to Biden’s administration. [Note that as of January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021, Joe Biden’s administration has reversed some of Trump’s prior changes, such as revamping the White House website by reincorporating the Spanish tab; recruiting several Latinos within the presidential cabinet (at the time of writing), and modifying the US migrant policy, to name but a few.]

## Notes

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1. This book was published under Donald Trump’s administration, and the review was written once Trump was ousted from the White House by Joe Biden’s win in the controversial presidential elections held on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020.

2. The RAE’s definition of (e) spanglish: m. A modality of speech of some Hispanic groups in the United States in which lexical and grammatical elements of Spanish and English are mixed [Translation]. Original source text: “m. Modalidad del habla de algunos grupos hispanos de los Estados Unidos en la que se mezclan elementos

léxicos y gramaticales del español y del inglés”. Available at <https://dle.rae.es/spanglish>, redirecting to <https://dle.rae.es/espanglish#Rq8JJSS>. Accessed March 5, 2021.

3. “No existe una única cultura ‘latina’, pero sí existe una lengua común: el español”.

4. “(...) preferimos este término a otros alternativos (como ‘español popular de los EEUU’) porque capta mejor el carácter híbrido del fenómeno”.

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