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AUTHOR Giron, Robert LeRoy
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ABSTRACT

A study was undertaken to gather attitudes of Spanish-speakers toward specific types of Chicano Spanish dialect lexical items. Reactions were randomly taken from 11 Latin American students who attended Southern Illinois University at Carbondale during the 1975 spring semester; 20 Mexican residents of Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, who attended English as a second language classes at El Paso Community College during the 1977 spring semester; and 20 Chicanos of El Paso who attended El Paso Community College during the 1977 spring semester. The respondents were asked to react to lexical items in a bilingual list of sentences and to provide a synonym to the lexical item. They were then asked questions designed to evaluate their linguistics sensitivity or awareness. They were also given a personal data sheet. The data collected demonstrated that both Mexicans and Chicanos recognize a Chicano Spanish dialect. The responses clearly show Chicano Spanish to be stigmatized by Mexicans, whereas Latin Americans are more receptive to this dialect. Chicanos appear willing to accept and use the dialect although some socio-linguistic stigma is associated with it. (Author/AMH)

CHICANO SPANISH: CROSS HISPANIC LANGUAGE ATTITUDES TOWARD SPECIFIC LEXICAL ITEMS*

Robert LeRoy Giron

Austin Community College

INTRODUCTION: The history of the Spanish that is spoken in the greater Southwestern United States dates back to the mid 1500s to the Spanish who settled the area. Linguistic isolation from grammatical changes which occurred in Spain and other parts of the Spanish-speaking world helped preserve several archaic forms which are rarely found in standard contemporary Spanish but that are still used today in the greater part of the Southwest. Over the centuries the Spanish of the Southwestern United States has developed into a distinctive dialect which is often referred to as Chicano Spanish. Chicano Spanish is spoken in a dynamic linguistic environment, and an important aspect of its maintenance is language attitudes. The purpose of the investigation was to gather attitudes of Spanish-speakers from South America, Mexican nationals from Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, and Chicanos (used as a term for Americans of Mexican extraction and void of any philosophical, political, or socio-economical alliance) from El Paso, Texas, toward specific types of Chicano Spanish dialect lexical items.

*This is a revised version of a paper read at the National Association for Chicano Studies' Tenth Annual Conference, Arizona State University, March 1982. The author would like to thank Glenn Gilbert, Diana Natalicio, and Ana Huerta-Macías for their helpful comments.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE: An interesting study on one of the lexical characteristics of the Spanish of the Southwestern United States was conducted in 1965 when Coltharp presented a study entitled The Tongue of the Tirilones: A Linguistic Study of a Criminal Argot. The study described the Spanish spoken in the South El Paso, Texas, area, a poor district, where the economically deprived youth developed an argot which helped establish the group's solidarity. Through the years the argot of the Tirilones (a term for hoodlum) has diffused itself among many socio-economic classes. Ramírez, in 1973, in an article entitled "Lexical Usage of and Attitudes Toward Southwest Spanish in the Ysleta, Texas, Area" showed that especially young males use Tirilon terms to express "affective semantic shadings". Thus through the years many of the Tirilon items have become incorporated into the Spanish of the Southwestern United States which is otherwise known as Chicano Spanish. In 1976, Valdés Fallis demonstrated in her article "Code-Switching in Bilingual Chicano Poetry" that present day Chicano Spanish is utilized in Chicano poetry for metaphorical effects when desired. Lawton's studies of 1974 and 1975 on Chicano Spanish concentrate on considering it a "bona fide" vernacular in that it is used to stress: 1) ethnicity, 2) social solidarity, 3) Americanism, and 4) non-identification with Anglo aspirations.

BACKGROUND TO STUDY: The study consisted in interviewing three different Hispanic groups and gathering their reactions and attitudes toward Chicano Spanish. The three Hispanic groups were chosen in the following fashion and had the following characteristics:

1) The South American subjects consisted of eleven students randomly selected from the total number of Latin American countries represented at Southern Illinois University during the 1975 spring semester. Of the eleven respondents, seven were

from Venezuela, two from Argentina, and one each from Colombia and Mexico. The Mexican was classified as South American since he came from the interior of Mexico as opposed to the Ciudad Juárez-El Paso border area. There were nine males and two females in the group. The ages ranged from eighteen to thirty-two years. Respondents' educational levels included three with M.A. degrees, five with B.A. degrees and three were enrolled at the Center for English as a Second Language at Southern Illinois University. Each respondent was asked to indicate his/her ethnic background. Four indicated that they were mestizo; three stated that they were Spanish; one stated that she was Semitic; and two did not respond. Each respondent was also asked to rate his/her socio-economic status by placing him/herself on a scale of both political affiliation and wealth. The responses revealed that one belonged to the ruling-upper class, one to the non-ruling-wealthy class, seven to the non-ruling-middle class, one to the non-ruling-lower-middle class, and one to the non-ruling-lower class.

The respondents were also asked to indicate the extent of their travel, their first language, study of English, and knowledge of other languages. Of the group, four indicated that they had traveled outside of the Southern Illinois area, and all stated they had traveled in Spanish-speaking countries. Spanish was the first language for all respondents. Eight respondents studied English in South America, two studied and learned English in the United States and one began English studies in Mexico. The length of English study ranged from four months to twenty-six years. The following languages were known to the respondents: eleven, Spanish; eight, English; three, limited English; one, French; one, Yiddish, Hebrew, German; and one, Latin.

2) The twenty Mexicans, residents of Ciudad Juarez, Mexico,

were randomly selected from English as a Second Language classes at El Paso Community College during the 1977 spring semester. Of the group, eight were male and twelve, female.. Their ages ranged from eighteen to thirty-one years. The sample showed that nine had completed preparatoria (pre-college study); nine had completed high school; and two had not completed high school. In terms of ethnic background, eight indicated that they were Mexican; seven stated that they were Spanish; four did not respond; and one considered himself Spanish-French. Socio-economically, fourteen described themselves as belonging to the non-ruling-middle class and six to the non-ruling-upper class.

Of the sample, seventeen had traveled outside the El Paso, Texas, area. All indicated that their first language was Spanish. Twelve studied English in Mexico; three studied English only in the United States; three had not studied English; and two studied English both in Mexico and the United States. The lenght of English language study ranged from three months to five years. The respondents were familiar with these languages: seventeen, limited English; three, Spanish only.

3) The Chicanos (in this study all Americans of Mexican extraction are considered Chicano) consisted of twenty students randomly selected from the 1977 spring semester at El Paso Community College. All were born in the United States. There were thirteen males and seven females. The ages ranged from eighteen to forty-six years. Of the sample, nineteen had completed high school and only one had not. Nine stated that they were Mexican; one indicated that he was mestizo; one indicated that she was Black; only one indicated that he was Chicano; and three did not respond. Of the group, fifteen described themselves as belonging to the non-ruling-middle class, two to the non-ruling-lower class.

Of the Chicano group, fifteen had traveled outside of the

El Paso, Texas, area and twelve had traveled in Spanish-speaking countries. English was the first language for fourteen of the respondents; five indicated that Spanish was their first language; and one stated that he was bilingual. The sample showed that nineteen had studied English in the United States while one studied English in Mexico. The length of English language study ranged from four to forty years. The languages with which the respondents were familiar included fifteen bilingual (English-Spanish), five English only, two French, and one Portuguese.

PROCEDURE: The respondents were given a bilingual list of the lexical items each of which was used in a sentence that attempted to make the meaning of the lexical item as clear as possible. The following are examples:

1. El cloche del Wolkswagen está roto.
   The Wolkswagen's clutch is broken.
2. Los invitó pero nadien vino.
   He invited them, but no one came.
3. ¿A qué horas quieres ir a lonchar? Tengo hambre.
   What time do you want to go eat lunch? I am hungry.
4. Estoy sin un daime.
   I do not have a single dime.
5. Se fué de volada. Ni dijo adiós.
   He left flying. He did not even say goodbye.
6. El chota me dió una multa.
   The cop gave me a fine.

Each respondent was also given a response sheet on which he/she was to record reactions to each of the forty-five items. The respondents were then instructed in Spanish to read the sentence containing the lexical item and to write their reactions to that item on the answer sheet. To demonstrate knowledge of the item as used in the stimulus sentence, respondents were

asked to provide a synonym; only these responses were recorded and analyzed. Each respondent was asked if he/she would or would not use the lexical item with the meaning as used in the stimulus sentence.

The respondents were then asked questions designed to evaluate their linguistics sensitivity or awareness. Respondents were asked to state whether they thought educated, uneducated, or all speakers use the item. It should be pointed out that these are totally subjective reactions since many Southwest speakers who are educated use some of these items. Respondents were also asked to state whether they thought the young, the old, males, females, or all speakers use the item. All items were classified by the respondents according to the following linguistic derivations: Spanish, Castilian, archaism, Chicano, English, Anglicism, neologism, barbaric or Italian. Respondents were allowed to check more than one linguistic derivation as an item could, for example, be both barbaric and Spanish/Castilian. Although all forty-four items were checked in seventeen dictionaries and studies, four selective references were used to compare the acceptability of the item by the respondents to the entry of the lexical item in a dictionary or study, since each item was listed in a dictionary or study at least once. Because of the various dialects of Spanish spoken by the respondents, they were asked to indicate in what country or countries they thought and item was used. Special attention was given to the South Americans to see whether they were aware that many Chicanos use some of these items. Afterwards respondents were given a person data sheet. Figure 1 reflects the informants' educational patterns while Figure 2 shows how the informants rated their socio-economic status.

Figure 1
Comparison of Educational Patterns
Among the Hispanic Groups

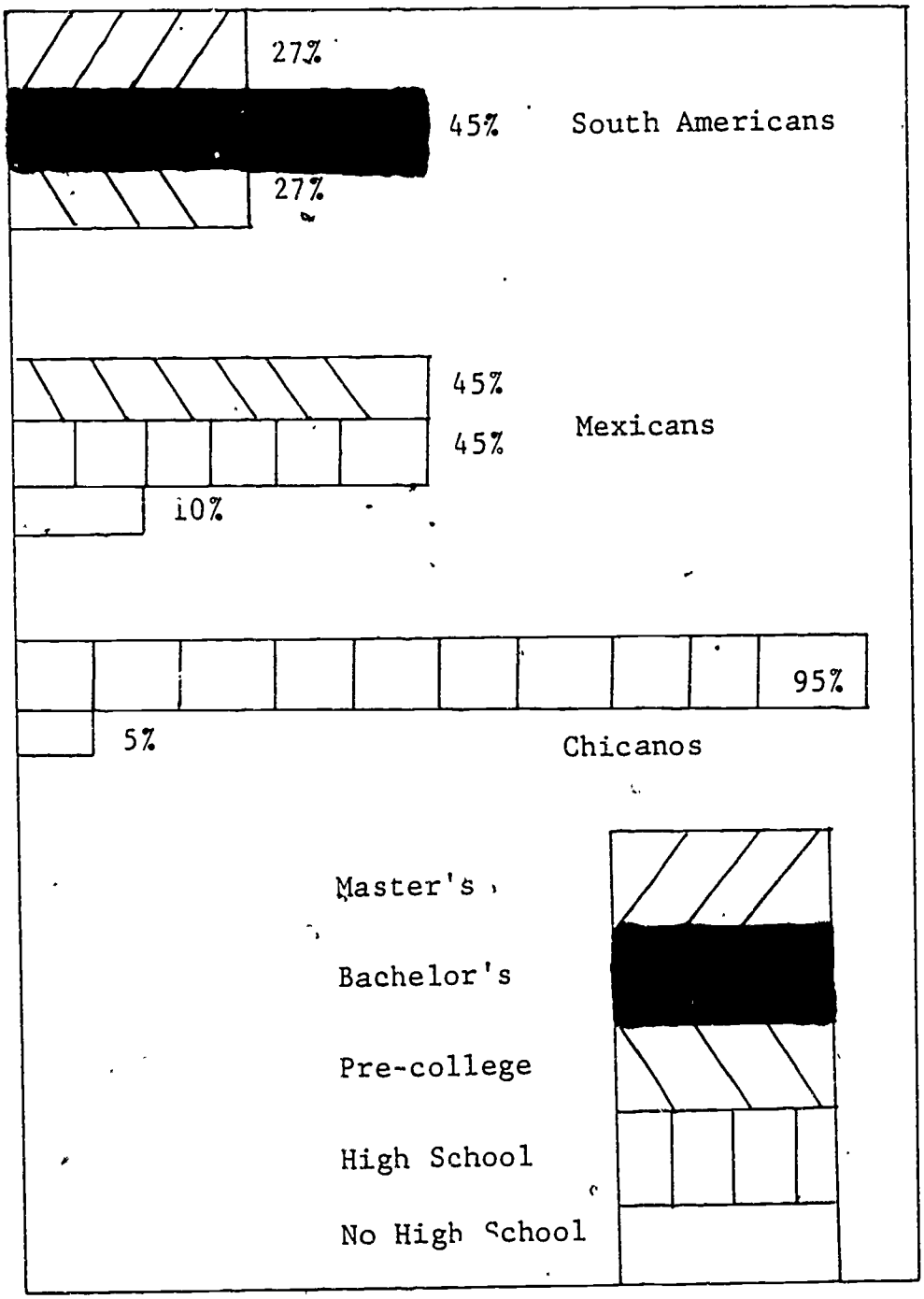


Figure 2

Cross Section of Socio-economic Status

Scale	South Americans	Mexicans	Chicanos
ruling-upper class	9%		
non-ruling-wealthy class	9%		
non-ruling-upper class		30%	
non-ruling-middle class	64%	70%	75%
non-ruling-lower-middle class	9%		10%
non-ruling-lower class	9%		15%

In analyzing the data, if any respondent associated an item with the vernacular of uneducated speakers, the item was considered stigmatized. If the majority of the respondents also stated that they do not and would not use the item as given, it was considered unacceptable. However, if an item was associated with the vernacular of uneducated speakers and if the majority stated that they would use the item, then the item was considered to be stigmatized but in a state of flux. That is to say, according to the respondents' reactions, such an item is not totally acceptable.

RESULTS OF THE DATA: Of the lexical items, only padrastro and carro were known by all and acceptable to 50% or more of the respondents in each group. Cloche was known by 50% of all group respondents and acceptable. Chota was known by 50% of all group

respondents and unacceptable.

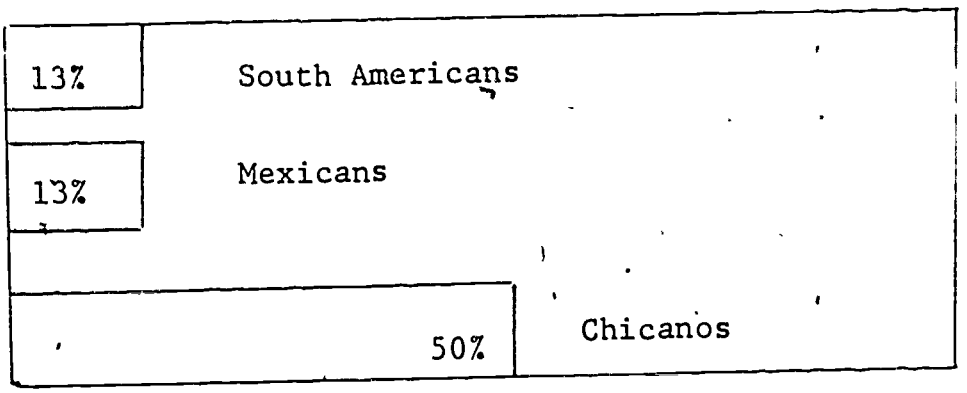
When comparing the responses of the South Americans group to the Chicano group, more than 50% of all respondents agreed that padrastro, carro, beisbol, flamencas, Chicano and okey are acceptable. The majority of both groups found reales, bechito, aldrede, de volada, parquear, cloche, suiche, Crismes, daime, closet, and background (in a Spanish sentence) acceptable. Vide, asina, chota, chavo, lonchar, empréstame, truje, chante, pistiar, and chanclear were unacceptable to the majority of both groups.

Comparatively, more than 50% of all respondents of both the Mexican and Chicano groups agreed that padrastro, carro, Chicano, okey, beisbol and daime are acceptable. Flamencas, aldrede, cloche, reales, suiche, de volada, and dioquis are acceptable to the majority of both groups. Both groups found truje, empréstame, chota, chante, chavo, pinta, chanclear, lonchar, vide, asina, and pistiar unacceptable.

In analyzing the linguistic derivation acceptance correlation, one found that the Chicanos considered the archaic terms more acceptable than the South Americans and Mexicans who considered them unacceptable with the exception of aldrede (see Figure 3). Of the nine contemporary terms both the Chicanos

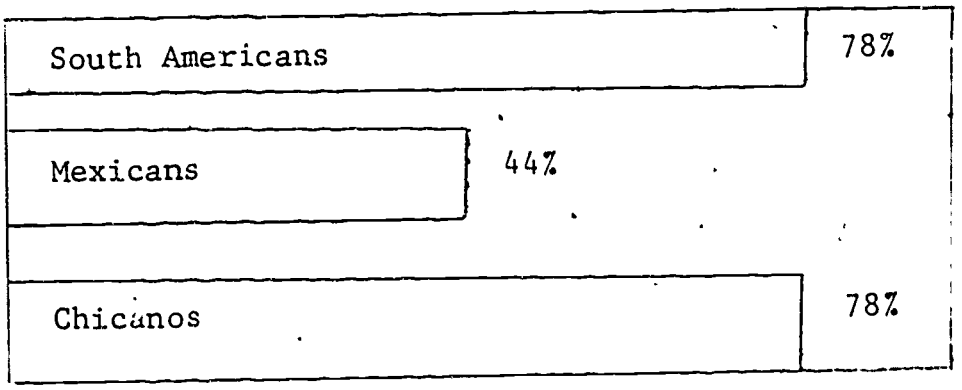
Figure 3

Acceptance of Archaic Items



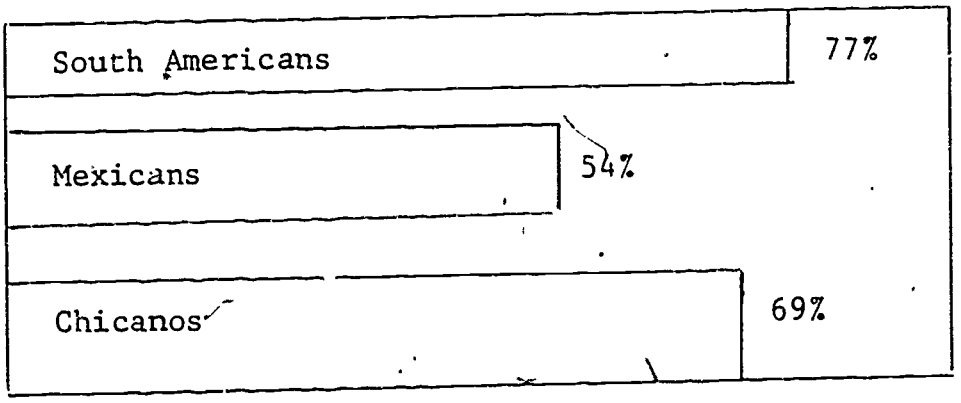
and South Americans accepted an equal majority of the terms while the Mexicans accepted only four (see Figure 4). With

Figure 4
Acceptance of Comptemporary Items



regard to the thirteen Anglicisms, the South Americans accepted the majority while the Chicanos and Mexicans accepted a declining number respectively (see Figure 5). Concerning the twelve

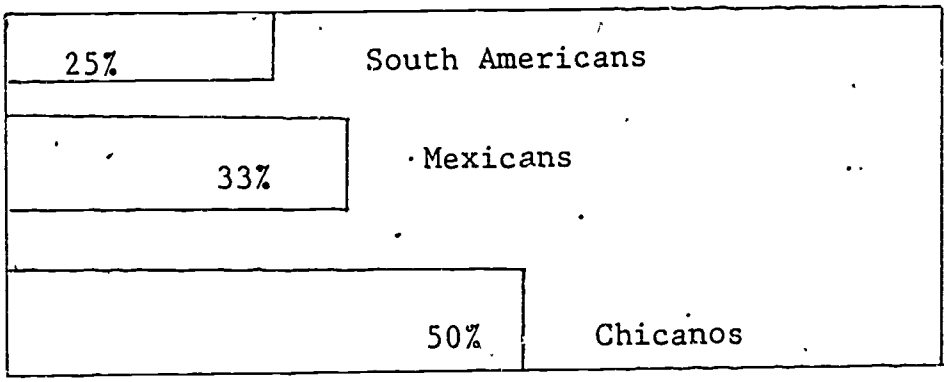
Figure 5
Acceptance of Anglicisms



Chicanismos, used to describe any item that is not archaic, standard contemporary Spanish, or an Anglicism, Chicanos accepted six while the Mexicans accepted four and the South Americans accepted three (see Figure 6). In the case of the use of background in a Spanish sentence, both the Chicanos and the South

Figure 6

Acceptance of Chicanismos



Americans found it acceptable while the Mexicans did not. Only the South Americans accepted the Italian word ciao. Although ciao is used in many Spanish-speaking countries, most people spell the word chau and perhaps the Italian spelling was unfamiliar to the Chicanos and Mexicans.

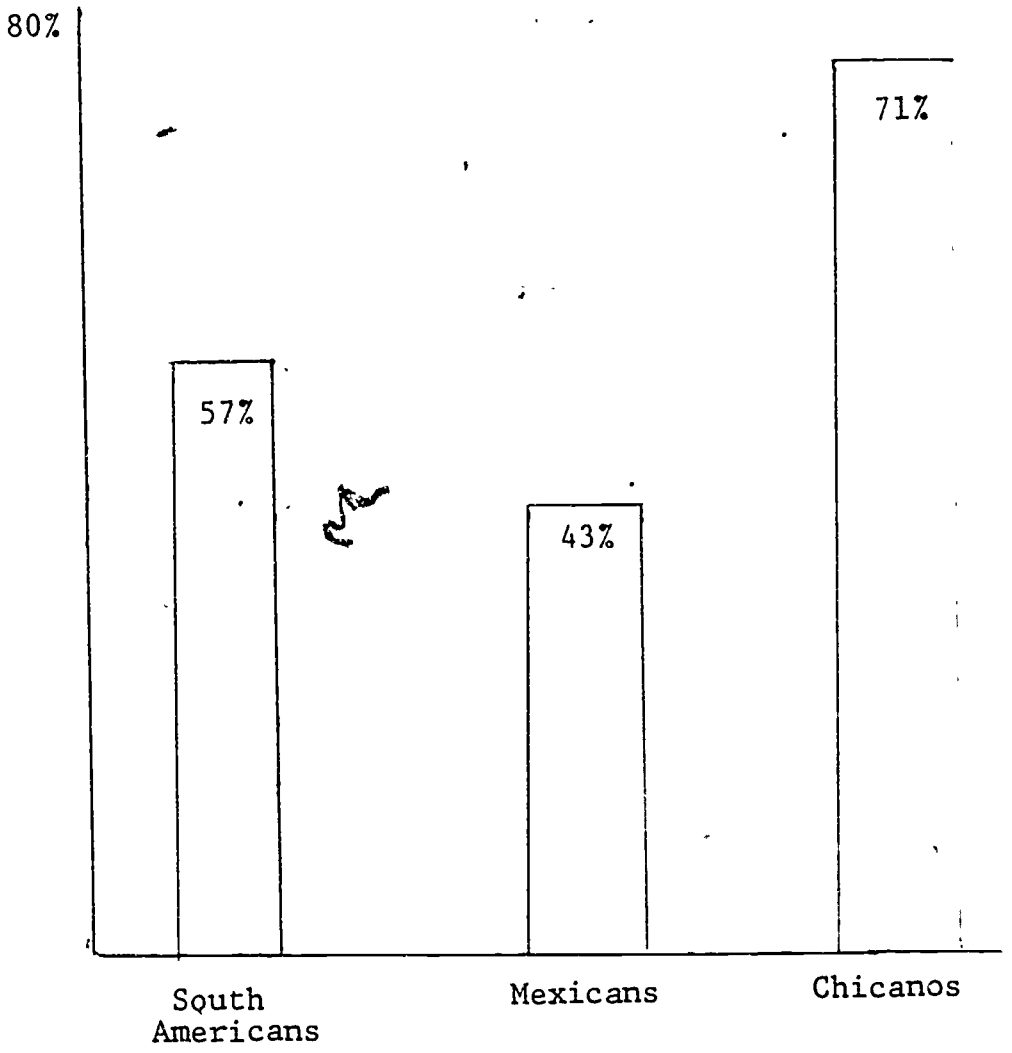
Of the seven items listed in Diccionario de la Lengua Española (1963), Langernsheidt Standard Dictionary of English and Spanish Languages (1966), and Simon and Schuster's International Dictionary (1973), with the same form and meaning as indicated in this study, the Chicanos accepted five, the South Americans accepted four, and the Mexicans accepted three (see Figure 7). Concerning the linguistic influence of sixteen Tirilon argot items, Chicanos accepted a majority while the South Americans and Mexicans accepted a declining number respectively (see Figure 8).

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS: It is amazing that all groups seemed totally unaware of archaic forms in Spanish. The respondents instead classified the archaic items as barbaric and associated them with the vernacular of the uneducated. The majority of the respondents also associated the lexical items

Figure 7

Acceptance of Seven Lexical Items Listed

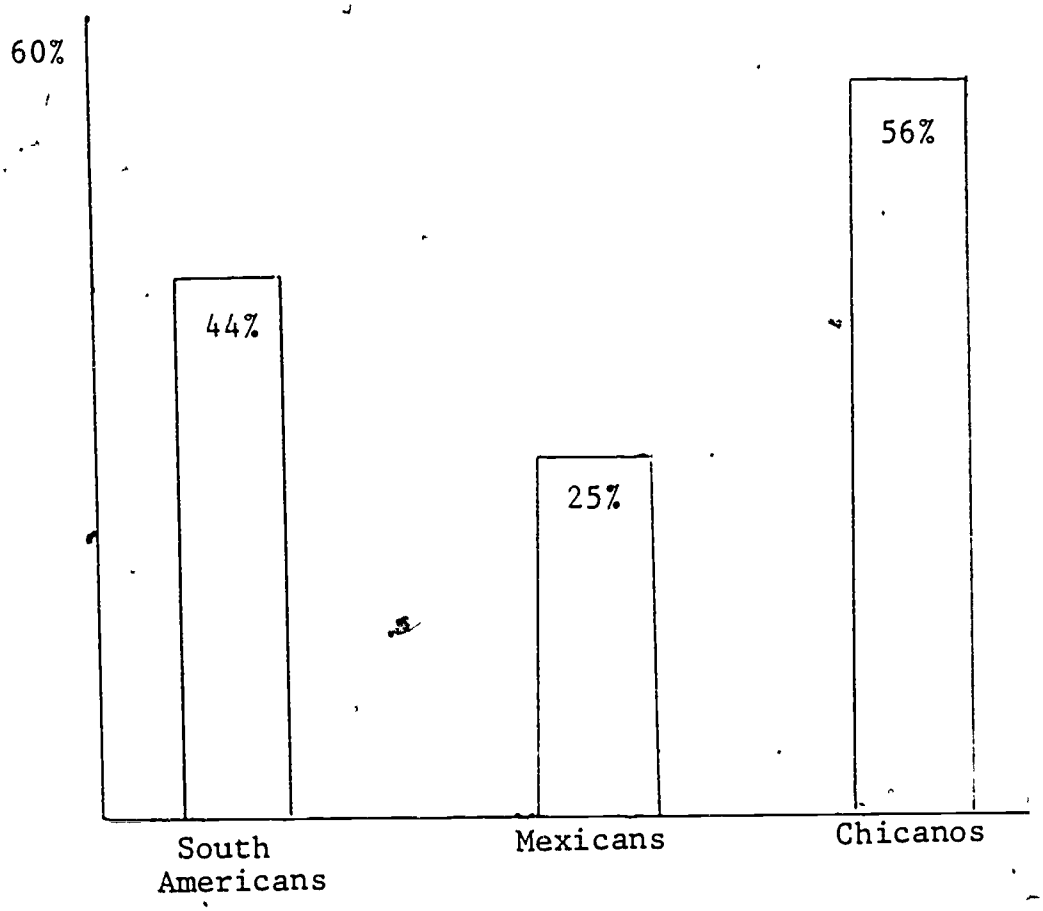
In Selected Dictionaries



as being most often used in their own Spanish-speaking areas. The item reales (used for money by some speakers in New Mexico, Colorado, Nebraska, and Texas to mean a quarter) was considered to be used by older speakers; bechito was associated with the speech of women but was also stigmatized for the use of the

Figure 8

Acceptance of Tirilon Items



phoneme /č/ for /s/. Coño, not used in the Chicano Spanish dialect, is stigmatized and in a state of flux as it was associated with the vernacular of uneducated young males. Although at least 50% of the South Americans accepted coño, Chicanos and Mexicans find it unacceptable.

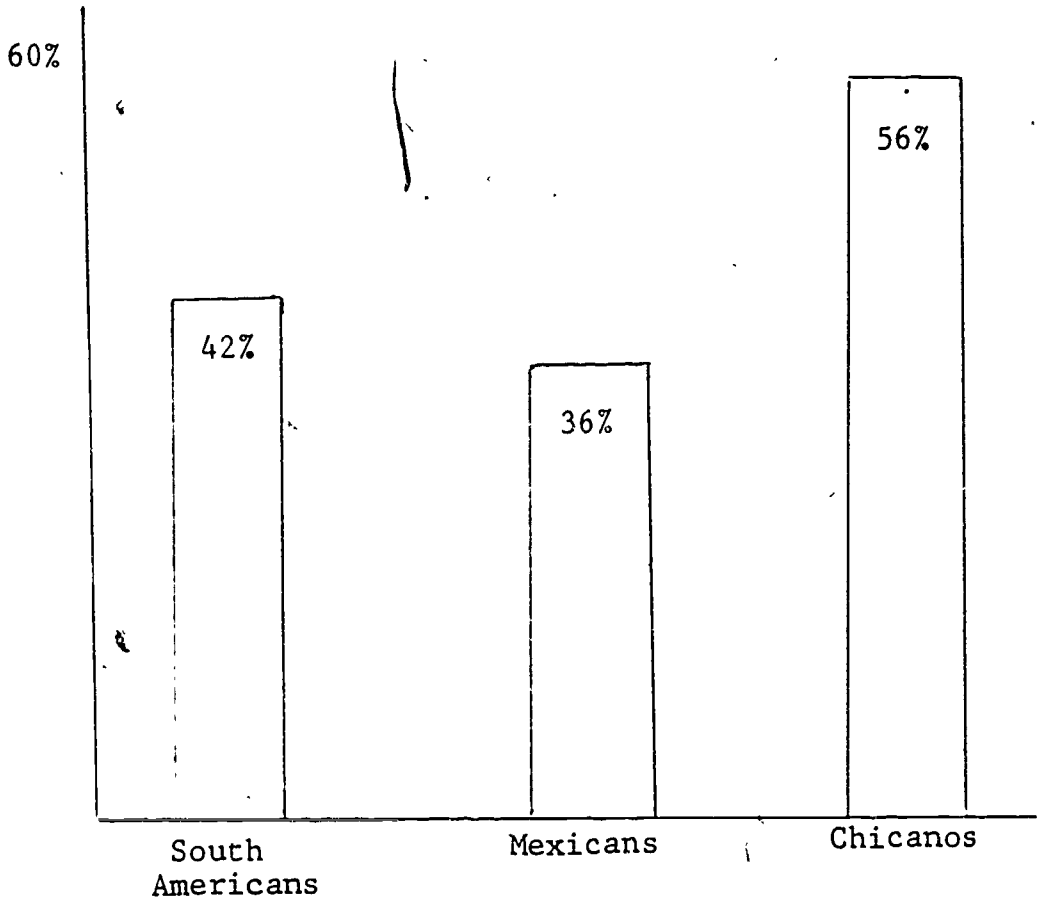
One of the interesting findings made apparent by this study is that both Chicanos and Mexicans labeled the Anglicisms as Chicano items; thus the validity of the Chicano Spanish dialect is increased in that both groups recognize certain elements of

the dialect. On the other hand, the lexical items classified as Chicanismos, which can be considered Mexicanismos or Caló (slang), were usually classified as being Chicano items by the Chicanos, neologisms by the South Americans but barbaric by the Mexicans. These items were usually associated with the vernacular of uneducated speakers and most often with young males. It is also interesting that the South Americans appeared unaware that the lexical items in the study are used in the Southwestern United States.

In responding to the Chicano Spanish dialect lexical items, it would appear logical that the majority of Chicanos would accept them, as illustrated by the data. The data herein support claims that the present day Chicano, from most socio-economic classes, is at least familiar with these lexical items and may even use them for metaphorical emphasis and/or social solidarity. Although many Chicano Spanish dialect lexical items are stigmatized, it is interesting to note that the South Americans are more receptive than are the Mexicans to the elements that make up certain aspects of the Chicano Spanish dialect; that is, archaisms, especially Anglicisms, and the Chicanismos. Of this total group of lexical items, the majority of South Americans accepted fourteen of thirty-three items or 42%; the Mexicans accepted twelve of the thirty-three items or 36% (see Figure 9). It should not be surprising that the majority of the Chicanos accepted nineteen of the thirty-three items or 56% (see Figure 9). Therefore, it is obvious that the Chicanos are aware of their dialect and appear willing to accept it although they demonstrate linguistic insecurity because of the socio-linguistic stigma associated with it. It is understandable that many Chicano Spanish dialect lexical items are often associated with the vernacular of young uneducated males. The Tirilon lexical items that have become incorporated into the Chicano Spanish dialect

Figure 9

Acceptance of Chicano Spanish Dialect Lexical Items



were first used by deprived males from South El Paso who often never finished their education.

The language orientation responses also show that South Americans and Chicanos are more receptive to Anglicisms than Mexicans. The political and social prestige of the United States and the English language influences this linguistic acceptance or rejection depending on the political climate of the times. Nonetheless, the Heinz Kloss theory of Abstand and Ausbau can

be recognized amongst the respondents. The Mexicans, in the study, who were from the border area feel the linguistic struggle Kloss described. As shown in the study, the Mexicans display clear signs of linguistic distance and appear to want to keep their Spanish dialect free of Anglicisms. In addition, because the Mexicans held middle class or higher economic status and were better educated, by Mexican standards, one must ask whether the Mexican reaction to Anglicisms was a rejection of Chicano or Pocho (a term for Chicanos used by Mexicans) linguistic characteristics. That is, perhaps Mexicans believe all Chicanos are of lower economic status and less educated. Mexicans, then, would not want to be associated with Chicano or Pocho speech patterns. On the other hand, Chicanos, who are American, have a desire to demonstrate this linguistically, especially when the semantic range of an English word is larger in scope than its Spanish equivalent. In like manner, many Chicanos who have not had formal education in the Spanish language resort to converting English words into Spanish phonological structure (e.g. suiche from switch instead of interruptor). In fact one observes linguistic autonomy amongst Chicanos not only in speech but in literary publications.

In analyzing the data, one must be kept aware of linguistic attitudes that can be correlated to a respondent's sex. Both the South Americans and Chicano groups were predominately male while the Mexican group was predominately female. These findings lend credibility to Labov's hypothesis that women are more critical and self-conscious about using "correct" or "grammatical" language than males. However, one needs to ask whether similar results would reoccur if factors such as education and socio-economic status were constant in groups with an equal number of males and females.

Another important finding is that which concerns the word Chicano. It is interesting that both the Chicanos and Mexicans in the study found the word Chicano acceptable, but it is rather amazing that of twenty Chicanos only one labeled himself "Chicano". One wonders whether the Chicanos in the study used South El Paso (a poor district) standards in rating their socio-economic status.

CONCLUSION: In conclusion, it is the masses that determine which linguistic variation will remain in use, but factors such as status, cultural or educational objectives have a tremendous influence as Solé's research demonstrates. With an increase in education, Chicanos will probably eliminate archaisms from the Chicano Spanish dialect. However, the Chicanismos and especially Anglicisms, which are present in Puerto Rican and Cuban-American Spanish, will probably increase in number and acceptance. As a follow-up to this study, one could conduct a similar study on a larger scale with the help of a computer. Variables such as sex, education, and socio-economic class should be kept constant. Perhaps in ten years from now one might be able to determine whether the Chicano Spanish dialect will increase in usage and social acceptance. It would be interesting to see whether Mexicans will become more linguistically receptive to the Chicano Spanish dialect as Chicanos acquire higher socio-economic status in the United States, and whether most Chicanos will retain or abandon this dialect with social mobility and/or linguistic isolation from the Spanish language.

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