

Journey With Language – Variations in Spanish (11)

Rio de la Plata Countries

●Destination - Rio de la Plata Countries

The La Plata River is very different from what we usually think of as a river. It is more than 200km wide at the estuary, but is only about 300km in length. Geographically, it is the estuaries (estuario) for three major rivers: the Paraguay River, the Parana River (Paraná) and the Uruguay River, and many other smaller rivers. There are flights connecting the two cities on each side of the river: Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina and Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay. We will be visiting these two cities and Asuncion (Asunción), the inland capital of Paraguay. These three countries are called “Rio de la Plata Countries” from their geographical and historical ties.

Argentine Spanish is most distinguished by its Italian-sounding intonation. The following is an explanation of the influence of Italian immigrants settling between the end of 19th century and the beginning of 20th century.



[Picture 1: Boca District in Buenos Aires]

(...) en el censo de 1887, Buenos Aires contaba con un 47,4% de nacidos en territorio argentino, un 32,1% de italianos, un 9,1% de españoles y un 4,6% de franceses, junto con un 6,9% de otros extranjeros. Pese a la complejidad que plantea interpretar lingüísticamente estas cifras, no cabe duda sobre la existencia de un marcado multilingüismo (...)

(...) according to the 1887 census, of all the population in Buenos Aires, 47.4% were born in Argentina, 32.1% were from Italy, 9.1% from Spain, 4.6% from France, and 6.9% from other countries. Although it is too complicated to give a linguistic explanation to these figures, it is unquestionable that there existed a prominent multilingual community (...)

(María B. Fontanella¹)

To our surprise, almost one third of the residents were immigrants from Italy. Certainly, there are many Spanish words with Italian origins in the region, such as: *chau* (= *adiós* “bye”), *pibe/piba* (= *niño/niña* “boy/girl”), and *fiaca* (= *pereza* “laziness”). It is most likely that the unique intonation can also be ascribed to the Italian influence.



¹ , "Historia del español de la Argentina", in C. Hernández Alonso (ed.) *Historia y presente del español de América*, Junta de Castilla y León, 1992.

【Picture 2: Mate】

The biggest news of the year 2000 in the study of linguistics in Uruguay is probably the completion of *Atlas Lingüístico Diatópico y Diastrático del Uruguay* (Geographic and Social Linguistic Atlas of Uruguay) co-edited by the Department of Human Studies and Education at University of the Republic in Uruguay (*Universidad de la República*) and Kiel University in Germany. This is epoch-making for it includes sociolinguistic variations unlike the previous editions of linguistic atlases.

When I attended a symposium for linguistic geography, which also served as an opportunity for announcement of the publication of the atlas, I learned that the study of linguistic contacts around the Uruguay-Brazil border was prevalent among researchers in the area. Many words with Portuguese origin such as *fechar* (= *cerrar* “close”), *janella* (= *ventana* “window”), and *brasileiro* (= *brasileño* “Brazilian”) are commonly used. John Lipsky from the United States explains: “*La mezcla léxica es omnipresente en fronterizo, debido, sobre todo, a la elevada cantidad de vocabulario cognado que comparten el español y el portugués.*”² (Lexical mixing is all-pervasive in *fronterizo*, especially in view of the high cognate vocabulary shared by Spanish and Portuguese.)³



² *El español de América*, 1996, p.377.

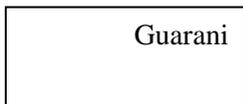
³ *Latin American Spanish*, 1994, p.344.

【Picture 3: Palacio de Gobierno, Paraguay】

Paraguay, as the nickname “heart of America” (*corazón de América*) suggests, lies in the middle of the immense continent of Latin America. In Asuncion, the capital where the Paraguay River runs like an artery, most people are fluent in both Spanish and Guarani (guaraní). The 1982 census of Paraguay shows that almost 50% of the population are bilingual in the two languages, 40% of the population speak Guarani only, and no more than 7% are monolingual in Spanish. This gives relevance to the fact that the tone of Guarani is added to Spanish spoken in Paraguay. One such example would be the Guarani suffix “-i” at the end of “*casa-i*” (small house), meaning small and trivial thing. “*Todo*” in Spanish indicates the completion of action in the way “*pa*” in Guarani does. E.g. *¿Floreció tu rosa?* (“Did your rose bloom?”), *No, se seca todo.* (= *No, se ha secado.* “No, it has withered.”) I learned many other characteristics in Paraguayan Spanish from Vitalina Páez and other professors at the Catholic University (Universidad Católica) in Asuncion. Paraguay is certainly a hearty country worthy of its nickname, “heart (corazón) of America”.

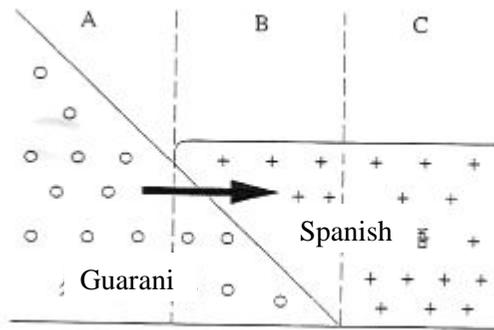
● **Pursuit of Language --Substratum, Super stratum and Abstratum**

Professor Adolfo Elizaincín at the University of the Republic in Uruguay is the chief editor of “Geographic and Social Linguistic Atlas of Uruguay”. In his other book, “Dialects in Contact: Spanish and Portuguese in Spain and America”⁴, he demonstrates three concepts describing the traits of adjacent languages.



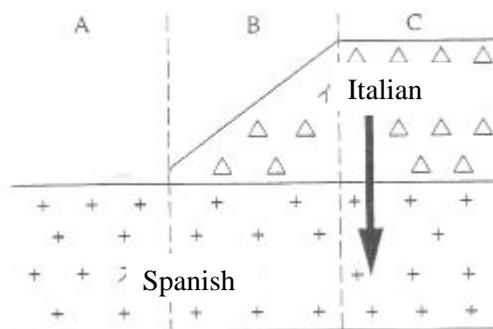
When the indigenous language has influence on the arriving language, the former language is called “substratum” (*substrato*). As shown in **【Graphic1】**, (shown with circles on the left) of Paraguay is a substratum of Spanish (shown with crosses on the right) in area B. Spanish is not used in area A, and there is no substratum in area C.

⁴ *Dialectos en Contacto. Español y Portugués en España y América*, 1992, Montevideo Arca, pp.45-47.



【Graphic1: Substratum】

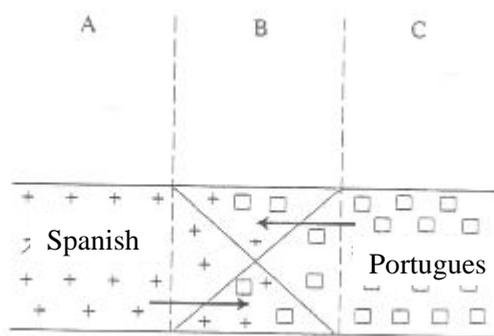
When Italian arrived in Argentina, it had a prevailing influence over existing Spanish. This is a case where the arriving language (Italian) serves as a “super stratum” (*superstrato*). As 【Graphic2】 suggests, the influence of Italian (shown with triangles) over Spanish (shown with crosses) is the greatest in area C, and weakens as you go from B to A. The borderline between the two languages can be impelled. Italian greeting “*chao*” seems to be used not only in Argentina and Uruguay, but permeate into the rest of the Spanish-speaking world in time.



【Graphic2: Super stratum】

As shown in 【Graphic3】, Portuguese (shown with squares) and Spanish (shown with crosses) stand abreast and influence each other at the border of Uruguay and Brazil. Portuguese is neither a substratum nor a super stratum in this case, but acts as an “ad stratum” (*adstrato*) to Spanish. For instance, influence of Portuguese can be recognized in unusual usage of *gustar*; e.g. *Gusto de Río de*

Janeiro. (=Me gusta Río de Janeiro .I like Rio de Janeiro.), and use of *hallar* for accidental meeting; e.g. **Cuando venía para acá, hallé a Juan.** (I bumped into Juan on the way.) This is a phenomenon found in area B near the border which has not reached A, the capital in the south.



【Graphic3: Ab stratum】

Professor Elizaincín further suggests that there are also other types of linguistic contacts.

Tan nítido como este esquema no lo es la realidad. Falta en esta visión, por ejemplo, el caso de que, como consecuencia del contacto, surjan lenguas del tipo pidgin, criollos, etc.

The reality is not as simple as shown in the diagram. For example, these concepts do not cover the cases of pidgin or Creole etc., which are also generated by the contacts of different languages.

●Language Variations - “Popcorn”

The linguistic situation differs in each one of the three Rio de la Plata countries. Like *mate*, there are in fact a number of customs and vocabulary that are common in all three countries, and there are others that are unique in each country. Here we will discuss the word “popcorn” as an example. **Pororó (Prr)** in map) is a common word in all three countries. There are also others such as **pochoclo (Pch)** in Argentina and **pop (Pop)** in Uruguay. In the entire Spanish-speaking world,

palomitas (**Plm**) is predominant. Others are: *cotufas* (**Ctf**) in (Canary Islands in) Spain and Venezuela, *rositas de maíz* (**Rsit**) in Cuba, *poporopo* (**Ppr**) in Guatemala, *crispetas* (**Ctp**) in Colombia, *canguil* (**Cgl**) in Ecuador, *pipocas* (**Ppc**) in Bolivia, and *cabritas* (**Cbt**) in Chile. A few other unique ones are: *roscas* (**Rsc**) of Las Palmas in the Canary Islands in Spain, and *rosetas* (**Rset**) in Mexico. *Po(p)corn* (**Pco**) of the English origin is also found in Puerto Rico, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru etc.



【Map: “Popcorn”】

***Assignment -11a**

Read Lipski (1996) and list the similarities and differences of phonological, grammatical and lexical characteristics of the Spanish in Argentina (pp.183-203), Paraguay (pp.324-335) and Uruguay (pp.369-377).

***Assignment -11b**

Read the following references, and explain the situation of immigrants and their social and cultural influence in 19th and 20th centuries Latin America.

* Reference:

Early, Edwin et al. *The History Atlas of South America*. New York: Macmillan, 1998.

Onuki, Yoshio et al. Translation: "Immigrants." In Translation: *Dictionary of Latin America*. Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1999.

***Assignment -11c**

Describe regional variations of the word "popcorn" in Spanish.

* Reference: Varilex: <http://gamp.c.u-tokyo.ac.jp/~ueda/varilex/>