

SPANISH CONTRIBUTION TO AMERICAN ENGLISH WORD-STOCK: AN OVERVIEW¹

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1. INTRODUCTION.

English is uniquely open to external influence. Since its own birth, it has been in contact with the languages of very different peoples in Europe: Celts, Teutons, Romans, Franks, etc., and its linguistic system has become more analytic and prone to borrowing.

During the Renaissance, under new social conditions, the English vocabulary was considerably enriched by incorporating many words from foreign sources, notably from the Romance and classical languages. It was precisely at that time, when sixteenth-century Spain was a world power in conflict with the emerging British empire, that the Spanish contribution had its first impact due to the cultural exchanges between Spain and England.

American English has continued and developed this tradition of hospitality. Of key importance among other influences was its inevitable relation with the Hispanic community, for reasons linked first with the Spanish colonization of America and later with military interventionism and the subsequent absorption by the United States of its southern borderlands, which had formerly belonged to Mexico. These historical facts together with the continuous influx of Hispanics from all over Latin America in search of the 'American dream', have made Hispanics the largest immigrant group in the U.S., numbering over 35 million people. The political, economic and cultural potential of the Hispanic sector enhances the interest in Spanish, which is in fashion, and has taken the first place as a second language in the American educational system.

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The growing importance of Spanish in the U.S. is reflected in a large increase in research into the language over the last two decades. In a society so aware of the sociolinguistic problems of bilingual education, most studies deal with the distinctive features of Spanish as it is spoken in the United States, and the alternations ("code-switching") and interferences produced between the two languages. With English being the dominant language, particular attention is paid to its influence on Spanish, especially when considering those dialectal areas characterized by a significant language mixture ("Tex-Mex", "Spanglish").² Less attention has been given, however, to the lexical borrowings brought into the English stock by contact with the Spanish language and culture ("hispanicisms"), which constitute a major influence, and are the aim of this study.

For historical reasons, most of the Spanish loanwords in English have originated in the United States. A good number are in general use but most of them are specific to American English, constituting one of its most distinctive features when compared with the British or other varieties of English. The *Oxford English Dictionary* includes over 1000 words and phrases with a Spanish source, of which nearly 40% are still in current usage (Algeo 1996: 27), and *Webster's Third* (1961) over 2000. A standard, although obsolete and incomplete dictionary collects Spanish terms in American English (Bentley 1932). More updated recordings of Spanish borrowings can be found in Rodríguez (1996), the most comprehensive monograph on the subject.³

2. TYPOLOGY.

When considering Spanish borrowings, one may take this concept in a broad sense, to include words or phrases that have Spanish as the "close source" (or "immediate etymon"), although the "ultimate source" (or "far etymon") might be in another language. *Tomato* and *tamale*, for example, are widely viewed as Spanish, although further etymological investigation points to a prehispanic origin, Nahuatl or the language of the Aztecs (*tomatl* and *tamalli*); the same applies to Taino *cacique*, Arabic *alcalde*, Basque *jai-alai*, etc. There are terms that have undergone the influence of Spanish and other languages such as Portuguese (*comandante*, *apertura*) and Italian (*gusto*, *al fresco*), which makes them susceptible to a different classification. One may also take into account expressions like *al primo*, which have a Spanish flavor although they are non-existent in the Spanish language.

On the other hand, there are words of Spanish origin that are not regarded strictly speaking as Spanish loans, given that English borrowed them directly from some other language. Thus, English *veranda* 'handrail, balcony' is an Indic

² For a recent and comprehensive dictionary of Spanglish, see Stavans (2001).

³ For reviews of this book, see Emilio Lorenzo, "La deuda hispánica del inglés", *Saber leer*, 107, August-Sept. (1997), 6-7; Emma Martinell, 27, 2 (1997), 525-528; Roger Wright, *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, July 1997, 374-375; Manfred Görlach, *International Journal of Lexicography*, 11, 1 (1998), 65-66; Robert Baumgardner, *World Englishes*, 18, 1 (1999), 92-95; Alan Kaye, *Multilingua*, 18, 441-443.

borrowing although it has "ultimate" Iberian origin, as it is derived from Spanish or Portuguese *baranda*, *varanda* (Algeo 1996: 13).

Occasionally some hybrid compounds develop, one constituent being English and the other Spanish, as in *pinto beans* (= Sp. *alubias pintas*), *whole/big enchilada*, *locoweed*, *hot tamale*.

Closely related to the issue of borrowing is "calquing". Examples of words and expressions modelled on a Spanish structure are scarce but worth noting; they include *liberation theology* and *fifth column* (the translation of *teología de la liberación* and *quinta columna*), which have also been calqued in other languages; *God's eye*, from MexSpan *ojo de dios*, a decorative small cross; *dark night (of the soul)*, from the *noche oscura* of San Juan de la Cruz; *the moment of truth*, from *el momento de la verdad*, drawn from bullfight language and popularized by E. Hemingway. A few others, such as *disappeared ones*, *refried beans*, and *Shining Path*, compete with their equivalent Spanish sources *desaparecido*, *frijoles refritos*, and *Sendero Luminoso* (Cannon 1996: 49).

There are also a few native expressions that, although not proper loanwords, have been coined on the basis of phonetic similarity and rhyme with some Spanish terms. This is part of a rising phenomenon known as "Mock Spanish", under which one may class items such as *hasty banana* 'hasta mañana' and *hasty lumbago* 'hasta luego' (for more on this issue, see Hill 1995).

3. MORPHOLOGY AND WORD-FORMATION.

The morphological and semantic nature of borrowings has varied according to the period in which they were incorporated into English. Early on, many of the words of Spanish origin were transmitted orally from one generation to another and underwent phonological integration which was increased with time to such an extent that today the majority of them are unrecognizable as hispanicisms (e.g., *sherry* < *Xeres* [now, Jerez de la Frontera], *lariat* < *la reata*, *vamoose* < *vamos*, *barbecue* < *barbacoa*), etc. An extreme case would be the cowboy word *wrangler*, which looks English to all appearances but comes from Mexican Spanish *caballerango* 'groom, stableman' (Dillard 1984: 138; Lodares 1996: 168).

Unlike these early assimilations and corruptions, nowadays there seems to be a tendency to preserve the original morphological features of a term with hardly any alteration (e.g., *desaparecidos*, *mano a mano*, *rosas* 'amphetamines', *yerba buena* 'marijuana'). This probably has to do with the development and widespread diffusion of the written mass media and the greater familiarity with and acceptance of the Spanish language by the English-speaking peoples.

This tendency to preserve the original morphology leads to borrowing some ready-made double plurals of noun compounds (*frijoles refritos*, *huevos rancheros*), thus introducing irregularities in the English inflectional system. Occasionally too, confusion derived from the different inflectional marking of the plural in English

leads to a metanalysis when forming the singular, as occurs with E. *tamale*, -s from Sp. *tamal*, -es (cf. by contrast, *frijol*, -es in both languages).

Spanish loanwords may also be subject to a functional shift, sometimes involving remarkable grammatical transformations when adapted to the English verbal system. As noticed by Craddock (1981: 199), the first person singular hortatory imperative *vamos* 'let's go' spawned the second person command *vamoose!* 'beat it, scram'. That is, in Spanish, *vamos* includes the speaker, whereas *vamoose!* in English is usually an imperative addressed to others. He also mentions as a likely derivation the verb *mosey* to judge from its original meaning 'to move swiftly, scram', although today it is most commonly taken to denote a slow dawdling movement, as in *to mosey along*.

The naturalness of the functional shift as a word-formation method in English is also reflected in other categories, like nouns and adjectives. Most expectable are noun > verb conversions such as *to corral* (from *corral*), *to coyote* (from *coyote*), *to lasso* (from *lasso* < Sp. *lazo*), or in participle adjectival form (*lariated*, from *lariat* < *la reata*); *corraled*, from *corral*; see Salado 1924: 42). Quite striking examples are the conversion into a verb, *huevozed* (with a meaning similar to *vamoose*), from the noun *huevos* ('eggs'), as well as the de-adjectival and hypercorrected participles *locoed* (from *loco*; see Salado 1924: 54) and *borrachiod* (from *borraccio*, attested in Murray).

Because of the "intimate" contact of Spanish with English in the U.S., Spanish has also left an imprint on English derivational morphology. The suffixes or combining forms that betray Spanish origin include the prolific *-teria* (*washeteria*, after *cafeteria*,) and the "parasitic" *-aroo* (*jivaroo*, *wackaroo*, etc.,) and *-eroo* (*swingeroo*, *stinkeroo*) which appeared in amusing slangy formations in the 1930s by analogy with *buckaroo* (< Sp. *vaquero* 'cowboy'). This slangy character is also in other combining forms of recent creation such as *-esta* (< *fiesta*) which denotes extra fanfare, celebration, and the like (e.g., *jubilesta* [< *jubilee*], *Hallowesta* < *Halloween*) and *el -o* which constitutes an amusing variation of whatever is infixed (*el cheapo* 'heap product', *el ropo*, etc.; see Murray 1996). Still more recent is the incorporation of the Spanish suffix *-ista*, especially in the political field (*Perotista*, *Clintonista*, etc.) which in contrast with English *-ist* (*Perotist*, *Clintonist*) provides the referent with a peculiar pejorative connotation (Rodríguez 1995a).

4. SEMANTICS AND STYLISTICS.

With regard to semantics, at an early stage the concepts subject to borrowing were chiefly connected with topography (*canyon*, *mesa*), fauna (*mosquito*, *alligator*), and flora (*calabaza*, *maize*) as well as economic activities such as livestock, agriculture and mining (*rodeo*, *vaquero*). This was due to the close relation between the land and its people, who were of Spanish origin. Today, however, the items that stand out belong to the shifting world of politics (*balseo*, *caudillo*, *junta*, *Sandinista*), which continually attracts more and more attention because of the importance of US relations with Latin America (Rodríguez 1996: 61-104). This

holds true as far as the written media are concerned, but on the oral and conversational level an important group of innovations consists of words pertaining to the underworld and to slang and unconventional language. Most are closely linked with the narcotics trade and traffic as well as other illegal activities, such as prostitution and smuggling, which are so stereotypically associated with the border area that joins the United States and Mexico (e.g., *caballo* and *gato* 'heroin', *perdida* 'whore'; see Murray 1996). Using the degree of formality as a scale, we could place the traditional and more characteristic lexicon of borrowings, which in the eyes of foreigners comprise the stereotype of what is considered to be typically Spanish (words such as *siesta*, *fiesta*, *flamenco*, *torero*, and *señorita*) between these two poles.

A great number of hispanic terms borrowed into English have a Latin American—particularly Mexican—stamp, and some are unknown or have a different meaning in European Spanish. Thus, *tortilla*, which for British holidaymakers in Spain is a 'Spanish omelette', throughout America is taken to mean 'a thin cornmeal pancake'.

Some loanwords undergo semantic changes or develop additional meanings which are not traced in the source language. Thus, English *guerrilla* (1809), which in Spanish means a type of 'fight', a 'guerrilla warfare', in English took an agential and personal reference, 'one engaged in that type of warfare', that is, 'a fighter' (cf. Sp. *guerrillero*). *Coyote*, which began with the meaning of 'prairie wolf' (in 1824) and 'a contemptible person, a cheat' (from Mexican Sp. *coyote* < Nahuatl *coyotl*), later came to designate 'someone who smuggles immigrants illegally from Mexico into the U.S.'

Occasionally, some borrowings are reborrowed in Spanish with meanings which were previously developed in English. Thus, *barbecue*, which originally comes from Sp. *barbacoa*, itself a loan from a West Indian dialect, *barbacoa* 'a raised frame of sticks',⁴ later came to mean 'meat cooked upon such a frame', and eventually 'a picnic at which such meat is served', and these two last meanings were borrowed in Spanish under English influence. *Lunch*, which originally seems to come from Spanish *loncha*, today is an anglicism with a meaning ('light meal') which has become obsolete in English (see Rodríguez 1993 and 1999). And *cowboy*, which was calqued after Spanish *vaquero* ('a man who herds cows'), later extended its meaning ('an man who herds and tends cattle, esp. in the western US') and with this American ranch reference it has been borrowed in most languages.

Most Spanish loans have an "ideational" or "referential" function, as there is no alternative word or established longer expression in English which can replace them without altering the meaning (e.g., *cacique*, *tamale*, *coyote*). There is also a significant number of them that could be classed as "synonymic loans", as their only *raison d'être* is to convey an "expressive" or "stylistic" effect, its connotation often

⁴ For J.M. Carrière, English *barbecue* may not come directly from Spanish *barbacoa*, but from a Canadian word, *baroka*, derived from a Western Indian language and signifying a frame for roasting or smoking meat (see Mencken 1945: 178).

being pejorative or referred to a negative, taboo or degrading reality (*cojones* 'balls', *políticos* 'politicians', *hoosegow* ('prison' < Sp. *juzgado*), *turista* 'diarrhea' [caused by dysentery, an illness which American tourists often get] and *siesta* 'afternoon nap', which connotes laziness).

5. ONOMASTICS.

Although not listed as loanwords, placenames undoubtedly trace, better than any other names, the historical influence of one country on another. Names may come and go but placenames tend to stay, although sometimes in altered form. Hispanic placenames are significantly preserved in the United States, from Florida to California, for the simple reason that this land was Spanish before it was inhabited by English-speaking people, and that large stretches of the country, in the Southwest, belonged to Mexico until last century. But Spanish influence is also noted in various parts of Canada (especially in the west, i.e. British Columbia) and in the Caribbean Islands (Trinidad, Jamaica, etc.).

The places which preserve a Spanish name are of very different sorts. One usually thinks of names of cities and towns, but one should also consider rivers, mountains, canyons, etc. No doubt, the most visible indication of such influence in the United States is the name of states. At least eight of them (*Texas*, *Nevada*, *Florida*, etc.) are of Spanish origin.

Usually names were given at the time of discovery or shortly afterwards and, when they were needed, they were taken from a great variety of sources. There are placenames which are derived from the titles of Spanish dignitaries (*Philippines*, for King Philip II of Spain), or which bear the name of the conqueror or the missionary, or the saint of the day on which they were discovered or founded (*San Francisco*, *San Diego*, *Santa Mónica*). Others evoke a special deed, event, or incident of the voyages of the first explorers (*Cañada del Hambre*, *Roblar de la Miseria*, etc.). For a comprehensive bibliography on this subject, see Rodríguez (1995b).

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

When one examines the extent of the influence of Spanish on English, one is struck not only by its quantitative weight, but also by the fact that it affects numerous levels of the linguistic system. My own examination of Spanish as a donor language and my ongoing compilation of words and expressions of Spanish origin in the English language proves that Spanish remains a vital influence on English. Furthermore, if we consider the intimacy of English-Spanish contacts in North America both at the present time and historically, and the "intimate borrowings" (Bloomfield) resulting from such interaction, together with the growing importance of the Spanish-speaking population, it is doubtful whether any other modern language is likely to rival Spanish in the immediate future⁵.

⁵ See Cannon (1996: 44), who claims that the latest lexicographic corpus shows that Japanese influence may have surpassed that of Spanish.

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