

My first fieldwork project: HONDURAS

Having moved from Michigan State to the University of Houston in the summer of 1981, I was eager to begin fieldwork in Latin America, taking advantage of inexpensive flights from Houston on the many national airlines still operating at the time. Looking through Canfield's recently published book *Spanish pronunciation in the Americas* (1981), I saw that there was almost no information on Honduras, a country that Canfield had apparently never visited, and for which there was no reliable linguistic bibliography. In 1982 I took my first flight, on the Honduran airline SAHSA (Servicio Aéreo de Honduras, S. A., known to Gringos as "stay at home, stay alive"), landing in the scary Tegucigalpa Toncontín airport (which I later discovered was considered to be the world's second most dangerous airport, the first being in Nepal), situated in a bowl surrounded by mountains with barely enough room for a 737 to safely land after a complicated corkscrew maneuver.





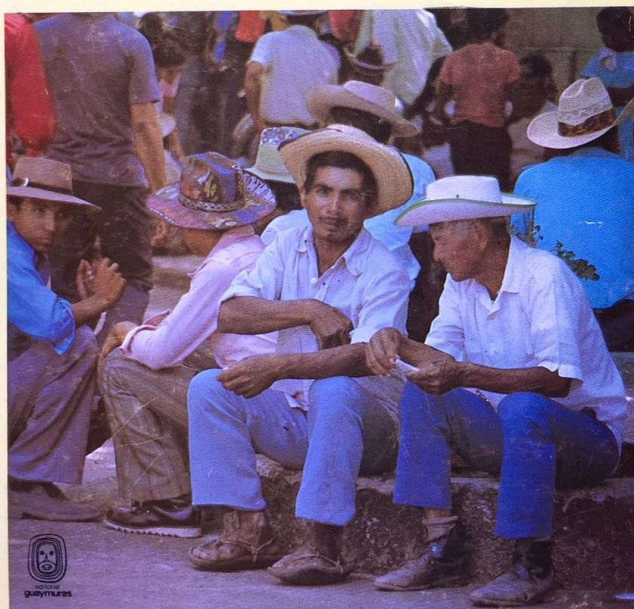
I spent more than a week wandering around Tegucigalpa and other Honduran cities and towns, making what recordings I could but with little planning. On a subsequent trip, after visiting some government offices I was given the contact of Atanasio Herranz, an expatriate Spaniard who taught linguistics at the national university. He was researching remnants of the Lenca language as well as local varieties of Spanish, and he generously shared his materials with me and gave me many contacts in Tegu and San Pedro Sula where I conducted many more interviews. During my research trips I was able to visit the spectacular Mayan remains at Copán, and the (2) graves of the “Filibustero” William Walker in Trujillo (then a sleepy village, until the U. S. built a military base some years later to aid the “Contra” rebels in Nicaragua.

During one trip I was invited to teach a seminar at the national university, and I left with Atanasio a manuscript on the unique realization of final /s/ in Honduran Spanish, which was subsequently included in an anthology edited by Atanasio.

El español hablado en Honduras

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Many years later, while attending a conference at a U. S. university (I seem to recall it being the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign), I was browsing the library collection and I came upon the bound volumes of the Boletín de la Academia Hondureña de la Lengua. Aimlessly thumbing through some pages I saw an article about Honduran /s/, and thinking that I had stumbled upon a previously unknown bibliographic item, I turned to the title page:

Reducción de la "s" en el Español de Honduras

JUAN M. LIPSKI

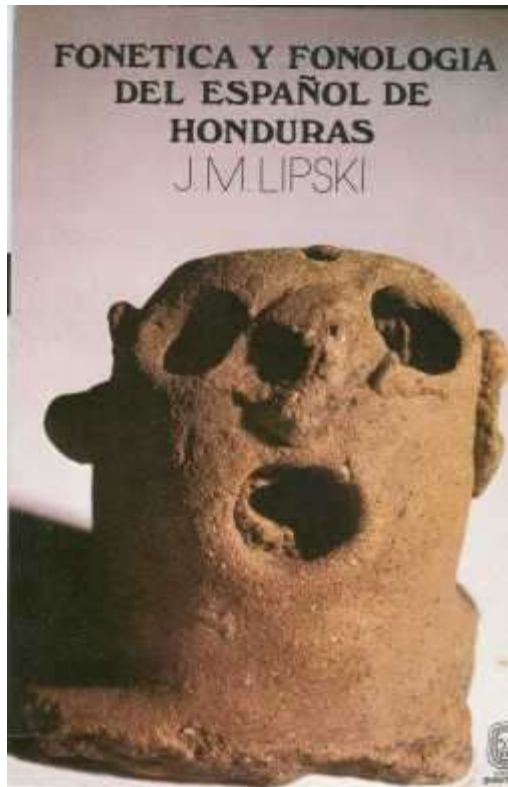
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A pesar de que las colonias centroamericanas figuraban entre las primeras en el Nuevo Mundo, la región centroamericana tradicionalmente ha recibido escasa atención en muchas dimensiones, y en particular en la dimensión lingüística puede afirmarse que la dialectología centroamericana todavía está en pañales en comparación con otras repúblicas de la América Latina. Esta tradición de abandono se debe a una variedad de factores de índole práctica, como el relativo aislamiento cultural, la falta de grandes centros de atracción cultural, la pobreza y la escasa representación de muchos países centroamericanos en el exterior, lo cual ha dado lugar a una ignorancia casi absoluta de las características lingüísticas del español centroamericano. Esta afirmación no quiere decir que no haya habido valiosos estudios dedicados a las variedades del castellano representadas por las repúblicas de Centroamérica, pues sí los hay, y entre los mejores de la tradición dialectológica, pero, por una u otra razón, la mayoría de los estudios sobresalientes pertenecen a décadas y aun a siglos pasados, ya que en la época contemporánea hay una notable escasez de profundas indagaciones lingüísticas sobre la región centroamericana. Es más, la mayoría de los estudios realizados sobre el español del istmo centroamericano han tomado como punto de partida la dimensión léxica, y los diccionarios, glosarios, listas y compilaciones de regionalismos existen en abundancia, aunque a veces presenten identificaciones regionales bastante controversiales. En la dimensión morfosintáctica, el mayor interés se ha concentrado en las características del voseo centroamericano, junto con una que otra observación sobre el uso de ciertos paradigmas verbales y demás cosas por el estilo. Al llegar al campo fonológico, la perspectiva

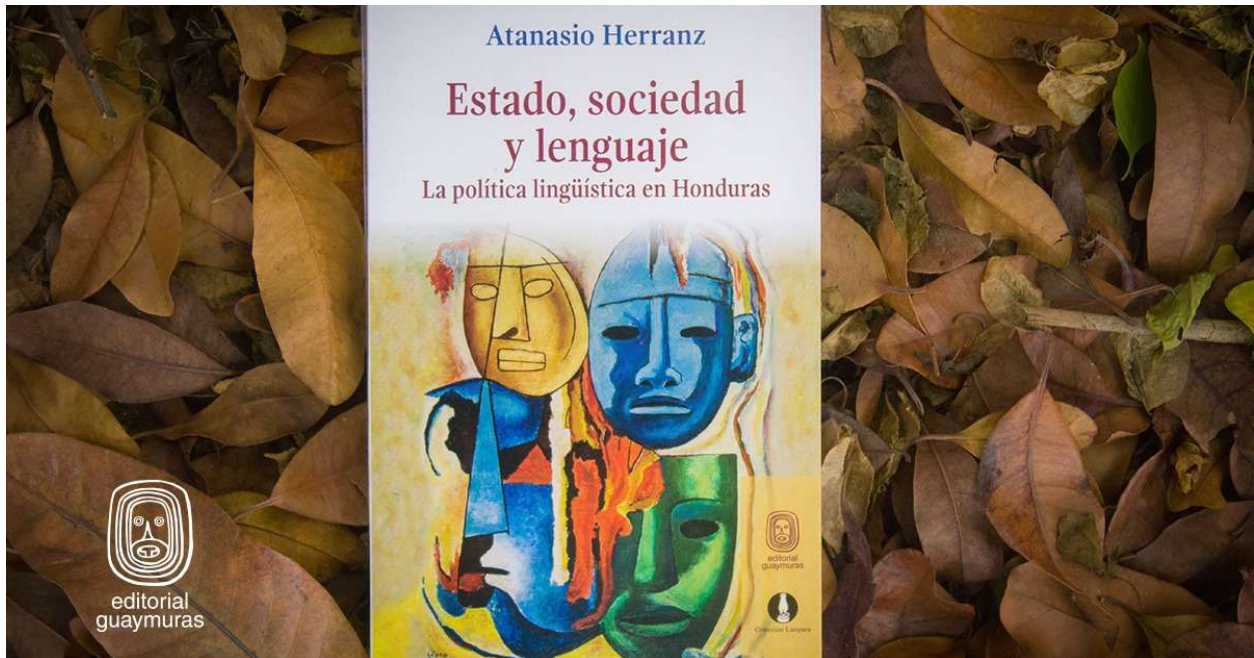
Someone had apparently passed my typescript on to the Academia, who unbeknownst to me, published it (with the name *Juan* as my Honduran friends called me).

But stranger things were to come. I had prepared a monograph on Honduran Spanish phonetics, and Atanasio took it to the small Guaymuras publisher in Tegucigalpa, which had published nearly all the books dealing with Honduran history and culture. I never met the folks, but according to Atanasio, the reception was favorable. Then I heard that the press had stopped, possibly permanently, and since by that time I was dealing with many other issues back in Houston, I gave it no more thought. After I arrived at the University of Florida in 1988, during a conversation with a colleague at a conference, he said that he had seen a book of mine, "something about" Central America. This was news to me since as far as I knew, I had not published any such thing, but prompted by the colleague I consulted the catalog of an international book dealer and found my book on Honduran Spanish listed. I sent them a check and received by return mail:



Imagine that! I then wrote to the (obviously not defunct) Guaymuras press, and received a profuse apology and a box of copies of the book.

In the intervening years, I have crossed paths with Atanasio on two occasions. The first, in Spain at a conference in Valladolid in 2001, and again at the meeting of the Asociación Centroamericana de Lingüística (ACALING) in El Salvador in 2017.



In 2023, Atanasio was honored during the (virtual) II Jornadas sobre el Español de Honduras; I was invited to give the inaugural lecture (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xRQcMViRAwM>), a fitting tribute to the man who had been so instrumental in launching my field research career.

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Departament Filologia Espanyola



II JORNADAS SOBRE
EL ESPAÑOL DE HONDURAS

en homenaje

a Atanasio Herranz y María Elba Nieto

Conferencistas **invitados**

- | | |
|--|--|
|  John M. Lipski |  Julio César Ventura |
|  Enrique Pato |  José Francisco Funes |
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|  Rocío Luque | |

20 abril al 11 mayo | 10:00
MODALIDAD **VIRTUAL** a. m.

¡Cheque, pues!
Cachuda Pichingo Lumbo Macaño
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