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**SPANGLISH**

**History and Origins**

The history of what people call “Spanglish,” using Spanish and English in the same conversation, can be traced back in modern times to the middle of the 19th century. In 1846 Mexico and the United States went to war. Mexico surrendered in 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. With its surrender, Mexico lost over half of its territory to the United States, what is now either all or parts of the states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Wyoming. The treaty established that Mexican citizens who remained in the new U.S. lands automatically became U.S. citizens, so a whole group of Spanish speakers was added to the U.S. population.

Then, five years later the United States decided that it needed extra land to build a southern railway line that avoided the deep snow and the high passes of the northern route. This resulted in the Gadsden Purchase of 1853. This purchase consisted of portions of southern New Mexico and Arizona, and established the current U.S.-Mexico border. Once more, Mexican citizens who stayed in this area automatically became U.S. citizens, adding even more Spanish speakers to the U.S. population.

Settlers from the eastern United States poured into the new territories, bringing with them the English language. So Spanish and English came crashing headlong into contact with each other. New settlers began to learn Spanish, and the former Mexican citizens started to learn English. Bilingual communities came into creation. And whenever two languages come into contact they begin to exchange words. The Anglo settlers had never seen some of the plants, animals and food in the new lands, and so words like mesquite, tomato, coyote, armadillo, tortilla, enchiladas, and tequila became part of the English vocabulary. The same happened with Spanish. For example, U.S. money was different from Mexican money, and so nickel, dime, quarter, and dollar became *nicle, daima, cuara*, and *dólar*. Track (as in
railroads) became *el traque*, truck turned into *la troca*, sheriff *el cherife*, and courthouse *la casa de corte*.

The new U.S.-Mexico border did not stop more Spanish speakers from arriving in the former Mexican territories. In 1910 the Mexican Revolution erupted, and many people fled to the north to escape the brutal bloodshed. During WWII the need for soldiers drained the U.S. workforce, so many Mexican laborers were issued permits to come to this country to support the United States. These laborers were supposed to return to their homes when the jobs were done, but many either stayed or returned later to establish new homes here. Beginning in the late 1970s, the Mexican peso began to lose value rapidly, forcing many people north to look for work to support their families back home. And the continued need for workers in the United States, especially in the hugely important business of food production, has created a demand for Mexican labor that continues to this day. As a result, there are Spanish-speaking communities in every state of the nation, including the one farthest north, Alaska.

But the Spanish-speaking population in the United States is not only from Mexico. In 1898 the United States went to war with Spain, and as a result Puerto Rico was added as a territory to this country. Puerto Rico remains a Spanish-speaking society, and Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens who can freely travel between the island and the United States. A large number of Cubans fled their island during and after the revolution led by Fidel Castro and settled mainly in Florida. Peoples from Central and South America, often escaping political upheaval and civil wars, have established communities in the United States. All these groups speak their own kind of Spanish, so, while there are many Spanish-English bilingual communities throughout the United States, a Puerto Rican, for example, knows if she is talking with someone whose family was originally from Mexico, Honduras, or Argentina.

Whatever the country of origin, however, all the young people born in the United States learn English, and thus have their own version of Spanglish. Puerto Ricans will say *chévere* if something’s cool, while someone who has roots in Mexico might say *qué suave, está chido*, or *qué padre*. For Caribbeans *tostones* are a fried plantain treat, while for someone in San Antonio, Texas *tostones* are a certain kind of coin. In Miami, if you want a bowl of spicy soup you order *mondongo*, but if you are in Los Angeles you have to ask for *menudo*. The list goes on and on, but one example of the richness of vocabulary in U.S. Spanish is Rubén Cobos’s masterpiece *A Dictionary of New Mexico and Southern Colorado Spanish*, which is needed to understand the words used just in that region. So, while bilingualism is the tie that binds U.S. Spanish speakers together, each group puts its own salsa into the Spanglish recipe!
Regional Practices and Traditions

Often, when we think of traditions, days like Thanksgiving and Super Bowl Sunday come to mind. Some are old, some are new, and they happen at certain times of the year. But other traditions occur every day. Ketchup on French fries is an American tradition, and salsa on a burrito a Mexican one. The same goes for language. Every since the early days of contact between English and Spanish in this country, in bilingual communities there has been a tradition of using both languages in a conversation. So in Los Angeles, Miami, or Chicago you might hear something like “el otro día fui al mall and there were some Adidas on sale bien baratos, so los compré de volada” (the other day I went to the mall and there were some Adidas on sale real cheap, so I bought them on the spot).

This fluid use of Spanish and English in the same sentence, or language switching (another way of saying Spanglish), is common in all Spanish/English bilingual communities in the United States. For some people, Spanglish means a broken mishmash of two languages, used only by poorly educated individuals who cannot really speak either English or Spanish. This is a common myth, but completely untrue. It is the use of the two languages in the same conversation, but the Spanish parts are grammatically correct Spanish, and the English parts grammatically correct English. Those who are the best speakers of Spanglish are those who are the most bilingual, those who grew up speaking both languages from an early age. A Spanglish speaker who switches languages fluently can also speak only Spanish with someone from Spain, and only English with someone from Ohio.

And like all traditions, there are certain rules that you normally follow. These rules are not written in stone. If you don’t have turkey on Thanksgiving or a fancy selection of snacks while watching the Super Bowl, that is okay, but still, a lot of people observe those rules. It is the same for language switching. Like Spanish and English, Spanglish has its own grammar rules. Here we need to make it clear that the word “rule” doesn’t mean something you look up in a grammar book. A rule is something you learn at an early age by listening to your parents, relatives, friends, the television or radio, anywhere that language is used. Little kids are like sponges in the sense that they can effortlessly soak up those rules without even trying. It lets them know when to use “a” or “an” (it’s an apple but a banana) or to say me hablo ayer (she spoke to me yesterday) versus HABLO español (I speak Spanish). These rules are not like the ones that say,

Never end a sentence with a preposition.

Or
Two negatives make a positive.
“Ain’t” ain’t a word.

In reality, “ain’t” is in any good dictionary. If someone says “there ain’t no way that’s gonna happen,” we know that it REALLY is not going to happen. These kinds of rules are ones that most people do not pay attention to.

So, using the Spanglish rules, many bilinguals will generally agree that

*Los niños están jumping en la cama* (the kids are jumping on the bed)
is grammatically okay, but

*ya hemos eaten la cena* (we have already eaten dinner)
is much less so. Or, switches can only happen at certain places, like after the verb *hacer* (to do or to make):

*Mi tío ya se hizo retire.* (My uncle finally retired.)

*Mi prima se hizo policewoman.* (My cousin became a policewoman.)

Another rule is that, when talking about something that happened, you use the language you heard it in.

*Sabes qué, el otro día me topé con el Chuy, y me dice, “Guess what, I'm getting married!”* (You know what, the other day I ran into Chuy, and he tells me, “Guess what, I’I'm getting married!”)

Or,

*I pulled into the parking lot the other day in my '54 Chevy, and this guy says, “Oye, ¿qué trae bajo la trompa?”* (I pulled into the parking lot the other day in my '54 Chevy, and this guy says, “Hey, what’s it got under the hood?”)

One more rule is that language switching is reserved for talking to other people who are bilingual too, so among friends, at parties, with brothers, sisters, and cousins, at picnics or a ball game, language switching or Spanglish will be common. It’s normally not done with people who are not bilingual. So if older family members are not fluent in English, then a bilingual only speaks Spanish with them. If a bilingual goes shopping and the clerk only speaks English, she only speaks English with him.

These rules, even though most of them have yet to be written down in a grammar book, are as real as the rules for English or Spanish. And it is generally only the people who have grown up with two languages who learn these rules. People who learn Spanish or English as adults generally don’t go on to learn the rules for Spanglish. So again, no matter where you live and where your
family came from, if you're a bilingual, language switching, or Spanglish, is an American tradition, sort of like putting spicy jalapeño salsa on your hot dog!

**Contemporary Forms**

A common myth is that Spanglish is a new language. It is not, but rather it is an American tradition that goes back over 150 years. Like any other form of spoken communication, however, it does change along with the times (languages that stop changing become dead, like classical Latin). The recent decades have presented some astonishing technical innovations, and language keeps right up with those changes. There are those of us who clearly remember a world that had no computers, no email, no Internet; chatting was something you did face to face with people, telephones sat on a desk or hung on a wall, and "googol" only meant a very big number. For others, being able to communicate with someone halfway across the world with a little machine you carry in your pocket is just about as normal and natural as breathing.

Either way, we have a whole set of words that have entered the English language, and from there into Spanish on a global level. Some are so common, like *television* and *teléfono*, that many people who only speak Spanish do not realize they came from English. Other more recent additions to the worldwide Spanish vocabulary are *chatear* from chat, *cliquear* from click, *computadora* from computer, and *internet* from Internet. Are you not answering your cell? *Pues*, *te texteo*. Do we need some information? *Fácil, lo gugleamos*. As we all know, *surfear el internet* is an easy way to come up with answers!

Not all people are happy with change, though, and they are discontented with what they call Spanglish. They might view all these new words and bilingual language switching with suspicion and think that the Spanish language is being destroyed by the “invasion” of English.

They might not realize that the United States is one of the largest Spanish-speaking countries in the world and adds to the vibrancy and richness of the Spanish language. Spanish, as a world language, is in absolutely no danger of being “destroyed,” as it is one of the principal languages on this planet. The Spanish-speaking population continues to grow in this nation, and it is predicted to continue to do so throughout the 21st century. From Maine to California, from Washington to Florida (and Alaska and Hawai‘i!), Spanish becomes more of a presence every day.

As long as there are babies being born into bilingual Spanish/English communities, Spanglish will continue to be heard in offices, boardrooms, restaurants, on the streets and in the parks, in schools and churches, in politics, anywhere that those bilinguals come together. Spanglish is as American a
tradition as hot dogs, burritos, ketchup, salsa, apple pie, tacos, baseball, piñatas, Super Bowl Sunday, Cinco de Mayo, hip-hop, and quinceañeras. And whether you prefer pupusas or gorditas (Central American and Mexican Spanish for a sort of thick, stuffed corn tortilla), mondongo or menudo (Puerto Rican and Mexican Spanish for the spicy soup mentioned above), Spanglish is the common tie that binds the many and varied Spanish-speaking communities in the United States together.

Daniel Joseph Villa

Further Reading

TANDAS AND CUNDINAS

History and Origins
A tanda or cundina in its most simple form consists of a savings-and-lending operation organized among friends, neighbors, relatives, or fellow workers. As a simple example, a hypothetical rotating savings and credit association (ROSCA) might consist of an organizer and four other persons who agree to contribute a set amount of $10 a week. The order in which these monies are distributed is decided by lot or by the order in which the members joined. Each person, including the organizer, receives a one-time payment of $40 from the ROSCA. Thus, each person contributes to the others' $40 payments at the rate of $10 dollars per week. The total lifespan of this hypothetical ROSCA would be five weeks. Or as one of the pioneers in the study of this phenomenon explains, a ROSCA consists of “a core of participants who agree to make regular contributions to a fund which is given, in whole or in part, to each contributor in rotation” (Ardener, 1996, 201).