



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### FEATURE ARTICLES

- Code-Switching  
Page 1
- Immigrants and Bilingualism  
Page 1
- The Price of Justice  
Page 3
- How is a Telephone  
Like an Interpreter?  
Page 11

### NAJIT NEWS

- Message from the Chair  
Page 2
- Introducing the NAJIT Board  
Page 12
- NAJIT Ethics Statement  
Page 12
- NAJIT Comments on DHS  
LEP Guidance  
Page 13
- Minutes of the 2010  
Annual Meeting  
Page 15
- Welcome New Members  
Page 18

### GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

- You Can't Catch an  
Old Bird with Chaff  
Page 19

### A LEXICOGRAPHER'S LAIR

- Legalese vs. English  
Page 20

### BOOK REVIEW

- Page 22

## CODE-SWITCHING: CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVES ON SPANISH AND ENGLISH

Martin C. Taylor

### Definition of Labels

Code-switching, however labeled — “Spanglish,” “Tex-Mex,” “language-switching,” “duelling languages” — and however spelled — one word or two, hyphenated or unhyphenated, lower case or upper — is a cultural and linguistic challenge that interpreters face in U.S. courtrooms or in other bicultural and bilingual settings. The phenomenon occurs naturally among all bilinguals, and obligates interpreters to be attuned to the ways in which *hispanoparlantes* express themselves. In the code-switching that may appear in court testimony or casual dialog, Spanish speakers interweave English words and phrases with their native Spanish.

Linguists Carl A. Grant and Gloria Ladson-Billings define succinctly the intertwining of English into Spanish speech as “the systematic shifting or alternation between languages in discourse among bilinguals sharing common language codes. The elements involved in code-switching retain their own meaning and adhere to the rules of pronunciation and grammar that govern the language of origin” (1997, p. 44).

### Code-Switching in Action

A Chicano *platicando* in border talk uses code-switching with utter facility, choosing spontaneously the most appropriate language in separate sentences (intersentential), or, as in the following case, within a sentence (intrasentential): “*Me dio un ride pa'l pueblo*” [Sp./Eng./Sp.]. Gregory Rodríguez, *L. A. Times* columnist on Mexican affairs, captures the commercial and cultural Americanization of the northern industrial city of Monterrey of middle-class Mexicans in an upscale neighborhood: “Particularly when discussing entertainment,” Rodríguez says, “[...] *Regios* (i.e., short for *regiomontanos*, citizens of Monterrey) like to pepper their Spanish with English. They’ll talk about

> [continues on page 6](#)

## IMMIGRANTS AND BILINGUALISM

Michael O’Laughlin

The population of the United States is changing quickly. The principal reason for this is not illegal immigration, but rather because immigration policies were radically altered in 1965. Before then it was very difficult for non-Europeans to migrate to the U.S. Today, 80% of immigrants are from Asia and Latin America. In all periods, immigration has primarily been geared to the needs of American industry. The U.S. has always needed a steady supply of cheap manual labor, and immigration policies have generally been calculated to meet this critical need.

There have been several large waves of new immigrants. One of the first waves brought low-wage laborers from Ireland; a subsequent wave came from Italy, yet another from Eastern Europe. Most migrants were drawn to the industrial belt that stretches from Boston to Chicago, an economic engine which also attracted people from other parts of North America, including a wave of blacks from the rural South and others from Quebec and Mexico. Some came seeking work only to find that good manufacturing jobs were in short supply, as when one third to half of all Puerto Ricans left the island after World War II only to find that the fabled factory jobs on the mainland had moved offshore or were in the process of leaving.

The labor market is not the only factor influencing immigration policies. U.S. involvement in foreign affairs precipitated other movements: Vietnamese and Hmong came on the heels of the Vietnam War; Cubans came during the Cold War; Somalis and Cambodians came due to the violent collapse of their own societies.

### Recent Immigration

Today’s immigrants face a different dynamic than that of their European predecessors. Fifty or one hundred years ago, those who came to do factory work could count on some degree of upward

> [continues on page 8](#)

**IMMIGRANTS AND BILINGUALISM** *continued from page 1*

mobility. There were plenty of opportunities for people to progress economically because U.S. society was less stratified at that time. By contrast, today's immigrant labor force forms an hourglass shape—wide at the high and low ends, and narrow in the middle. At the top end, immigrants with technical knowledge are making significant inroads in high tech, medicine and other knowledge-based industries; for example, 32% of the IT professionals in Silicon Valley were born in another country. The level of success of these immigrants is unprecedented.

The bottom of the hourglass, however, contains a much larger group of workers with few skills and often minimal education. They work not in factory or agricultural jobs these days, but in the service industry: cleaning houses, making coffee, painting houses, cutting grass, delivering pizzas, washing dishes, driving taxis. Often their work is not steady and some never find what they consider a real job. Many do not earn a living wage that can support a household. Furthermore, less-educated immigrants often discover that there is no easy way out of their underclass status. Even if an immigrant finishes high school or starts a small business, it's not enough anymore. They remain part of the minimum-wage working poor unless they acquire more marketable skills (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p. 61).

### Perception of Immigrants

Some Americans perceive today's immigrants as unable to advance because of a lack of ability or drive. As Peter Brimelow notes:

The latest immigrants are different from those who came before. These newcomers are less educated, less skilled, more prone to be in trouble with the law, less inclined to share American culture and values, and altogether less inclined to become American in name and spirit. (as cited in Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p. 50)

Although the U.S. is an immigrant nation, resentment of newer immigrants has existed since colonial times. This resentment is focused on the burdens that immigrants are believed to place on contemporary society, and their slow pace of assimilation. Although resentment of high-achieving immigrants may also exist, negative feelings are more common regarding people at the bottom of the hourglass. Industry may benefit from the presence of cheap immigrant labor, but local and state governments must see to the educational and medical needs of immigrant families. The fact that many unskilled immigrants cannot find a job that pays enough for a family to survive tends to discourage rapid assimilation, as immigrants become trapped in low-rent enclaves or ghettos.

### Generational Differences

Language issues faced by immigrants follow a similar hourglass pattern. Those in the top half usually already have some level of proficiency in English or strive to achieve proficiency for work reasons. At the lower half of the hourglass, English is not as necessary and language acquisition can take a generation. In fact, a new paradigm has emerged in the last 20 years concerning the dynam-

ics of immigrant assimilation and language shift. Today, instead of lumping all immigrants together or dividing them into groups by geographic origin, scholars see immigration as a lengthy process that affects three generations, with each generation facing separate issues.

The first generation consists of those born elsewhere who enter the U.S. as adults. These are often unskilled workers, frequently from rural areas. They come in search of a better life, or because there are no jobs in their home country. For example, half of Mexico's population of 100 million is under 19; there will not be enough work for all Mexicans coming of age in the 21st century. This first generation usually has a narrow focus: they are here to work, and assimilation into the dominant society is not uppermost in mind. Their goals are usually more modest: getting on their feet, supporting a family, buying a house in the host or home country. Many plan to earn some money and then return home.

The amount of English learned by the first generation depends to some extent on their age upon arrival. If they are in their mid-teens or younger on arrival, they acquire some level of proficiency in the new language, but those who are older tend to learn just enough English to survive (Portes & Schauffler, 1996, p. 14). There are two main reasons for this. First, there is often an absence of a strong educational background, and second, many linguists believe that the ability to pick up new languages decreases dramatically after puberty. Psychologically, those immigrants who do not acquire English retreat over time into a ghettoized, expatriate mentality.

The attitudes and experience of those who arrive as young children are quite different. This "1.5 generation," as it is called, is composed of those born in a foreign country but raised in the U.S.A. Both the 1.5 and the second generation are children of immigrants. Those toward the top of the aforementioned economic hourglass assimilate easily, although they may feel somewhat conflicted regarding family and cultural loyalties. However, the situation is quite different for those on the bottom. Children of poor immigrants are often worse off psychologically than the first generation. While their parents believe they have bettered themselves, their children tend to judge things by American standards, and realize their family is worse off than most others (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p. 6-7). Too often they internalize negative stereotyping, racism and the anxieties of the neighborhoods in which they live. These children can suffer from significant stress. Their families are under pressure, partly because both parents are working, sometimes at more than one job. Additionally, families often have been disconnected or split up, with some members still living in the country of origin. Often wives or children are left behind with aunts or grandparents, and even if families are later reunited, gaps in experience, language or culture within the family can be hard to overcome.

The longer that immigrant children at the bottom of the hourglass live in the United States, the worse they do academically, because they begin to lose hope (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p. 5). These children usually grow up speaking two languages, but this duality can become a hindrance at school and a

source of conflict at home. Parents can feel shut out or lose status if their children are able to deal with the new society better than they can. The more English the second generation learns and begins to rely on, the greater the gap with parents who, linguistically speaking, are living in another world. The second generation is a bilingual generation, but sometimes only transitionally bilingual. They may lose fluency in their mother tongue as they grow older.

The third generation consists of the grandchildren of the original immigrants. This group is normally fully assimilated and has a stable identity within American society. As a rule, the third generation is monolingual in English. Even if exposed to the grandparents' language on a regular basis, they have little interest in learning it. They see that language as part of the old world of their grandparents, in which they do not want to invest time or energy (Portes & Schauffler, 1996, p. 11).

These are the general, normative developments in language use by immigrants to the United States. Assimilation usually takes three generations and only the second generation is bilingual, perhaps transitionally. Many children of immigrants are born speaking a foreign language, transition to English in school, and then forget or discard much of their first language.

### The U.S., Where Languages Go to Die?

In no other country are foreign languages forgotten as quickly as they are here (Liebersohn, Dalto, & Johnson, 1975, p. 53-56). Why is this the case? In other places around the world where languages overlap, multilingualism is not unusual. By one estimate there are thirty times as many languages in the world as there are countries, and probably half the world's population is bilingual or multilingual (Romaine, 1996, p. 573). When a whole country or area uses two or more languages, the experts do not call this bilingualism, but *diglossia* — two languages in use in the same place. Sometimes there is *diglossia* but little or no bilingualism because different groups of people inhabit the same area but do not interact much. More commonly, where there is *diglossia*, there is some level of bilingualism, i.e., the competent use of two languages by the same person. *Diglossia* can also refer to areas where a separate language or dialect is used for more formal exchanges, such as High German in Switzerland, Mandarin in China or Portuguese in Cape Verde.

Compared to other countries, there is no stable *diglossia* in the United States. Instead, there is a great deal of transitional bilingualism. This country absorbs immigrants who speak different languages at an incredibly high rate, but the survival and retention of those languages over time is quite low (Hakuta, 1986, p. 166). Although some commentators point in alarm to signs that other languages are "taking over," serious linguistic studies have concluded that not even Spanish would be able to survive in the U.S. for more than a generation or two if new immigration were to cease (Veltman, 2009). Part of the reason for this is simply the dominance of English in today's world: English has become the world's default *lingua franca*, the language of the Internet, business, science, diplomacy, pop music, and Hollywood. The world is globalizing and shrinking, and English is part of that process (McCrum, 2010).

### English — Not in Any Danger

Therefore, the concern that kids today are growing up not knowing English is probably invalid. A study was done in Miami and Fort Lauderdale, the media center for Spanish in the United States, which surveyed eighth and ninth-graders as to their language use. The survey was of all students, including Anglos. It found that 73% could speak English very well, 26% could speak English well, and only 1% knew little or no English (Portes & Schauffler, 1996, p. 11). Thus, 99% of these youth spoke English. Moreover, 80% of these same students preferred to speak English (Portes & Schauffler, 1996, p. 21). Even for those students, usually Cubans, who were raised and educated in ethnic enclaves where Spanish was emphasized, 90% preferred to speak English (Portes & Schauffler, 1996, p. 21-22).

In all countries, the ability of an immigrant language to survive for very long does not depend on the number of language speakers, but on its number of elite speakers, together with the attitude of the second generation towards their parent's language and culture (Portes, 1996, p. 2). It is also helpful if the immigrants are clustered in ethnic enclaves, such as happened with the Chinese in New York and San Francisco, the Cambodians in Lowell, MA and Long Beach, CA, or the Mexicans in East L. A. When we look around the world, we also see that languages can achieve a permanent secondary status within a *diglossia* if they have a sphere where they are preferred. This is especially the case with languages connected to a religion. American Jews have stopped speaking Yiddish almost entirely, but they still may know some Hebrew because it plays a role in religion. The same can be said for Classical Arabic and Greek. They are surviving because they are used as religious and liturgical languages.

### Language Mixing

Everywhere in the world where languages are in contact, there is language mixing (Lipski, 2008). Here in the U.S., we see a slow deterioration of skills in the language of origin and a piecemeal replacement of foreign words by English ones. The first English words to appear on the tongues of unskilled monolingual immigrants are subject nouns and place names. For example, unless there is a word in your language for "hot dogs," you will use the American word. Likewise, if someone wants to go to a Market Basket (supermarket) or City Hall, they will identify these places by their English names. Therefore the names of things and places lead the list of English words quickly learned and used by foreigners (Otheguy, 2003). Next come the verbs, and these can often be interesting combinations of two languages. "To park" a car in Spanish and Portuguese becomes *parquear*, or *aparcar*, in which the English word is given new Latin verb endings. Thus English words and expressions begin to pepper the speech of the first generation. At the bottom of the hourglass, the second generation is the only truly bilingual generation, yet, even in their case, they are speaking primarily English by their teens, throwing in some of the mother tongue for emphasis or color or because it is more fun to speak that way. Many times bilingual phrases are used because they are creative, cool or funny.

I noted with interest a recent article in the *Boston Globe*

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IMMIGRANTS AND BILINGUALISM *continued from page 9*

describing the introduction of programming in Spanglish, just for kids making up the second generation. As producer Alex Peis said, “Our audience is a hybrid of all markets... They’re people who live in both worlds... They can tune in to a *telenovela* one hour and ‘Family Guy’ the next” (as cited in Villarreal, 2009, p. N6). Can these teenagers or young adults speak competently in their parent’s language without mistakes or substitutions? Not the ones on this show. As Melissa Crash Barrera, one of the stars, said, “I’ve worked in Latin television before and they’ve said, “You don’t speak enough Spanish,” “You sound funny when you speak Spanish”... I am Latina, and there are tons of kids that are like me. Being fluent in Spanish does not make you more Latina than me” (as cited in Villarreal, 2009, p. N6). Her remarks illustrate that the second generation often attains only a transitional bilingualism. Although they may be losing their Spanish, these kids are now a market with their own lingo, their own TV shows and their own music.

For all of us, an awareness of these sociological and linguistic patterns can be most helpful. It is advantageous to understand the reasons why interpreters are needed by the LEP population, and useful for us to be able to gauge a person’s relative language skills. It is usually the case that the better a person speaks English, the weaker s/he is in the other language, and vice versa. Most LEP people are positioned somewhere between two languages and two worlds. Interpreters must not be thrown off by language mixing, understanding it to be a universal phenomenon. As we listen to people speak, we should pay attention to what the language use tells us about their origins, the amount of time they have been in the U.S., their educational background, and culture. If we know something about the larger patterns of immigration and language use, then that speaker can be seen in a larger context. In the end, the more we understand, the better we are able to interpret. ▲

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# CREATIVE COURTROOM ACTIVITES

Rosemary Dann

**A** morning coverage assignment for the trial court in New Hampshire generally means one of two things. Either I am running frantically from one courtroom to another, juggling guilty pleas, restraining orders, summary process matters, motion hearings and trials, or I spend four hours in excruciating boredom waiting for the one defendant whose five-minute matter is called just before the lunch break. Rarely does the level of activity fall in between.

Recently, to keep from going stark-raving mad from lack of activity and a very uncomfortable seat, I exercised my creative instincts. It occurred to me that haiku would be a feasible task, as this verse form has a limited number of syllables, and would allow me to spring into interpreting action if needed. Later I showed my day’s production to my husband, who looked it over and said, “Nice, but the syllables in haiku are arranged as 5-7-5, not 7-5-7.” Oops. After recovering from my chagrin, I replied, “Well, then, I guess it’s MY-ku.” So for light reading, I offer some verbal snapshots of one morning in court.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| The defendant defaulted.                          | “Mr. Pérez, you’ve been charged...”                           |
| “Where were you on Friday?”                       | “No hablo inglés.”  |
| “My dog ate the court’s notice.”                  | “Call Madame Interpreter.”                                    |
| Cameras in the courtroom.                         | Hours drag on endlessly.                                      |
| What are they filming?                            | The clock slowly ticks.                                       |
| The arraignment: man bites dog.                   | Court officers suppress yawns.                                |
| Natives are getting restless.                     | Waiting ‘til they call my case.                               |
| Damn! These seats are hard.                       | No files to work on.  |
| Will this session never end?                      | Wish I had a Blackberry.                                      |
| All’s quiet in the courtroom<br>awaiting verdict. | Ancient law books lean in shelves,<br>backdrop for the judge. |
| A cell phone shatters silence.                    | Emcee, theatre of absurd. ▲                                   |
| They look down from gilded frames.                |   |
| Disapproving stares.                              |   |
| Faces of the judges past.                         |   |

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