Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Linguistic Heritage:

Sociohistorical Approaches to Spanish in the United States

Edited by Alejandra Balestra, Glenn Martínez and María Irene Moyna

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Recovering the past, creating the future

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Part I

Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Linguistic Heritage

1. Introduction

Over the last thirty years or so, the main focus of the study of Spanish in the United States has been synchronic, and has yielded abundant research on the formal, social, and pragmatic features of the language in its present day form. The historical dimension of Spanish in the territory of the current United States has had to wait considerably longer for recognition as a field of linguistic exploration, although recently some authors have devoted themselves to historical recovery, paying attention to colonial manuscripts (Perissinotto 1992, 1998; Craddock 1998, Craddock & De Marco 1999-2000, Imhoff 2002), or indirectly, using data from dialectal atlases as evidence (Bills & Vigil 1999). This has made available to the historian and linguist a growing collection of competent transcriptions and exegesis and has made possible further exploration in the field (Acevedo 2000, Bernal-Enríquez 2000, Bills & Vigil 2000, Trujillo 2000). To date, however, little has been done in terms of applying sociolinguistic methods to historical documents from the area (with some notable exceptions, cf. Balestra 2002, 2006, Martínez 2000a, 2000b, Wolford 2005).

The purpose of the present project is to look at the Spanish language in the United States from a sociohistorical perspective, taking a stab at a field that is ripe for development. Sociolinguistic analysis can give insights into the direction of language change and hint at the social forces that motivate it. It opens a window onto society and offers a way to gauge conflicts between its various groups and sheds light on how these conflicts have been resolved or perpetuated. Language thus becomes a barometer of the power shifts among groups. This work also sets the stage for the booming field of synchronic and dialectal studies of Spanish in the United States, closing the gap in scholarship between synchrony and diachrony, and helping to highlight the long tradition of multilingualism in the present-day territory of the United States. Ultimately, it is hoped that this increased awareness will help dispel the myth of an English-only Arca-

dia that is at the base of much of the xenophobic sentiment that prevails today. This work will have succeeded if it motivates others to apply sociohistorical research methods to Spanish in the United States.

Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Linguistic Heritage: Sociohistorical Approaches to Spanish in the United States is structured as an extensive introduction and a collection of seven articles that touch upon numerous related fields and may be of interest to a number of scholars, such as historians, sociologists, and linguists. In that sense, it is truly multidisciplinary, even if the main focus is language and linguistic change. The purpose of the introduction is to provide a historical background, including a discussion of the linguistic policies that emerged in the Southwest during the periods of Spanish, Mexican, and U.S. rule. We also discuss the location and characteristics of the archival sources that may be used to study these periods, in an attempt to entice other scholars to carry out their own fruitful explorations. Finally, we include a brief discussion of the quantitative and qualitative methodologies, borrowed from sociolinguistics, as well as the main challenges encountered when applying them to historical data.

2. Historical background

The modest purpose of this historical introduction is to provide a general overview of the various periods of Spanish, Mexican, and American domination in the area now known as the American Southwest. Because the emphasis of this work is on language, particular attention will be paid to the demographic characteristics and the power dynamics between the various groups, since those are known to shape linguistic behavior. In most instances, however, it will be little more than an exposition of the main historical facts, with no attempt at in-depth analysis. The first reason for this is the need to compress into a few pages a history that spans several thousand years, when we include the pre-Columbian period. The second reason is that there are already many excellent works that cover the history and social evolution of the area in much greater detail than this introduction can. The interested reader may consult works on the history of the Southwest from a number of perspectives (cf. for example, Richardson 1934, Hollon 1967, Faulk 1968, Perrigo 1970, Cutter & Engstrand 1996 for general accounts; Bolton 1921, McWilliams 1990 [1948], Bannon 1970, Weber 2003 [1973] for pioneer works on the Spanish-Mexican borderlands; Wellman 1954 & Kessell 2002 for narrative histories; Barrera 1979, Griswold del Castillo 1979, 1984, Griswold del Castillo & De León 1996, for sociological and political reappraisals from a Chicano perspective; and Duingan & Gann 1998,

González 2000, for works that consider the history of all Latino groups in the United States).

The tradition of American history begins with the arrival of the English on the eastern seaboard in 1607 and the establishment of their colonies. This is, of course, not based on historical precedence but it is rather the result of an Anglo-centric assumption that American civilization as we know it is the child of English parents exclusively. Thus, we are told, the powerful Anglo-American thrust for exploration, and conquest swept the country from east to west, gradually taming nature and natives, and gaining ground over alien European powers who got in the way of the unstoppable force of "Manifest Destiny", as the nineteenth century U.S. expansionist policy came to be known. Although for many years Spanish borderlands historians have been striving to present a more accurate picture (cf. Bannon 1970:8), the myth has been hard to dispel in popular culture. This erroneous view provides a false argument for many of today's ethnically and linguistically exclusionary political and social movements. At a time when the future appears increasingly dependent on multicultural integration on a global scale, it would be well to look back on the past of the United States and recognize that diversity is part of the very warp and weave of the nation. The multiple contributions of its early inhabitants, both native and European, have shaped the physical, economic, social, cultural, and linguistic landscape of vast territories of the country. The main purpose of this work is to shed light on one specific strand of this variegated tapestry, namely, the Spanish-Mexican heritage. We do so on the basis of an in-depth analysis of textual sources that highlight the linguistic, social, and ethnic diversity present even then.

Let us begin, then, by stating the oft-overlooked fact: the Anglo settlers to the territory of the present-day United States had been preceded by other Europeans, envoys of the Spanish crown, who set foot on the Florida shores in 1513. These first explorers would be followed by conquerors, and then by missionaries and settlers. The first European language known for a fact to have been spoken on American soil was therefore not English but Spanish, and some speakers of U.S. Spanish today are the direct descendants of those early arrivals. By the time the first English colonies were founded, the Spaniards had already made considerable inroads on the northern frontier of New Spain, and were well on their way to establishing stable settlements in the area. They would continue to do so for a period exceeding three hundred years altogether, until they collided with other European settlers moving south and west.

In the course of the three centuries of Spanish rule over New Spain, the northern borderlands came to constitute a vast swathe of lands to the north of the furthermost expanses of the Aztec empire. They included vast territories in the north of present-day Mexico, comprising from east to west, Nuevo San-

tander (now divided between south Texas and the Mexican state of Tamaulipas), Nuevo León, Coahuila, Nueva Vizcaya (present-day Chihuahua), Sinaloa, Sonora, and Baja California. Additionally, they included territories which are now within the United States, namely, Florida, Louisiana, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. Further forays were made into present-day Kansas, Nebraska, Utah, Colorado, Nevada, and as far north on the Pacific Coast as Oregon, Washington, and Alaska (for details, cf. Cutter & Engstrand 1996:2).

The movement was not a neat progression from south to north, however. It is better to understand the conquest as a three-pronged advance, which has been aptly described as "the extended fingers of an upraised hand" (Kessell 2002:xiv). There was a central thrust from Mexico City to the north, covering northern Mexico and New Mexico. A western wing climbed up the western slope of the Sierra Madre into Sinaloa and La Pimería (present day Sonora and Arizona) and was joined by a northward expansion from Baja California that was later pushed even further into Alta California. Finally, fanning from the central plateau northward, expeditions were sent to the western Texas plains to defend against the advances of the French established in the Mississipi valley. In fact, these French territories of the lower Mississippi would also come into Spanish possession briefly and will therefore occupy us when discussing the eastern borderlands. Finally, Florida, which had been the site of the earliest explorations and which was reached more frequently from the Antilles than from New Spain, remained in general marginal to the borderlands and retained its military outpost status, failing to develop into a regular colonial settlement. In what follows, we provide a brief outline of the geographic characteristics of these areas, a description of the main groups of their early inhabitants, and the stages of Spanish northern conquest and settlements.

2.1. Early Settlers and Inhabitants

From the geographical point of view, the Spanish borderlands were a vast territory with two mountain ranges running from north to south in Mexican territory, i.e., the Sierra Madre Occidental and Oriental, continued within the boundaries of the United States by the Sierra Nevada and the Pacific Cordillera, on the west, and the Rocky Mountains, further east. Between these slopes lie fertile valleys in California, while Baja California is a narrow, arid corridor, split down the middle by a mountain range and a desert. The central areas in the south of Arizona and New Mexico are rugged and dry, with vast expanses of desert interrupted by forbidding mountain ranges and almost impassable canyons. To the east of the Rockies lies the dry Llano Estacado (Staked Plain)

in Texas, and further east still, the swampy Gulf coast of Louisiana and Florida (Cutter & Engstrand 1996:Ch.1).

The main waterways are constituted by the Colorado, flowing into the Gulf of Cortés, the Rio Grande, which crosses New Mexico from north to south before bending eastward to flow into the Gulf of Mexico, and the Mississippi, which also flows into the Gulf from the north. Aside from these, there are few reliable rivers with sufficient flow year-round to provide irrigation or transportation of people or goods. On the other hand, those same trickles can overflow with seasonal rains, which in colonial times slowed down the progress of overland packtrains. Reaching Alta California was particularly difficult: the land passage through the Yuma desert was made dangerous by the presence of natives; the sea voyage, too, was perilous and uncertain. At the mercy of currents and winds, ships could be destroyed at sea or take so long to get there from the ports of Acapulco or La Paz that crews were often ravaged by scurvy.

These vast areas were not uninhabited upon the Spaniards' arrival. Estimates of the indigenous population in 1492 vary, but some think that there were approximately 700,000 people living in the current territory of the United States, while another 200,000 lived in the northern Mexican frontier (Griswold del Castillo & De León 1996:2). The first settlers, small bands of hunters, must have arrived in the proto-Asiatic migrations across the Bering Straight, sometime between 50,000 and 20,000 B.C. They continued southward, with some groups branching off to the east of the Rockies, while others travelled south along the Pacific coast between 12,000 and 9,000 (Cutter & Engstrand 1996:8). They arrived in Baja California around 8,000 B.C., and populated the peninsula in waves of migrants who left their most puzzling modern traces in cave paintings in the central desert (León Portilla 2000:59 *et passim*).

At first these peoples were hunters of large game, but by 3,000 they had a more diversified diet, practiced agriculture, and had started living in villages. For example, the Mogollón-Mimbres culture, went as far east as the Rio Grande Valley and as far west as south central Arizona. They planted corn and supplemented agriculture with hunting and gathering. To their west was the culture of the Hohokam, who developed a canal system allowing them to irrigate the Sonoran desert and plant corn, squash, beans, and cotton (Cutter & Engstrand 1996:10). To the north, in the territory of the Four Corners (where Arizona, Utah, New Mexico, and Colorado meet) were the Anasazi. They were a basket weaving culture, who later learned to weave cotton and make pottery. They obtained their sustenance from agriculture and some hunting. Originally they lived in caves, but eventually they built pithouses which they turned into complex apartment structures, by adding rooms to existing dwellings. In the 13th century Arizona cultures declined, maybe due to drought, epidemics, or the

migration of hunters from the north and east. For whatever reason, the people of Arizona abandoned their cities and moved to the Rio Grande Valley or became entrenched in isolated areas (Perrigo 1970:8; Cutter & Engstrand 1996:14).

The invading newcomers were Athapascan hunters, such as the Apaches and the Navajo. The latter, although originally an Apache tribe, eventually acquired sedentary traits. The Apaches, on the other hand, continued to be nomadic, increasingly so with the appearance of horses in the territory. Another nomadic people, further east into west Texas, were the Comanches, buffalo hunters like their Apache enemies. In the south and east of Texas, the Caddo, a buffalo-hunting people who also knew corn and vegetables, formed a confederacy with several divisions and subtribes (Perrigo 1970:12).

According to Milanich (1998), Florida was inhabited by Paleoindians around 8,000 B.C., when the weather in the area was cooler and drier than today, and the peninsula itself is estimated to have covered more land, due to lower sea levels. The weather would gradually become wetter, giving rise to wetlands in some locations and leading the early inhabitants to an increased reliance on the sea for subsistence. With time, the early inhabitants would construct stone and bone artifacts, and by the year 2,000 they were making pottery and trapping animals. In east and central Florida, the Mayaca and the Timucuan peoples collected animal and plant life, and by 750 A.D., the Timucua were growing corn, and they also consumed beans, peas, pumpkins, citrons, gourds, and tobacco. In the north of the peninsula there is also evidence of intense farming around the same time by the Apalachee, which in turn led to more complex social organization.

In the west, the fertile soil of California provided sustenance to a high population of diverse indigenous peoples. According to Cutter and Engstrand (1996:9), they added up to somewhere between 135,000 and 350,000 and spoke 135 distinct language varieties. Even small areas could allow for very dense occupation by semi-sedentary groups, due to the abundance in animal and vegetable life in the valleys. From south to north, those groups included the Pericues, the Guaycuras, the Huchities in the south and center of Baja California (López Portilla 2000:61 *et passim*), the Yumans around the border area, the Mission Indians (as the coastal tribes came to be known after the arrival of the mission fathers), and a number of other groups including the Penutians and the Miwok in central California (Cutter & Engstrand 1996:15).

2.2. Early Explorers and Conquerors

To summarize the historical periods corresponding to the Spanish conquest and settlement of the borderlands, it makes sense to have recourse to one of the