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Book Review Essays

Is American Spanish Healthy?

Author: [Ilan Stavans](#)

Abstract

This essay reviews the following works:

How Borges Wrote. By Daniel Balderston. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2018. Pp. ix + 375. \$49.50 hardcover. ISBN: 9780813939643.

Diccionario Panhispánico de Dudas. Real Academia de la Lengua Española. Madrid: Taurus, 2015. Pp. 888. \$193.00. ISBN: 9788430617500.

An American Language: The History of Spanish in the United States. By Rosina Lozano. Oakland: University of California Press, 2018. Pp. viii + 364. \$29.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780520297074.

La maravillosa historia del español. By Francisco Moreno Fernández. Barcelona: Espasa, 2015. Pp. 389. ISBN: 9788467044270.

Educating across Borders: The Case of a Dual Language Program on the U.S.-Mexico Border. By María Teresa de la Piedra, Blanca Araujo, and Alberto Esquinca. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018. Pp. xiii + 216. \$35.00 paperback. ISBN: 9780816538478.

Motherless Tongues: The Insurgency of Language amid Wars of Translation. By Vicente L. Rafael. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016. Pp. xii + 255. \$26.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780822360742.

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How does one measure the health of a language? By means of looking at its diversity and by attentively exploring the way it reacts to the challenges it faces.

With approximately 460 million speakers worldwide today, Spanish is the world's second-largest native language, sandwiched between the sum of varieties of Chinese (1.3 billion) and English (379 million). Internationally, English is

the most popular second language, which means there are far more non-native (an estimated 1.5 billion) than native speakers, at a ratio of roughly five to one. Some twenty countries have Spanish as either their official language or, as in the case of Bolivia and Paraguay, as one among several. All of this is a statement of global dominance but not about fitness. The Spanish-speaking Latin American countries with the largest populations are, in descending order, Mexico, Colombia, and Argentina. (Spain comes after Colombia, with 47 million speakers.) In each of them, the language is used in pluralistic, idiosyncratic ways, to such degree that talking about a “national language” is pertinent only insofar as the designation accommodates the nonstandard varieties encompassed within a specific territory. There is Lunfardo in Argentina, for instance; elsewhere, there are also hybrid tongues like *Frespañol* (French and Spanish), *Portuñol* (Portuguese and Spanish), *Tanglañol* (Tagalog and Spanish), and *Casteidish* (Spanish and Yiddish). In general, Spanish doesn’t recognize these mixed forms. Yet the second-largest concentration of Hispanic people in the globe is the United States, with over 60 million, of which close to 45 million use some type of Spanish. Nowhere else does it face more substantial hurdles in its daily interaction than it does with English, resulting in an assortment of communicating strategies as well as—and prominently—Spanglish, a mestizo form that, although controversial, is increasingly recognized as a legitimate way of communication. Spanglish is the elephant in the room, meaning that it does not cease to exist because one works hard at ignoring it.

Iberian and American Spanish exist in a state of inequality. For starters, the tension between standard Iberian Spanish and the American varieties considered pose a number of important questions, not only what is “normal” in a particular type of Spanish and what is deviant but to what extent “normality” should be defined in Spain. How does the language negotiate the balance between a standardized form in one corner of the Hispanophone world vis-à-vis the other? What number of words is it acceptable to loan from other languages in one country, and how many should that national Spanish loan to others? Does the Spanish of Mexico affect the Spanish of, say, Argentina or Venezuela or Costa Rica?

Arguably the most sensitive thermometers of a language are writers. Writers experiment with words, turning them upside down and inside out. Their relationship with the lexicographic archives is ambivalent at heart: they discard what they deem unnecessary and invent what they feel is needed. Among the most fertile of writers—such as Alejo Carpentier, Julio Cortázar, Gabriel García Márquez, and Elena Poniatowska—reshape syntax in their own image. Of course, there are a number of other significant keepers of a language, such as the makers of dictionaries and the members of academies, and maybe a cohort in the media (bloggers, commentators, and newspaper columnists). But overall they tend to be more solemn, less playful. Writers are clarions. They get dirty with words, so to speak. Writers not only embrace linguistic change; they even take a lead in bringing about that change. On the opposite end are academies, largely noneducational institutions in charge of safeguarding a language, a task that takes all sorts of strategies to accomplish, which function differently depending on the culture in which they are located. Academies tend to be less permissive, more conservative. Their responsibility is to maintain the status quo; to that end, they become self-proclaimed fortresses against change. Language on the street often moves at a rhythm different from that of the academy.

In the case of Spanish, speakers in the Hispanophone world nurture a love/hate relationship with the Real Academia Española, the Royal Spanish Academy, originally founded in 1713. In part this is because of the anarchic emotions ingrained in the DNA of the culture, but also because of the aloofness and datedness the institution maintains, at least on its facade. Apparently, none of the academies in other imperial languages—such as French, Italian, and Portuguese—projects such snootiness, such pomposity as the one based in Madrid does. (English doesn’t have the equivalent of a royal academy, although at different times in its history there have been attempts to establish one, either in London or in Washington, DC, or New York.) The embarrassing institutional motto, “*limpia, fija y da esplendor*,” is frequently derided as paternalistic, not to say colonizing. (For decades, if not centuries, there have been fruitless petitions to the RAE to change it.) Almost every Spanish-speaking country has its Academia Correspondiente

(altogether, there are twenty-two), which, at least according to lore, are extremities of the Spanish matrix endowed to arbitrate what is proper in their respective habitats yet, when it comes to the nitty-gritty, have a subaltern position vis-à-vis Madrid. At any rate, the RAE decides what words go in the official *Diccionario de la Lengua Española*, a tool fitting the language to the Iberian taste. Variants emerging in the Americas are said to take years to reach the academy and only a few are deemed acceptable for inclusion in the lexicon. This creates a centralized structure that is at once stifling and unidirectional. Change happens all the time in Spanish; it is just that officialdom isn't prone to accepting it.

Among the assortment of books under review, the one in which the love affair with Spanish is most creative is Daniel Balderston's lavishly illustrated edition of *How Borges Wrote*. (Curiously, the title is in past tense, although dead writers exist in an eternal present.) Heavily illustrated, the volume is made of photographic and textual reproductions of a large number of Borges's manuscripts. Balderston, who teaches at the University of Pittsburgh and has devoted his whole career to the Argentine author of *El Aleph*, studies, with meticulous care, the artistic development of a writer who, with little doubt, is among the best of the twentieth century. It is possible to count on one hand the writers in Spanish who, aside from being extraordinarily eloquent in their oeuvre, have a deep knowledge of, and influence on, the ins and outs of the language. Even among them, Borges is on top. A polyglot, he wrote in Spanish, English, and French and knew, among other tongues, German, Latin, and Hebrew. Of him one might say what is often ascribed to Flaubert: he was about *le mot juste*. There is a mathematical precision in his best work—say, the poem “Spinoza,” the story “Tlön Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,” and the essay “The Argentine Writer and Tradition” (which began as a lecture in Buenos Aires and was first published in 1951)—that gives the impression of complete control over language. But there is something more: Borges was attuned to the undulations of Argentine Spanish in a unique way. His early oeuvre, especially “Man in a Street Corner,” display an interest in Argentine slang and even in Lunfardo. This is because Borges was attracted to the language of *orilleros* and other urban social types, just as he was attracted to the world of the gauchos from the Pampas. Among his innumerable contributions to gaucho literature, for instance, was the distinction between what was gaucho and *gauchesco*, the latter an artistic recreation of gaucho life not written by those who experienced it. In other words, Borges was drawn to degrees of experiential knowledge and the way an individual or work of art represented, genuinely and otherwise, a particular archetype of Argentina's identity.

How Borges Wrote is about how Borges became an Argentine writer and, along the way, how he transformed himself into the most universal of American writers in Spanish. The book benefits from a couple of crucial factors. One is the accumulated research done by dozens of scholars over the last half a century or so on the author's evolution, his aspirations, and his pantheon of myths. The details of these affinities are quite granular. I myself recently published *Borges, the Jew*, a short book/long disquisition on Borges's interest in Jewish themes.¹ In it I go so far as to describe him as a Jewish author, so nuanced was his knowledge of symbols and motifs from the Kabbalah, the Talmud, and modern Jewish literature, including Franz Kafka, Martin Buber, and Sh. Y. Agnon. The other factor is the surfacing of Borges's manuscripts, frequently coming from suspicious collectors and misguided dealers. The abundance of such items makes it possible to compare versions. This allows for a refreshing take on the oeuvre: to what extent did Borges edit (that is, “correct”) as he shaped several versions of the same text? Did he alter material even as he was reading proofs? Are all the changes visible in the manuscripts coming from his own hands?

The result is a window into the Argentine writer's inner and outer drive. In analyzing various versions, Balderston allows the reader to see the superciliousness with which Borges approached writing. Like nineteenth-century French poet and essayist Paul Valéry, Borges believed that a work of literature is never really finished; it is only abandoned. What comes across is a supreme devotion—one might even talk of a religious fervor—toward Spanish as an inexhaustible verbal reservoir and Borges as its supreme keeper. Without being too rigid, he looks for the syntactically correct sentence. But often he does something else. Since he learned to read in English (in a famous anecdote included in “An Autobiographical Essay,” published, in coauthorship with Norman Thomas Di Giovanni, in the *New Yorker* in

1970, Borges said he first read *Don Quixote of La Mancha* in Shakespeare's tongue; when he later encountered the Spanish original, he thought it was a poor translation), it is possible to detect an English-language grammatical base in his structure. So much so that a number of translators of his work—myself included—have said that bringing it from Spanish into English is less about structure and more about everything else. The fact that Borges polished his works with such intensity creates a feast for language lovers. It serves as a reminder that the health of a language lies in the infinite possibilities it allows.

Another way of attesting how a language functions is by looking at its dictionaries. Unfortunately, the dominant dictionaries of the Hispanic world—where lexicography is recognizably several steps behind that of other ecosystems—reflect this pseudo-federalist approach. A recent edition of the *Diccionario Panhispánico de Dudas (DPD)* is a perfect example. Reviewing a dictionary, needless to say, is a daunting task. The key markers aren't only if it is complete but how it defines the very concept of completeness, if it is clearly and accessibly designed, if it addresses a tangible overall need, if it contains typos or mistakes, and if it proposes definitions that are either misconstrued or contain implied biases. Finding mistakes in dictionaries, it should be added, is occasionally the sport of writers like Guillermo Cabrera Infante, García Márquez, and Rosario Ferré. For instance, García Márquez, in a column in the Spanish newspaper *El País* (May 19, 1982), pointed to the word *perro*, which used to be defined as “Mamífero doméstico de la familia de los cánidos, de tamaño, forma y pelajes muy diversos, según las razas, pero siempre con la cola de menor longitud que las patas posteriores, una de las cuales levanta el macho para orinar.” The author of *Cien años de soledad* was a fan of María Moliner, but this didn't stop him, in the same article, from criticizing her definition of *día*: “Espacio de tiempo que tarda el Sol en dar una vuelta completa alrededor de la Tierra.” The mistake, it appears, was rooted in the *Diccionario de la Lengua Española*, which defined *day* as “Tiempo que el Sol emplea en dar, aparentemente, una vuelta a la Tierra.” As a discipline, lexicography constantly borders on plagiarism.²

Since its first printed edition in 2005, the mission of the *DPD* has been to resolve “las dudas lingüísticas más habituales (ortográficas, léxicas y gramaticales) que plantea el uso del español.” The 2015 updates those definitions and expands the lexicon's database. How does one accomplish such a task in such a vast, heterogeneous milieu? Is *vosotros* better than *vos*? Is *con tal que* right and *con tal de que* wrong? Is *bicho* a bug or a sexual organ? In principle, the lexicon isn't only orthodox but Iberocentric; it settles questions according to the mode used in Spain, in spite of the fact that only one out of every nine users of the language lives in the Iberian Peninsula. And while it purports not to impose but to persuade, its 888 pages, in this age in which the legacy of the colonial enterprise is thoroughly being questioned, do come across as paternalistic.

It is useful to distinguish between two types of dictionaries: descriptive and prescriptive. English-language lexicography endorses the former; that is, the purpose of the *Oxford English Dictionary* or *Merriam-Webster* is to describe how the language is used at a specific time. For better or worse, English is a language “of the people, by the people, and for the people,” a line, by the way, first used by John Wycliffe in 1384 in the prologue to his translation of the Bible. In the Hispanic world, in contrast, there is a preponderance of prescriptive lexicons, that is, manuals that purport to tell people how to use the language properly. The very idea of a *diccionario de dudas* already unmasks the objective behind it: the dictionary doesn't collect words for users to ponder at will; instead, it resolves doubts, that it, is legislates what is right and what isn't.

The general state of lexicography in Spanish, in my view, is rather sleepy. It doesn't have the sort of grip that builds on critical analysis. The *DPD* prolongs the approach established by the *Diccionario de americanismos* (2010), spearhead by Humberto López Morales, who for years coordinated the Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española in the Hispanic world. While recognizing plurality, it quiets diversity. It reduces the number of loan words, especially from English, to a minimum. It is no surprise that noninstitutional lexicons like *María Moliner* and *Clave*³ feel spongier, more accepting, in the spirit of the polemical *Webster's Third*.⁴ They aren't forced to fit any political agenda like those of the Royal Spanish Academy. The *DPD* places emphasis on the term “pan-Hispanic,” which, ironically, it doesn't

define. Still, in attempting to look at normative language across the entire Hispanic world, it relates “norma” to the “standard form,” by which it means “norma culta.” Except that, in establishing that norm, it is aspirational rather than scientific. In the front matter, this is how it explains its purpose:

El español no es idéntico en todos los lugares en que se habla. En cada país, e incluso en cada zona geográfica y culturalmente delimitada dentro de cada país, las preferencias lingüísticas de sus habitantes son distintas, en algún aspecto, de las preferencias de los hablantes de otras zonas y países. Además, las divergencias en el uso no se deben únicamente a razones geográficas. También dependen en gran medida del modo de expresión (oral o escrito), de la situación comunicativa (formal o informal) y del nivel sociocultural de los hablantes.

Por su carácter de lengua supranacional, hablada en más de veinte países, el español constituye, en realidad, un conjunto de normas diversas, que comparten, no obstante, una amplia base común: la que se manifiesta en la expresión culta de nivel formal, extraordinariamente homogénea en todo el ámbito hispánico, con variaciones mínimas entre las diferentes zonas, casi siempre de tipo fónico y léxico. Es por ello la expresión culta formal la que constituye el español estándar: la lengua que todos empleamos, o aspiramos a emplear, cuando sentimos la necesidad de expresarnos con corrección; la lengua que se enseña en las escuelas; la que, con mayor o menor acierto, utilizamos al hablar en público o emplean los medios de comunicación; la lengua de los ensayos y de los libros científicos y técnicos. Es, en definitiva, la que configura la norma, el código compartido que hace posible que hispanohablantes de muy distintas procedencias se entiendan sin dificultad y se reconozcan miembros de una misma comunidad lingüística.

Expressed differently, the *DPD* establishes what is correct and what isn't according to an educated criterion that is established by a community of Iberian linguistic legislators who, while paying attention to multiple variants, reach their final decision in Europe. Centralism supersedes demographic representation.

Periodically, a history of the Spanish language is published to assess the historical development of the language over the centuries. Here, again, the quality of explorations is an expression of the type of thinking on language that goes on in the culture at large. The most distinguished figures in the field, including Ramón Menéndez Pidal, Amado Alonso, and Rafael Lapesa (with rare exceptions, such as María Rosa Lida de Malkiel, this is mostly a men's club), tend toward static, revisionist accounts that analyze the development of Spanish in a suffocating fashion. They come from a Germanic philological tradition that focuses on morpho-syntactical patterns rather than on large cultural waves. The result are historiographies that tend to be triumphalist in their vision, of the type that argues that Spanish is an astonishing language because it has survived more than a million years. In my view, less methodical but more compelling is a book like *The Story of Spanish* (2013) by the Canadian couple Jean-Benoît Nadeau and Julie Barlow. While chatty and lighthearted, it is far more enlightening, in part because the authors provide a larger comparative context against which to understand the development of the Spanish language. (They have also written *The Story of French* [2008].)⁵

At the time of his death in 1968, Menéndez Pidal left unfinished a history of the Spanish language, two volumes of which were published posthumously. In spite of his narrow focus, it would have been enormously useful to see the project in toto. Useful books by John M. Lipski,⁶ Ralph Penny,⁷ and David A. Pharies,⁸ among others, have followed the historical arch of the language. Francisco Moreno Fernández, who teaches at the Universidad de Alcalá, is a member of the evangelical Cervantes Institute, and recently published a rather unsatisfying *Diccionario de anglicismos del español estadounidense* (2018), has embarked in such a quest in *La maravillosa historia del español*. It is a bizarre, disjointed, and mechanical examination that shows little by way of insight.

Moreno Fernández's approach is rather conventional. He divided his narrative into three major parts, each subdivided into six chapters. The first section, “De los orígenes a las navegaciones,” reaches the age of Columbus. “Del imperio a las revoluciones,” the second section, looks at the falling Spanish Empire and its colonies, exploring the Enlightenment and its approach to science, religion, and language. And the third and last section, “De las

independencias al siglo XXI,” is a sweeping account of the age of independence and the challenges Spanish faces in modernity, in particular on social media.

As in other ambitious undertakings of this type, Moreno Fernández must go fast in order to cover as much terrain as possible. The problem is that his style is stilted (he writes in a *castizo* voice, an affected Castilian trait that feels outdated) and his insights are uninteresting. For instance, the part on the colonization of the Americas is delivered without a hint of regret for what was lost in the Iberian imperial quest. Andrés Bello, arguably the most influential thinker on language and a Renaissance man in his own right, gets a summery profile. Borges barely gets a mention. Regrettably, essential scholars Amado Alonso, Miguel Antonio Caro Tobar, Rufino José Cuervo Urisarri, Rubén Darío, Américo Castro, Pedro Henríquez Ureña, and Alfonso Reyes just don’t exist. It should be said that the vast majority of histories of the Spanish language that are available are the product of Iberian authors. This inevitably situates them in a mind-set that looks at Spanish as a centripetal exercise. Moreno Fernández doesn’t appear to be aware of his own viewpoint. A counterpoint to his stand is Antonio Alatorre’s *Los 1001 años de la lengua española* (1989).⁹ Written in Mexico, it looks at Spanish reverentially while also recognizing its oppressive, undignified nature as it reached beyond its immediate confines in the Iberian Peninsula. This attitude—the perspective of the coerced—is palpable in every sentence.

Another vantage point from which to appreciate how a language relates to the world is translation. It is the mechanism whereby what occurs outside one’s language is verbally reconstructed.

Without translation, we would exist in total isolation. But translation also poses challenges when it comes to understanding one’s own habitat and that of others. While the number of books translated into Spanish in the nineteenth century was far lower than the equivalent in German, French, English, or Italian, a vigorous effort to bring other literatures to the heart of Hispanic culture has greatly expanded the reservoir of possibilities. Still, a number of important issues have emerged. Since the fact that many of the translations are made—paid and published—in Spain, and given that the syntax is often Iberian, does this endeavor amount to a perpetuation of the colonial relationship between Spain and the Americas? Is this another way to make Iberian Spanish the default normative variety? Obviously, the outpouring of translations from Spain to the rest of the Hispanophone world is a legacy of the economic dependency of past centuries. Shouldn’t there be active ways to address it?

There is also the issue of loyalties. In an epoch in which popular culture, traveling fast through broadcast and social media, allows English to remain a global conqueror while also opening doors to other tongues, purity is actually impossible to imagine in concrete terms; so is the penchant for verbal contamination. Vicente L. Rafael’s *Motherless Tongues: The Insurgency of Language amid Wars of Translation* is, among other things, an exploration of identity in the Philippines, an invaluable case study when it comes to understanding the adventures of Spanish since the Spanish-American War of 1898. A professor of history at the University of Washington, Rafael focuses on the clash between Spanish and English and on what he calls “the vexed relationship between language and history” (1).¹⁰ In the early pages, Rafael offers an insightful autobiographical meditation on his own journey. Born in the mid-fifties, he talks about his various languages in private school, how English ruled and Spanish was taught badly so that students wouldn’t learn it properly, as well as other tongues that connected him with several segments of Manila. On page 5, he offers a portrait of how Spanish lost its dominance in the Philippines and even English stopped being enforced by outside powers (nearly half a century of US colonial rule came to an end in 1946), giving place to a Babel-like plurality of options:

Such is a condensed inventory of my linguistic legacy: the privilege of American English punctured and punctuated by a variety of vernaculars: Tagalog, Ilonggo, Kapampangan, bits and pieces of Hokkien, Hakka, Spanish, and Latin. The garrulous and swiftly changing idioms of creole Tanglish, gay-speak, private school talk, and Marxist-Maoist jargon woven into the black vernacular and bohemian lexicon of American pop culture of the 1960s—all of which were

pronounced with different regional accents—further added to this dizzying density. Hence, whenever I am asked what my native language is, I always hesitate to respond. I cannot point to a single one without feeling that I might be betraying the others.

Is the eclipse of Spanish, as Rafael describes it, a concession of misbegotten imperial dreams? In what sense is the experience in the Philippines the opposite of what took place in Spain's former colonies in the Caribbean Basin, such as Cuba and Puerto Rico? Does the eclipse of Spanish fully explain why the Philippines are frequently excluded from general accounts of Latin America?

In a volume in which I found much to admire, perhaps Rafael's most inspiring sections deal with war: translation in war and translation as war, as well as the battle for the soul of the Philippines from the perspective of the receding Spanish Empire, which lost the 1898 war, and the arrival of English as a language of instruction and also of submission soon after, and, in the middle of this, the role of Tagalog as a conduit of insurgency. Rafael's disquisitions are fascinating, in part because in the spectrum of Hispanic civilization the Philippines remains a marginal, eclipsed space. There is an astute section on Renato Rosado ("Contracting Nostalgia") and another on Reynaldo Ileto ("Language, History, and Autobiography"). War, tacit or concrete, is, for Rafael, the natural state of the Philippines. And language is the field in which insurgency and consent are played out. He is a perspicacious observer of culture whose discernments constantly open up new vistas.

Rosina Lozano's *An American Language: The History of Spanish in the United States* has breadth and vision. Its focus isn't really the present, although the implications of its findings surely reach to our day. Lozano, who teaches at Princeton, focuses on approximately a century, from the end of the Mexican-American War of 1846–1848 to the end of the Second World War in 1945. She breaks this period in two, with the immediate aftermath of the Guerra del '98 as the parting of the water. It was at that time that Spain finally receded from the Caribbean Basin and the Philippines and the United States became the new ruling imperial power. The division is productive. The territories that are known now as the Southwest entered the US constellation after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed. The population in them, including Nevada, Utah, and New Mexico, diverse as it was, was suddenly asked to communicate in English, with Spanish becoming a subservient tongue. This linguistic imposition created an identity among Spanish speakers whose scars are felt to the present day. Likewise, the use non-Latinos made of Spanish in those lands underwent a series of dramatic transformations, syntactical as well as cultural. Then, in 1902, Puerto Rico officially entered the liminal condition it still finds itself in: neither a fully independent nation nor a full-fledged state of the union. This duality again played itself out at the level of language, in the island's labyrinthine negotiations between Spanish and English. Scores of Mexicans in the United States and Puerto Ricans in the mainland enlisted in the military in the forties, displaying their patriotism. The way Spanish was employed in their ranks, and the vitality it displayed on the home front in politics, education, media, and advertising are superb channels to understand the vicissitudes the language underwent in the early half of the twentieth century.

Lozano isn't a linguist; she isn't a philologist, either. Her academic field is history. This is palpable everywhere in her approach. *An American Language* (the title echoes H. L. Mencken's invaluable multivolume *The American Language*)¹¹ looks at empirical data coming from social fields rather than zooming in on grammar, syntax, and other verbal devices. Although Lozano is a savvier, far more accomplished interpreter of reality than Moreno Fernández, this absence produces a picture that isn't unlike Francisco Moreno Fernández's: a view of the ups and downs of people and artifacts but not enough analysis of the actual transformations, that is, how verbal conjugations, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and punctuation have changed over time. The reader finishes Lozano's book with a clear sense of how Spanish was besieged across those one hundred years, but the adventures of its grammar are barely mentioned.

Spanglish, in my opinion, was the real outcome of the debacle. The term wasn't used in full until the 1970s by Nuyoricans, whose pugilistic search for place in the East Coast connected them with the freedom fighters of the Civil

Rights ear. At first, the sense of a common hybrid language that took portions from both Spanish and English was split into subgroups: Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans in the mainland, and Cubans in Florida. However, by the 1990s there was a growing sense that these diverse national entities came together in a larger whole and that the mixed tongues they used had much in common. It was then that the word *Spanglish* gained currency. Is the use of Spanglish a sign that Spanish is in retreat? Does Spanglish represent a defeat for English-language instruction in schools? Is Spanglish evidence that Latinos aren't assimilating to the so-called melting pot (or, in the jargon of other sociologists, the mosaic) the way other immigrant groups have?¹² This is why, in spite of its rigid, scientific structure, *Educating across Borders: The Case of a Dual Language Program on the U.S.-Mexico Border*, by María Teresa de la Piedra, Blanca Araujo, and Alberto Esquinca, is important. The first and third authors teach at the University of Texas in El Paso and the second at New Mexico State University. Their book is an ethnography by three researchers of the lives of bilingual students on both sides of the border. This population is called "*transfronterizxs*." They not only cross the border regularly but they exist in a state of permanent language switch. The traditional view is that such back-and-forth ends up being detrimental to those who engage in it. Worse, there are preconceived assumptions that the people on the border suffer from an educational deficit and that such a deficit delays them in comparison with monolingual populations on either side of the divide. What de la Piedra, Araujo, and Esquinca find is altogether different.

Perhaps this is the appropriate place to offer a brief reflection along the lines of an op-ed I wrote in the *New York Times en Español* on the recent scholarly prevalence of using *x* in gender-based words.¹³ While the intention is honest and legitimate—Spanish, one of the Roman languages, is a child of Latin in its gender-defined formations—the effort is misguided. Unlike, say, Arabic, the equality between oral and written languages is one the prime reasons Spanish remains vital. The *x* is impossible to pronounce across all syntactic constructions; it also undermines the health of the language overall. The insistence with which the form is used in *Educating across Borders* makes a political statement that is less about scholarly rigor than it is about precision. Nevertheless, the volume offers a valuable contribution. "*Desde la frontera*," they write on page 164, "we are sickened about the damaging false rhetoric about the border as a lawless land and a war zone, and about border residents characterized as violent criminals." Although the group they studied included upper-middle-class as well as working-class people, the majority belonged to the latter. The authors insist that further explorations on a more heterogeneous sample would offer more detailed findings. Still, the findings point to a singular asset: speakers who code-switch, when encouraged to be translingual without being penalized, display confidence and admirable depths of knowledge. To put it bluntly, *mestizaje* of languages as well as cultures should be welcomed. After all, it is a statement of the way things are among large portions of the border population.

In truth, these are also characteristics of a large number of Latinos who don't live along the US-Mexico line. *Mestizaje*, indeed, is the key word here. It is what characterizes the entire minority, all 60 million or more who live in every corner of the country. The dual identity among a large number of them, feeling loyal to Spanish but welcoming English as the lingua franca, is evidence of a new civilization rising in front of our eyes. That ascent, categorically, is one of the most significant transformations of Hispanic civilization in the last hundred years, one that, as a result of political clout and financial prowess, will surely define the future for all of the Hispanophone world. How Spanish, as a language, at the very least acknowledges that change is an indicator of where Hispanic civilization, and its language along with it, are likely to go in the future. It is emblematic that there are few books of value in Spanish on how to write well. Likewise, learned yet accessible meditations on how the language has evolved are few and far between. English has no linguistic police, yet there is a plethora of forums on how the language functions, who uses what strategies, what the histories of a certain modality are, and so on. In contrast, in Spanish there is poverty in this regard. No doubt Spanglish represents the biggest challenge Spanish faces nowadays. Yet let us not forget that Spanish itself, since even before 1492, is constituted as a hodgepodge of elements in constant change. Latin is the original foundation, on top of which French, Arabic, English, German, and a plethora of other sources have left their mark. To survive, Spanish has needed to adapt to the circumstances, absorbing these ingredients in an ever-changing

movement that keeps it spinning all the time. In the Americas in particular, that spin is frantic. The way Spanish has resolved the tension between unity and diversity highlights its versatility. This is to say that change is the most constant aspect of language, as it is of nature as a whole. Will it be capable of retaining its center as it continues to evolve? Will Spanglish, rejected for what it represents, be an autonomous, self-sufficient spin-off, a language in its own right? And will that loss leave Spanish limping?

Notes

- ¹ Ilan Stavans, *Borges, the Jew* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016). [↑](#)
- ² In Thomas Pierce's *The New Discoverer Discover'd* (1659), he writes: "It is not certainly for nothing, that the word Plagiary should signifie (in Classick writers) a stealer of other folkes children, and of other folkes Wit; the fruit of the body, and of the brain." The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (2012), offering a historical definition, describes a plagiarist as "person who abducts the child or slave of another, kidnapper, seducer, also a literary thief." [↑](#)
- ³ María Moliner, *Diccionario del uso del español*, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (Madrid: RBA & Gredos, 2007); and *Clave: Diccionario del uso del español actual* (Madrid: Ediciones SM, 2006). [↑](#)
- ⁴ Published in 1961 by G. & C. Merriam & Co., *Webster's Third New International* (unabridged) was called the most progressive of English-language dictionaries. See David Skinner's "Ain't That the Truth: Webster's Third, the Most Controversial Dictionary in the English Language," *Humanities* 30, no. 4 (2009): <https://www.neh.gov/humanities/2009/julyaugust/feature/ain%E2%80%99t-the-truth>. [↑](#)
- ⁵ Jean-Benoît Nadeau and Julie Barlow, *The Story of French* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2008) and *The Story of Spanish* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2014). Nadeau and Barlow are idiosyncratic essayists. More than straight arguments, their books feel like accumulations of anecdotes. *The Story of Spanish* is made of disparate sections about topics like Alfonso X "El Sabio," the Real Academia Española, and the syncopated relationship between dialects and standardized languages. [↑](#)
- ⁶ John M. Lipski, *Latin American Spanish* (New York: Longman, 1994). [↑](#)
- ⁷ Ralph Penny, *A History of the Spanish Language*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003). The historical emphasis in this volume isn't on social changes but on how phonology, morpho-syntax, and semantics, among other dimensions, have evolved over time. In that sense, it isn't a history the Spanish language as much as a compendium of linguistic evolution. This makes for a dry, obtuse reading experience. Only chapter 6, "Past, Present, and Future," lives up to the volume's title. [↑](#)
- ⁸ David A. Pharies, *A Brief History of the Spanish Language*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). At 314 pages in a volume with a small trim size, this is a "brief" history. Unfortunately, the sections on American and US Spanish are minuscule. Divided into nine chapters, the book explores language change in sweeping ways, looking, among other things, into language families, bilingualism and diglossia, the Visigothic and Muslim invasions of the Iberian Peninsula, the so-called Reconquista, Latin syntax, Alphonsine orthography, the Jewish dialect known as Sephardi, and American Spanish. The book also includes excerpts from important texts, which are accompanied by questions designed for students to engage with the material. This pedagogical component feels like an afterthought, however. Pharies is also the editor-in-chief of the *University of Chicago Spanish-English Dictionary/Diccionario Universidad de Chicago Inglés-Español*, 6th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), which, at 626 pages, is also relatively concise. For a different historical and lexicographic approach than that of Nadeau and Barlow, Lipski, Penny, and Pharies, see my essay "Notes on Latino Philology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Latino Studies*, edited by Ilan Stavans (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 267–283. [↑](#)

⁹ Antonio Alatorre, *Los 1001 años de la lengua española*, 3rd ed. (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2002). Alatorre (1922–2010) is an insightful thinker awaiting recognition. Aside from his studies on language and literature, he translated, among others, Marcel Bataillon, Jacques Lacan, and Machado de Assis into Spanish, edited the complete works of Sor Juana Inés de La Cruz, and led El Colegio de México between 1953 and 1972. ↑

¹⁰ Rafael wrote the introduction to Nick Joaquin's *The Woman Who Had Two Navels and Tales of the Tropical Gothic* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2017), a classic of Filipino literature that is fascinating not only for its content but for the English in which it is written, showcasing the “doubleness” of his postcolonial worldview. That “doubleness” is at the heart of translation as an intellectual endeavor, especially when the source comes from the misnamed “Third World.” ↑

¹¹ H. L. Mencken, *The American Language: An Inquiry into the Development of English in the United States*, 2nd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1938; first published 1919). This is an extraordinary work through which it is possible to appreciate the immigrant waves defining American society through the prism of language. Not only is Mencken's erudition admirable, so is his witty, irreverent style. ↑

¹² I have debated these questions in “For the Love of Spanglish,” *New York Times*, July 20, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/20/opinion/puerto-rico-spanglish.html>, Among other examples, see my translation of *El Little Príncipe* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (Edition Tintenfass, 2016) and the essay “*El Little Príncipe*—Translating Saint-Exupéry's Classic into Spanglish,” *Words Without Borders* (January 25, 2017): <https://www.wordswithoutborders.org/dispatches/article/el-little-principe-translating-saint-exuperys-classic-into-spanglish>. ↑

¹³ “El significado del ‘latinx,’” *New York Times en Español*, November 14, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2017/11/14/el-significado-del-latinx/>. ↑

Author Information

Ilan Stavans is Lewis-Sebring Professor of Humanities and Latin American and Latino Culture at Amherst College. He is the author of, most recently, *The Seventh Heaven: Travels through Jewish Latin America* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019).

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DELIVERY OF HEALTH CARE EVALUATION STUDIES FINANCING, HEALTH HEALTH CARE REFORM HEALTH SYSTEM PLANS – organization and administration SPAIN. © World Health Organization 2018 (acting as the host organization for, and secretariat of, the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies). All rights reserved. SPAIN. Figure 4. Spanish people live longer, but not all years of life in old age are lived in good health. Life expectancy 65. Spain is receiving considerable funding to modernise its health system through the EU Structural and Investment Funds. During the 2014–2020 period, Spain will receive just over EUR 500 million to invest in its health system. Most of this funding is allocated to the development of eHealth (EUR 257 million), health infrastructure (EUR 177 million) and to improve access to health and social services (EUR 67 million) (European Commission, 2016). Translations in context of "American Health" in English-Spanish from Reverso Context: the pan american health organization, american public health association. Arabic German English Spanish French Hebrew Italian Japanese Dutch Polish Portuguese Romanian Russian Turkish Chinese. Spanish. Synonyms Arabic German English Spanish French Hebrew Italian Japanese Dutch Polish Portuguese Romanian Russian Turkish Chinese. These examples may contain rude words based on your search. These examples may contain colloquial words based on your search. Translation of "American Health" in Spanish. American Health Panamericana de la Salud. Panamericana de Salud. salud estadounidense. Other translations. Suggestions. Pets and Your Health / Healthy Bond for Life. Company Collaboration. Food System Strategy. *All health/medical information on this website has been reviewed and approved by the American Heart Association, based on scientific research and American Heart Association guidelines. Use this link for more information on our content editorial process. Contact Us.