

Journey With Language – Variations in Spanish (6) Mexico

●Destination --Mexico

Zacatecas (Zacatecas) is in the central highlands of the Sierra Madre (*Sierra Madre*), a half an hour flight northwest from Mexico City (*Ciudad de México*) There used to be great gold and silver mines operating there, and the beautiful buildings of the city are well preserved from the colonial period. In 1997, The First International Conference of the Spanish Language (*Primer Congreso Internacional de la Lengua Española*) was held in this city. Commemorating the 500th year after Columbus arrived in America, it was proposed by the former president Ernesto Zedillo in 1992, and was hosted by the Ministry of Public Education and the Cervantes Institute of Spain. Renowned guests were invited, including President Zedillo, King Juan Carlos, and two of the winners of the Nobel Prize in Literature, Gabriel García Márquez and Camilo José Cela, making the conference extraordinary.



【Picture 1: View of Mexico City from Latin America Tower】



【Picture 2: Reforma Avenue in Mexico City】

Following the ceremony on the first day, we had a presentation and a panel discussion on sociolinguistic issues (*cuestiones sociolingüísticas*) regarding the Spanish language used in newspapers, radio, TV and movies. It was rather a “TV conference” than an academic meeting, and presentations and question-and-answer session were held in front of several TV cameras with bright lights. At the press conference, the presenters took various questions on the subject. It is a humble area of study, and I had never experienced such a great deal of media coverage concerning the study of the Spanish language.

As I left the convention hall, I was surrounded by local elementary school students with questions they said were homework assignments from school. One of them asked me: “There was an article in newspaper saying the Spanish we speak in Zacatecas is a corrupt Spanish. Is that true?”. So I told them it was not true, and that it is just people speak differently in different regions. The mass media seems to have a strong influence regardless of where you are.

●Pursuit of Language - Archaism and Neologism

Spanish dialectician Zamora Vicente wrote: "El léxico americano es abundante en arcaísmos" (There are many archaisms in American Spanish) in his book (*Dialectología Española*, 1967). For example, in the chart below, the words on the left column are no longer used in Spain but are still used in America, and the vocabulary has shifted to the ones in the middle in Spain.

America	Spanish	English
<i>amarrar</i>	atar	tie
<i>balde</i>	cubo	bucket
<i>botar</i>	tírar	throw
<i>durazno</i>	melocotón	peach
<i>enojarse</i>	enfadarse	angry
<i>foráneo</i>	extranjero	foreign
<i>frijol</i>	judía	bean
<i>lindo</i>	bonito, excelente	pretty, excellent
<i>valija</i>	maleta	suitcase

Following is an explanation of the word “botar” in the etymological dictionary written by J. Corominas and J.A. Pascual.¹

Significó antiguamente 'lanzar, arrojar, tirar', con aplicación a cualquier objeto (*botar una piedra, botar el pañuelo*), extensión semántica hoy conservada casi en toda América y en las hablas leonesas y gallegoportuguesas, así como en el vasco. En el resto de España el vocablo alcanzó menor vitalidad y pronto tendió a tomar el matiz de 'arrojar con violencia'

It used to mean “throw/pitch”, and was used with any object (throw a stone, throw a handkerchief). This meaning remained in almost all parts of America, Leonese (in Spain), Galician-Portuguese, and in Basque. In the rest of Spain, the word changed its nuance to “throw violently”.

¹ *Diccionario crítico etimológico castellano e hispánico*, Gredos, 1980.

However, it is not fair to label these words as archaisms (*arcaísmos*) since they are still alive in many parts of the world. It is perhaps more important to recognize the fact that neologisms (*neologismos*) were born in Spain. The following is a citation from the thesis written by Juan Lope Blanch, a leading Spanish linguist in Mexico.²

Podría calificarse de arcaizante o conservadora una norma particular que haya mantenido en uso un elevado número de formas olvidadas por todas o por la gran mayoría de las hablas hispánicas, en especial si entre éstas se hallan las de mayor prestigio.

When a standard language of a particular region has many forms that are no longer common in the mainstream spoken Spanish (especially if it includes the ones with more prestige), it is appropriate to consider the language as archaic or conservative.

Moreover, he points out that it is more complicated than to simply describe the language as “Spanish of America”, and the study of Spanish language has not reached the level of understanding the whole picture.

² "El supuesto arcaísmo del español americano", *Estudios sobre el español de México*, UNAM, México.



【Picture 3: In Zacatecas】



【Picture 4: Native Dress in Zacatecas】

●Language Variations - “Suitcase”

We will look at the word “suitcase” today. Although the previous chart may give you the impression that only *valija* (V in map) is used in America, and *maleta* (M) in Spain, the truth is more complicated. *Meleta* and *valija* are both used in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Costalica, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina. In Spain, *maleta* is used solely, and never *valija*. In Mexico, *veliz* (Vz) and *petaca* (P) are used as well.



【Map: “Suitcase”】

***Assignment -6a**

Read Lipski (1996: 294-299), and discuss the relationship between Mexican history and Spanish language.

***Assignment -6b**

Lipski (1996: 304) describes “no más (=sólo)” and “ya mero (=casi)” as the morphological characteristics of Mexican Spanish. Use various references to study the historical/geographical distribution.

- *No más quería platicar contigo.*
- *Ya mero me caigo.*

Corpus del Español: <http://www.corpusdelespanol.org/>, Google etc.

***Assignment -6c**

Describe regional variations of the word “suitcase” in Spanish.

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