

New Immigrants in  
the United States  
Readings for Second  
Language Educators

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## **6 The linguistic situation of Central Americans**

*John M. Lipski*

### **Introduction: Central Americans in the United States**

Latin American immigration to the United States is certainly not a new phenomenon, but the geographical areas of Hispanoamerica that are represented by the major migratory trends have shifted over time, although always set against the constant background of immigration from Mexico. The major population shifts have come from Puerto Rico and Cuba, respectively, but in the 1980s and 1990s the immigration from Central America gave every indication of eventually attaining the same proportions as the Caribbean groups (Jamail & Stolp, 1985; Peñalosa, 1984; Wallace, 1989). Economic reasons were the original motivating factor, but political pressures in the convulsed Central American region played an ever more important role in stimulating the northward migration of economically stable family units, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s. Since Central America and the United States share no common border and since many families arrive by air or by sea, immigrants have a greater tendency to settle in geographically delimited population clusters, which then form centripetal nuclei attracting further immigration. Like their fellow Latin Americans, Central American immigrants commonly settle in cities with large Spanish-speaking populations; this follows both from the geographical location of such cities, which usually represent the southern border of the United States or a major airline terminus, and from the desire to live in a minimally foreign environment. Although the Central Americans who have moved to established colonies at first interact principally with their compatriots, before long the inevitable contact with other Latino Americans and American-born Latinos takes place, with the resulting transculturation and expansion of social horizons of all groups involved. Traditionally (i.e., before the political turmoil of the past three decades), the majority of Central Americans immigrating to the United States represented the professional classes, those with funds to travel and establish themselves in the United States. The lower middle classes have also come in large numbers, particularly to the major cities, whereas members of the lower working classes, particularly from rural regions of Central America, were not as frequently represented. As a result of the

economic status of the Central Americans living in the United States, contact with their home countries was frequent and all-pervasive, and Central Americans routinely sent their children to be educated in the United States, often to live with family members already there.

The large-scale political turmoil in Central America that dominated the 1980s and extended into the beginning of the 1990s brought new waves of immigration to the United States, not only from the privileged classes but also in increasing numbers from members of the lower middle and lower working classes, including the peasantry, who by whatever means escaped the violence, destruction, and instability of their homelands, and sought a haven in the United States. By the end of the 1980s, as many as one million Central Americans lived in the United States, the majority of them undocumented refugees living in difficult conditions. Today, immigration from Central America has slowed considerably, and Central Americans in the United States are caught up in a tangle of conflicting perspectives on immigration reform and repatriation of former refugees. Although the lives of many Central Americans have stabilized, a cloud of uncertainty hangs over other Central American families in the United States. Because of the difficult conditions under which they arrived and lived, the language and culture of Central Americans in the United States have not received an acknowledgment proportional to the numerical strength of this population.

To date, no educational programs in the United States have targeted Central Americans. In each area in which they have settled, Central Americans have been lumped together with other Latino groups, and because of their Meso-American origins they have been identified with Mexican Americans. In general, the social services available in Spanish are as appropriate for Central Americans as for other groups, but in the bilingual classroom or school counseling office subtle differences between Mexican and Central American varieties can blossom into major sources of miscommunication. In addition to specific vocabulary items that may have substantially different meanings in each dialect group or be completely unknown to one group, young Central American children may not recognize the use of the familiar pronoun *tú* used by non-Central American Spanish speakers in the United States; conversely, school personnel may be baffled by Central Americans' use of *vos* and the accompanying verb forms. Central Americans use *hasta* to refer to the beginning of an event (*la maestra viene hasta las ocho* [the teacher will come at 8:00] whereas other U.S. Latino groups use the same word to refer to the end of an action (*estamos aquí hasta las ocho* [we will be here until 8:00])). These are but a few of the differences that teachers and counselors who deal with Central American students should be aware of.

## Salvadorans in the United States

### *Demographics and history of migration*

Beginning around 1979 and ending with the peace accords of 1992, El Salvador underwent one of the most bloody, prolonged civil wars in the history of Central America. During the worst of the violence, wealthy Salvadorans fled the likely possibility of death or injury and loss of their property; middle-class citizens fled to establish small businesses in other nations rather than risk certain ruin in El Salvador. Left-leaning intellectuals and professionals fled to avoid falling into the hands of the police intelligence system, aided by a program of anonymous denunciations and death squads, which cast a pall of uncertainty and fear over large segments of the citizenry. Peasants fled the country following destruction of their villages by Vietnam-style scorched-earth tactics after having had home and family destroyed by confrontations between military forces and guerrillas or after having failed to find a safe haven in neighboring areas of Honduras and Guatemala. Tens of thousands of these Salvadorans ended up in the United States. Although some Salvadorans have returned to their home country or have been deported since the end of the political violence, the majority of those who arrived in the United States during the 1980s still reside there. As a result, the cross-section of Salvadorans émigrés is very broad, as is the political spectrum, ranging from fierce right wing to revolutionary left wing and passing through a neutralist or isolationist desire for peace at any price. Salvadorans have made their presence felt as a social force, a refugee group to be dealt with, a political-action current that must be handled cautiously by government agencies, and a further source of Latino identity in the United States. At present, an undetermined but large number of Salvadorans are in the United States under questionable circumstances; immigration has dwindled from the huge influx during the 1980s, but small numbers of Salvadorans continue to enter the United States, both legally and illegally. Legislation (under the broad heading of immigration reform) that would mandate the forced repatriation of all illegal Central Americans in the United States has been temporarily put on hold at this writing, but the political future of Salvadorans and other Central Americans in the United States remains in jeopardy. Currently, the largest Salvadoran communities in the United States are found in Houston (Lipski, 1986a, 1989), Los Angeles (Peñalosa, 1984), San Francisco (Saragoza, 1995), Miami, and Washington, DC (Jones, 1994), with smaller groups scattered throughout the country, particularly in large cities with significant Spanish-speaking populations.

Even before the civil turmoil in El Salvador, which began around 1980, Salvadorans emigrated in large numbers to neighboring Central American nations as well as to the United States. El Salvador is the most densely populated nation in Central America, and its population density contrasts markedly with that of neighboring Honduras as well as with that of Belize, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and southeastern Mexico. By the 1960s, the population density of El Salvador, combined with landowners who devoted production to cash-crop agriculture, had forced thousands of Salvadoran peasants to seek opportunities elsewhere. Neighboring Honduras, whose population density was a fraction of that of El Salvador, was a natural destination, and by the late 1960s some 300,000 Salvadorans were squatting across the border in Honduras (Peterson, 1986, p. 6). Thousands of other Salvadorans worked in the banana plantations of northern Honduras. In 1969, smoldering resentment of Salvadorans within Honduras came to a head after a bitterly disputed soccer match, and for a brief but bloody period the two nations went to war. The outside world ridiculed the soccer war between two so-called banana republics, but the real cause had more to do with displaced workers and an increasingly difficult labor situation within Honduras. As a result of this conflict, thousands of Salvadorans were forcibly repatriated or coerced into leaving Honduras. Guatemala – El Salvador's other neighbor – became the next major destination, as Salvadoran agricultural workers flooded into southwestern Guatemala to work on coffee, sugar, and cotton plantations. These jobs had traditionally been held by laborers from northern Guatemala, but the Salvadorans were willing to work for less money. It is estimated that as many as 300,000 Salvadorans migrated to Guatemala in the 1970s, nearly all illegally since Guatemala did not grant work permits to foreign workers.

Mexico was also a favorite destination of Salvadorans, particularly after the Salvadoran civil war broke out, but Salvadorans in Mexico were never regarded as any more than transitory visitors en route to the United States. Despite the unfriendly, often brutal treatment afforded to them by Mexican authorities, thousands of Salvadorans settled in Mexico; in 1985 it was estimated that some 116,000 undocumented Salvadorans lived in that country (Peterson, 1986, p. 9). An estimate made the preceding year placed the number closer to 120,000 (Montes, 1986, p. 56), and as early as 1982 as many as 140,000 Salvadorans were estimated to be living in Mexico (Torres Rivas, 1986, p. 10). Of these, some 40,000 lived in the greater Mexico City area, with others found in Guadalajara, Monterrey, and towns along Mexico's northern and southern borders.

Salvadoran migration to the United States was already significant be-

fore the outbreak of civil war, considering the small size and relative distance of that country. Some 73,000 Salvadorans appeared in the 1980 U.S. census (a small fraction of the total number residing in the United States), nearly all of whom had migrated during the 1970s. However, not until the outbreak of civil conflict in the late 1970s did Salvadoran emigration reach staggering proportions. In 1980, the total population of El Salvador was approximately five million inhabitants; in 1980–1981 alone, more than 300,000 Salvadorans, or 6% of the total population, left the country. The trends were similar for most of the 1980s, so that by the end of the period, a third or more of all Salvadorans were living outside the country.

By the middle of the 1980s, some 500,000 Salvadorans had been internally displaced, and as many as 750,000 had fled the country (Ferris, 1987, p. 22); this figure represents well over 20% of the national population. Some took refuge in Guatemala (100,000), Nicaragua (21,000), Honduras (30,000), Costa Rica (23,500), Belize (2,000), and especially Mexico (150,000–250,000), and still others made the longer trek to the United States (Ferris, 1987, p. 35; see also Montes, 1986, pp. 56–57; Morel, 1991). By the middle of the 1980s, as many as 850,000 Salvadorans lived in the United States (Ferris, 1987, p. 121; Aguayo & Weiss Fagen, 1988, p. 58). The emigration can be broken down roughly as follows, using the time period 1941–1987 as representative of Salvadoran emigration to the United States (Montes Mozo & García Vázquez, 1988, p. 9):

<i>Time period</i>	<i>Emigrants to the United States (%)</i>
1941–1976	16.7
1977–1978	6.0
1979–1981	28.5
1982–1987	48.8

In the period 1941–1981, some 34% of the Salvadoran emigrants had entered the United States legally, 46% were undocumented, and 20% were attempting to obtain legal immigrant status. (Montes Mozo & García Vázquez, 1988, 9 f). In the period 1982–1987, only 16% entered the country legally, 66% were undocumented, and 18% were applying for legal residence. Some more recent census figures for the Salvadoran population in the United States suggest that the numbers decreased following peace initiatives in El Salvador, and the remainder of Central America, but given the undocumented status of most Salvadorans in the United States, the new numbers must be regarded cautiously. The 1990 U.S. census (Funkhouser, 1995, p. 29) shows the following breakdown of known Salvadoran immigrants by state (including some but not all those who entered the country illegally):

California	281,087
Texas	46,519
New York	38,365
Virginia	21,261
Maryland	13,619
Florida	9,991
District of Columbia	9,559
Massachusetts	6,954
Illinois	5,235
Total	464,798

Among cities with large concentrations of Salvadorans as of 1990 were the following:

Los Angeles	211,401
Washington, DC	43,730
Houston	30,834
San Francisco	27,934
New York	21,655
Nassau, Long Island	15,828
Anaheim	10,924
Dallas	9,942

Even if underreporting and return migration are accounted for, these figures clearly show the effects of the Salvadoran civil war, which began around 1979 and produced a mass exodus during the 1980s.

For most of the regions, the preceding figures are probably too low, since they include only immigrants who were identified by the U.S. government through census counts, use of social services, etc. Although some illegal immigrants are included in these figures, the true numbers have always been considerably greater, especially in major centripetal areas such as Houston and Los Angeles. Illegal immigration was spurred by the fact that very few Salvadorans have been able to achieve legitimate political refugee status, even during the height of the civil conflict in El Salvador. For example, of some 30,000 Salvadorans applying for political asylum in the United States from 1980 through 1985, only 3% of the cases were approved. In fiscal year 1980–1981, of 5,500 Salvadoran requests for political asylum, only 2 were granted (Suárez-Orozco, 1989, p. 55). With rejection rates this high, illegal entry and residence were the only option available to most Salvadorans.

Analyses vary as to the relative proportion of urban and rural emigrants to the United States among voluntary immigrants and displaced persons. Montes (1987, p. 56), who carried out a study in El Salvador among families of emigrants to the United States, discovered that 47% were from urban areas; the number was 53% among voluntary immi-

grants, but only 20% among displaced persons. A study carried out among Salvadoran immigrants in the United States gave similar results. Peasant farmers represented 12% of the reported immigrant population (9% among voluntary immigrants and 20% among displaced persons). According to Montes (1987, p. 84) breakdown of other occupations (as reported by family members remaining in El Salvador) was as follows:

Profession	Voluntary (%)	Displaced (%)
Professional	3.2	2.6
Laborer	9.7	9.8
Subordinate	25.5	9.4
Small business operator	13.1	8.5
Mechanical tradesperson	15.9	12.7
Domestic service worker	18.6	28.7
Farm laborer	9.4	19.9
Other	6.4	8.5

The figures are highly skewed according to gender. For example, domestic service represented 1.3% of the male immigrants but 35.0% of the females. Among laborers, 40.1% were male and 17.6% female. Educational levels varied widely, from illiterate rural residents to urban residents with the equivalent of a high school education. Taken as a group, the educational level of displaced Salvadorans ranged from 6 to 8 years (Montes, 1987 pp. 86–87; see also Suárez-Orozco, 1989, pp. 83–84).

The preceding data are quite limited as a result of the precarious situation of the Salvadoran community in the United States, the lack of viable background studies that may be used as a point of reference, and the constantly evolving nature of the political situation in El Salvador (Cabib, 1985; Peterson, 1986; Speed, 1992). Nonetheless, as is evident from the preceding remarks, the Salvadoran community in the United States is demographically and socially significant, particularly as more members acquire legal immigration status, learn English, become socially and economically more mobile, and begin to participate fully in the life of the United States outside limited Latino American neighborhoods.

#### Linguistic particulars

Salvadoran Spanish pronunciation shares with other Central American dialects the weak pronunciation of intervocalic /y/ and the velarization of word-final /n/ (i.e., pronounced as the *-ng* in English *sing*). Most Salvadorans, particularly from urban and rural working classes, strongly aspirate not only word-final /s/ but also word-initial /s/ (as in *la [h]emana, El [h]alvador*), in this distinguishing themselves from other Central

Americans except for some Hondurans (Lipski, 1983, 1985, 1986b). This trait alone, together with a tendency for many rural speakers to pronounce /s/ as interdental [ʃ] (like English *th* in *thick*) and to speak nasally, makes colloquial working-class Salvadoran speech difficult for speakers of non-Central American varieties to understand. Like other Central Americans, Salvadorans use the familiar second-person pronoun *vos* and its accompanying verb forms to the nearly total exclusion of *tú*. Combinations with *hasta* are used to signal the beginning of an event: *¿Hasta cuándo viene el jefe?* (When will the boss arrive?). Salvadoran Spanish exhibits a construction also found at times in Guatemala, the combination *indefinite article + possessive adjective + noun*: *una mi amiga* (a friend of mine; normally *mi amiga/una amiga mía*). The tag *¿va?* (right, you know), probably derived from *verdad*, is often used to punctuate conversations.

### *Interaction with other varieties of Spanish*

The largest Salvadoran communities in the United States are in contact with Mexican and Mexican American varieties of Spanish, and given the precarious situation of many Salvadorans (undocumented and fearful of arrest and deportation by immigration officials), Salvadorans sometimes attempt to attenuate strikingly Central American traits and even to imitate what are perceived to be Mexican features. On a personal level, Salvadorans of all socioeconomic groupings feel no negative emotions toward Mexicans or Mexican Americans but rather regard them as fellow Latinos. Some Salvadorans note that Mexicans and particularly Mexican Americans adopt an attitude of superiority and even hostility toward (illegally entering) Central Americans; this situation is likely to increase as the new immigration laws widen the social divisions among Mexican Americans (U.S. citizens), Mexican nationals who qualified for amnesty under the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (and who are already perceived by many Mexican Americans as undesirable competition for scarce jobs), and new arrivals, i.e., Mexicans and Central Americans who do not qualify for amnesty. At the same time, Salvadorans aspiring to acceptance in European American society are quick to perceive the stigma attached to being Mexican and spare no attempt to highlight the differences that separate Mexicans and Salvadorans. This has created considerable ambivalence among Salvadoran laborers who are working under illegal conditions; although many Mexicans in the southwestern United States work under similar conditions, the presence of Mexican workers is in itself not sufficient to trigger migratory investigations or raids (since Immigration and Naturalization Service officers in the Southwest often accept the de facto presence of illegal Mexican workers and intervene only randomly and

sporadically), whereas a Central American may be singled out for presentation of documents and declarations of citizenship or migratory status. Therefore, most Salvadoran laborers, while trying to maintain their cultural identity as Salvadorans, try to fade into the background of the Mexican and Mexican American labor force in the hope that the current will carry them along; such is usually the case.

The questions of identification and differences vis-à-vis Mexicans are strongly felt in language usage. Salvadoran Spanish differs in several major respects from the dialects of Mexican Spanish most commonly heard in the United States. Numerous differences exist in the lexical dimension as well as in the countless idiomatic expressions peculiar to each group. In the syntactic dimension, Salvadorans share many of the peculiarities of Central Americans, whereas on a phonological level Salvadoran Spanish exhibits striking differences from the most common Mexican speech patterns. In reality, most Salvadorans' attempts at masking their regional origins or mimicking Mexican Spanish are only marginally successful. The most consistent strategy is avoidance of *vos* and obviously regional expressions. Few Salvadorans can or will modify their pronunciation.

### *Domains of language use*

The vast majority of Salvadorans in the United States come from the poorest rural regions of El Salvador. Many are illiterate, and virtually none knew English before arriving in the United States (Nackerud, 1993, p. 211). Precariously finding employment in work sites staffed by other undocumented Spanish speakers and excluded through fear or by law from access to adult education programs, few Salvadoran adults have moved beyond the pale of Spanish-speaking neighborhoods. Most have acquired the rudiments of English, which allow them to conduct basic transactions in English, but at work and at home the Salvadoran community continues to be overwhelmingly Spanish speaking. With the coming of amnesty programs, a greater number of Salvadoran children are attending school, usually in bilingual education programs.

### *Educational needs*

When Salvadorans first began arriving in the United States in large numbers, most were from rural regions and possessed little or no literacy in Spanish and no abilities in English. Given the undocumented status of the majority of refugees, many were reluctant to place their children in U.S. schools for fear of deportation. As Salvadorans discovered that most school systems accepted children without documentation of immigration status, larger numbers of Salvadoran children entered the U.S.

school system (Saragoza, 1995). These numbers increased even more after the amnesty of 1986, and even though many Salvadorans were excluded from amnesty or political asylum, today most young Salvadorans in the United States are receiving public education. Since the originally arriving Salvadorans spoke little or no English, the children were normally placed in transitional bilingual education classes, often surrounded by a cohort of Mexican children. Salvadoran children were at a disadvantage for several reasons. First, their predominantly rural upbringing in contrast to the increasingly urban origin of recent Mexican immigrants meant that they were less familiar with any sort of formal schooling; many were behind the grade level of their Mexican classmates. Furthermore, available bilingual education materials focused primarily on Mexican (or occasionally Caribbean) dialects of Spanish, particularly in vocabulary. Salvadoran children were at times alienated by these materials, and at other times they simply could not understand the items in question. Mexicans' *ándale* (let's go), *papalote* (kite), *giéro* (blond, fair-skinned), *chamaco* and *huerco* (child), *lana* (money), and *popote* (soda straw), are as unknown to Salvadorans as the latter's *pupusa* (corn pancake filled with cheese or meat), *chele* (blond), *chuchó* (dog), *pisto* (money), *piscucha* (kite), *cipote* (child), and *caites* (sandals) are to Mexicans. Small Salvadoran children unaccustomed to verb forms associated with the pronoun *tú* did not always make the transition from *sentáte* (*vos*) to *siéntate* (*tú*) (sit down), (*vos*) *sos* to (*tú*) *eres* (you are), and so forth. Few bilingual teachers were familiar with Central American dialects, and not all reacted favorably to the unexpected words and pronunciation. Although there is little hard evidence of specific educational differences occasioned by culture and dialect clash, anecdotal accounts suggest that matters were not always easy. Teachers who did not obtain the rapid acknowledgment that they expected sometimes attributed the children's silence as surliness or even cognitive disorders. At this writing there are no comprehensive accounts of Spanish dialect differences appropriate for bilingual education teachers, but as the number of non-English-speaking Salvadorans entering the U.S. school system diminishes, group-specific educational problems are also on the decline. Finally, and perhaps most important for school achievement, many Salvadoran children arriving in the 1980s had personally witnessed political terror, torture, and murder in their homeland and had been traumatized to the point where academic success was an unattainable goal (Arroyo & Eth, 1985). A number of students had been forced to leave school in El Salvador because of the fear of violence and death, which further hindered their entry into the U.S. school system. Currently, the number of Salvadoran children in U.S. schools who have personally experienced political violence has been significantly reduced, and their situation is falling into line with that of economic im-

migrants who have not lived under the shadow of terror in their homeland.

## Nicaraguans in the United States

### *Demographics and history of migration*

Nicaraguans have been present in the United States in small numbers since the early 1900s, but no large groups of Nicaraguans were to be found until the beginnings of the Sandinista insurrection against the Somoza regime began in the mid-1970s. The rebels used the name of Augusto César Sandino, a Nicaraguan patriot who had died while leading a resistance to the occupation of Nicaragua by the U.S. Marines in the 1930s. Sandino's capture and death was followed by the installation of Anastasio Somoza, a military officer with close ties to the U.S. occupation forces. Four decades of dictatorial Somoza rule ensued, including rule by the father, two sons (Luis and Anastasio Jr.), a grandson in training (Anastasio III), and interim puppet presidents. This situation created the inevitable exile population, but most were found in Mexico or neighboring Central American countries. When the Sandinista armed insurrection began to gather force in 1978, the increasing death toll, political repression, guerrilla warfare in both urban and rural areas, shortages and blackouts, and a general climate of insecurity prompted many Nicaraguans with the means at their disposal to leave the country temporarily or at least to send their children abroad. The United States was a favored safe haven for those who could afford it, since other Central American countries had problems of their own. Honduras openly supported the Somoza government, Costa Rica increasingly favored the Sandinistas, and El Salvador and Guatemala were rapidly sliding down the path to civil wars of their own.

With the abdication of Somoza and the triumph of the Sandinista Revolution in July 1979, political violence temporarily stopped. However, the rapid social changes that accompanied the Sandinistas' rise to power provoked an almost immediate exodus of the wealthiest elements of Nicaraguan society, at least some of whom had actively contributed to the prosperity of the Somoza regimes and others who simply because of their socioeconomic status in this poor nation were regarded with suspicion and hostility by revolutionary supporters. Almost immediately after the Sandinista takeover, a counterrevolutionary movement was formed, spearheaded by former members of the Somoza National Guard and supported financially by Nicaraguans whose fortunes had diminished by the transition from *Somocismo* to *Sandinismo*; the U.S. government also provided crucial economic and logistical support



through both public and clandestine channels. The *contras* began an active military campaign against the Sandinista regime, which in practice affected virtually all residents of the country. As a result of the intensified *contra* activity, together with the increasing Sandinista interference in all aspects of Nicaraguans' lives, the Nicaraguan exodus grew from a trickle to a torrent. Large numbers of Nicaraguans moved to the United States, especially Miami and Los Angeles, where they established small businesses or found other employment. Assuming at first that return to Nicaragua would be imminent, they soon felt the reality of exile, as matters in Nicaragua went from bad to worse. Stable Nicaraguan communities in the United States took shape, with an internal structure that duplicated patterns found in the home country. Particularly in Miami, the climate was favorable for educated, middle-class refugees from a leftist revolutionary government that also openly embraced Communist Cuban support. This is not to suggest that all exiled Cubans in Miami welcomed Nicaraguans with open arms, since both groups were often placed in competition for scarce resources, but the fact that the groups shared a common enemy served to smooth over many differences.

In response to international calls for elections, the Sandinistas held elections in 1984, which confirmed Sandinista rule. Although foreign observers reported no extraordinary irregularities, these elections were rejected both by the Nicaraguan opposition and, more important for the future of the country, by the U.S. government. A new round of elections, with rigorous supervision by invited observers as well as opportunity for the diffusion of opposition views, was scheduled for 1990. Much to the surprise of even the most anti-Sandinista hopefuls, the presidency was won by the candidate of an opposition coalition, Violeta Barrios de Chamorro. Although Chamorro had openly aligned herself with the political wing of the *contra* movements, headed by ex-Somocista National Guard officers, she was clearly not in favor of a return to *Somocismo*, since her husband, Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, a popular newspaper editor, had been assassinated in the later years of the last Somoza regime.

The Nicaraguan community in exile was jubilant over Chamorro's election, but, perhaps, predictably, this event did not spur a large-scale, permanent return of expatriots. Many Nicaraguans had lived in the United States for 5–10 years, had established successful business, were living in comfortable and safe neighborhoods, had children in American schools, and were little inclined to return to a chaotic post-civil war environment in which economic fragility and political uncertainty were the order of the day. Return migration was slow, and Nicaragua has not experienced the torrent of returning immigrants that the numbers of displaced persons during the Sandinista period would suggest (Ortega, 1991). Within the country, the return of displaced persons to their orig-

inal homes has been much more extensive, as has the repatriation of Nicaraguans from the neighboring countries of Honduras and Costa Rica.

In 1996, the second post-Sandinista government, headed by Arnaldo Alemán, was elected in Nicaragua. This government adopted a more confrontational stance vis-à-vis the Sandinistas, and the result has been strikes, protests, and considerable civil unrest. At the same time, the U.S. government, having once admitted tens of thousands of Nicaraguans as de facto political refugees, decided that few Nicaraguans living in the United States would face political persecution if they returned to their homeland and passed repatriation laws that could theoretically result in mass deportations. In the face of protests from Nicaraguans in the United States and by the Nicaraguan government, U.S. authorities reacted cautiously, promising that massive eviction of Nicaraguans will not occur. As of mid-1997, the applicable laws had been stalled by court injunctions, but the future of Nicaraguans in the United States was more uncertain than ever before.

Emigration of Nicaraguans to the United States during the Sandinista period is better documented than that of other Central American refugees from the same time period, given the more preferential treatment afforded by the U.S. government. During the insurrection against Somoza, some 100,000–200,000 Nicaraguans left the country as refugees; another 800,000 were internally displaced (the total population of the country at the time was perhaps 2.5 million). In the first year of the Sandinista triumph (1979), many Nicaraguans most of whom had been directly implicated in the Somoza government or the Nicaraguan military, took refuge in the United States. By 1984, it was estimated that some 30,000 lived in the Miami area alone, with smaller numbers in Los Angeles, New York City, and New Orleans (Universidad para la Paz, 1987, p. 178). By 1985, some 50,000 Nicaraguans were estimated to live in the United States, undoubtedly a figure much lower than the true population (Ferris, 1987, p. 35). In 1984, some 25,000 Nicaraguans were known to have taken refuge in neighboring Honduras (including at least 14,000 Miskitos), and at least 4,000 in Costa Rica (Fariás Caro & Garita Salas, 1985, pp. 43–59; Montes, 1986, p. 57). Some estimates place the total number of Nicaraguans in the two neighboring countries at more than 40,000 during the first years of the 1980's (Torres Rivas, 1986, p. 11). By 1986, more than 30,000 Nicaraguans lived across the border in Costa Rica.

Not all the Nicaraguans living in the United States come from the western, Spanish-speaking departments. The Caribbean or Atlantic coast of Nicaragua, whose residents are largely of African American or Native American descent, is the home to creole English, Miskito, and Sumu (together with a vanishingly small number of Rama speakers), to

the almost total exclusion of Spanish except in official usage. Most post-colonial Nicaraguan governments, while commercially exploiting the natural resources of the Atlantic region, made little attempt to alter or even interact with the cultural and ethnic institutions of this area. Some government schools were always present, but the government tolerated the establishment and maintenance of schools by foreign-based missionary groups on a scale that would probably have been scrutinized if not curtailed had it occurred in the more densely populated, Spanish-speaking Pacific region. The Sandinista government, in power from 1979 to 1990, regarded the Atlantic region as a challenge to plans for social and political integration of the entire nation, and the Sandinistas apparently unaware of earlier, largely successful efforts by other groups, undertook a literacy campaign in the region at times. Alienation and direct conflict often resulted, leading to the presence of more Spanish-speaking government officials in the Atlantic region, in turn spurring a more negative reaction to the Spanish language and the creation of a vicious circle (Cayasso, 1995). One result was the immigration of many *costeños* to the United States, where the largest single concentration is found in Miami. Although most speak Spanish reasonably well, the Atlantic coast residents in Miami do not frequently interact or identify with Spanish-speaking Nicaraguans, except for some professionals and business owners aspiring to a Nicaraguan clientele. A significant concentration of English-speaking Nicaraguans live in Opa Loka, just to the north of Miami, in a neighborhood also inhabited by other Caribbean groups, mostly African American. Many *costeños* bring a knowledge of English sufficiently developed that they immediately secure desirable jobs, a situation not so often found among Spanish-speaking Nicaraguans, which adds to incipient resentment of the Atlantic-coast residents on the part of Spanish-speaking Nicaraguans. Miskito-speaking Nicaraguans, traditionally among the country's most marginalized citizens, are not common in the United States, although a small pocket of Miskito fishermen can still be found in Port Arthur, Texas. They also speak Spanish, most quite fluently, and use this language when interacting with the Mexican American population.

### Linguistic particulars

Like other Central American dialects, Nicaraguan Spanish gives a weak pronunciation to intervocalic /y/ and velarizes word-final /n/. Word-final /s/ is aspirated to a much higher degree than in other Central American varieties, approaching the levels found in Caribbean varieties of Spanish. Nicaraguans share with other Central Americans the use of *vos* as the informal pronoun. Nicaraguans of all social classes are much more inclined to proffer *vos* to total strangers than other Central Americans

are, a trait that has earned them the reputation of being overly familiar, or *confianzudo*. Among typically Nicaraguan words are the interjections *idiay* and *chocho*, the use of *chuchu* for dog (the word means *light switch* to Cubans), *chavallo* and *chigiün* for small child, *chunches* for unidentified or unimportant objects, *reales* for money, *maje* for male friend, *chele* for blond, fair-skinned individuals, and numerous foods, including *gallo pinto* (dish of red beans and rice), *pinol* and *pinolillo* (drinks made of cacao and roasted corn) and *vigorón* (dish made of yuca and pork rinds).

### Interaction with other varieties of Spanish

In Miami, Nicaraguan Spanish comes into contact with Cuban Spanish on a daily basis. Cuban Spanish, representing a variety of registers, generations, and degrees of bilingualism with English, defines the norms of Miami Spanish language broadcasting and journalism and is the de facto lingua franca in most parts of the city. It is nearly impossible for a Spanish speaker in Miami, particularly one who relies on Spanish more heavily than English, to avoid contact with Cuban Spanish, regardless of individual attitudes toward Cubans and their language. Less frequently, depending on personal circumstances, Nicaraguans, in South Florida, encounter other Spanish dialects, with Salvadoran, Colombian (of several regions), and Puerto Rican being the most common.

Virtually all Nicaraguans living in the greater Miami area have definite opinions and attitudes regarding Cuban Spanish, Nicaraguan Spanish, and the interface between the two. Those Cubans who are familiar with Nicaraguans and their speech have equally well-defined opinions. In a survey I conducted in 1991, a majority of middle-class Nicaraguans in Miami over the age of about 20 expressed at least some negative sentiments toward Cuban Spanish. Frequently, these feelings were vague and not associated with particular linguistic characteristics; they reflected cultural differences and perhaps concealed some resentment at the obviously dominant position enjoyed by Cubans in South Florida. Typical of these nonspecific negative comments (by no means characteristic of the entire Nicaraguan community) were the fact that Cubans speak "too loud," "too fast," "too nasty," and so forth. These are precisely the same unsubstantiated criticisms that neighboring Central American countries level against Nicaraguans and are typical of xenophobic attitudes worldwide. As with all stereotypes, there is always a kernel of truth. Compared with the baseline Central American varieties of Spanish, Cuban Spanish in the more emotionally charged registers is objectively marked by greater intonational swings, often perceived as absolute differences in volume. In animated conversations, Cubans (particularly Cuban men) tend to prefer simultaneous participation,

with each intervention taking place at a successively higher volume level, instead of a greater emphasis on turn taking, which prevails throughout Central America. To the ear unaccustomed to such energetic exchanges, a Cuban conversation can seem impossibly rapid, deafeningly loud, and incredibly rude.

Claims of "vulgar" talking normally involve certain key lexical items that are inoffensive and common in one dialect but carry a heavy negative connotation in the other. Cuban Spanish is noted for the very frequent use of *coño*, an originally obscene epithet still very common in Spain but rarely heard in Latin America outside of the Caribbean. Nicaraguans are aware that *coño* is a "bad" word and are sometimes surprised at the ease with which well-bred Cubans, including women and children, employ this term. Even more shocking to the Nicaraguan ear is the uninhibited use of *comemierda* for fool or gullible person.

On a more specific basis, many Nicaraguans criticize Cubans for an excessive use of Anglicisms, particularly loan translations and slightly adapted borrowings. At the time of the survey, the Nicaraguan community in Miami had not resided in a bilingual environment long enough for this type of subtle syntactic Anglicism to penetrate vernacular speech. Nicaraguan adolescents picked these combinations up naturally, through contact with Cuban friends and simply by existing in the Miami Hispanophone environment. Older Nicaraguans are predictably dismayed when their children begin using constructions from other groups, particularly when in the parents' eyes the combinations are socially unacceptable.

Nicaraguans do not frequently comment on Cubans' pronunciation of Spanish except to note neutralization of preconsonantal /l/ and /t/, giving rise to forms such as *porque* instead of *porque* (because) and *calta* in place of *carta* (letter). Objectively, the change from /t/ to [l] is rather infrequent in Cuban Spanish, compared, e.g., to Puerto Rican and even Dominican dialects. In Cuba, it is characteristic of the lower classes in the central and eastern provinces and was not widely found in the Cuban exile community until after the Mariel boatlift of 1980, in which large numbers of less educated, working-class or rural Cubans arrived in the United States.

Relatively few Cubans in Miami have close enough contact with Nicaraguans to have formed clear opinions regarding Nicaraguan Spanish. Among those Cubans who do mention specific features, the use of *vos* stands out as the most striking difference. Cubans' reactions toward this distinctly non-Caribbean phenomenon range from "strange" to "incorrect." A few Cubans comment on Nicaraguans' weak pronunciation of intervocalic /y/, especially in contact with /i/ and /e/, which can make *gallina* (hen) sound like *gaina* and *sello* (stamp) emerge as *seo*. Cubans also comment on the frequency with which Nicaraguans punc-

uate their speech with *pues* [pueh] (well), a trait of which Nicaraguans themselves are also aware. Among the more shocking differences is the use of *jodido* as a casual greeting among Nicaraguans of both sexes. To Cubans, use of this word in anything less than an insult would be unthinkable.

Nicaraguans are not exempt from feelings of linguistic insecurity, but the Nicaraguan community in the United States is less afflicted by such sentiments than other Central American groups are. A high level of education and a more comfortable socioeconomic status is probably the main contributing factor, aided by a certain smugness about being the bearers of a form of Spanish as yet unaffected by the overwhelming influence of English. Few Nicaraguans consciously alter their language when speaking to Cubans, and even fewer willingly adopt Cubanisms into their own speech. With regard to the characteristically Central American use of *vos*, a majority of Nicaraguans stated that they used such forms to Cubans who had attained a level of *confianza* which warranted such usage. A few confessed to employing *tú* so as to not shock or offend Cubans.

Nicaraguans in Los Angeles are primarily in contact with Mexican speakers of Spanish, together with smaller numbers of Salvadoran and Guatemalan speakers. To date there is no evidence of significant dialect clash between Nicaraguans and other Spanish speakers in the Los Angeles area, although individual incidents no doubt occur.

#### *Domains of language use*

In U.S. cities with large Nicaraguan communities, the Nicaraguans tend to cluster in ethnically homogeneous neighborhoods. The largest such colony is in far western Miami, where entire subdivisions and shopping centers re-create a Nicaraguan lifestyle. A smaller neighborhood in central Miami also contains a high concentration of Nicaraguans. Those Nicaraguans coming from middle- and upper-class backgrounds (a significant proportion of the total) learned some English before going to the United States; many sent their children to American schools in Nicaragua. In the United States, Nicaraguan children have been rapidly absorbed into the school systems, receiving bilingual education when necessary. There is a natural tendency for Nicaraguan children to cluster around other Spanish speakers, but the increasingly English-dominant young Nicaraguan population is broadening its social networks. Nicaraguans who arrived as adults live in neighborhoods and frequent stores and businesses where all linguistic interchanges take place in Spanish. Most Nicaraguans also work in Spanish-speaking businesses, preferably owned or staffed by other Nicaraguans. There is interaction with the wider English-speaking community, but, particular-

ly in Miami, the combination of recent immigrant status and the overwhelming presence of Spanish facilitates retention of Spanish as the main language for all domains.

### *Educational needs*

The majority of Nicaraguans entering the U.S. school system after the immigration surge of the 1980s spoke little or no English and were placed in bilingual education classes. Most had attended school in Nicaragua and experienced little shock upon entering school. Linguistic differences with respect to the prevailing Spanish dialects (Cuban in Miami, Mexican American in Los Angeles and most other cities) have been noted, but anecdotal testimony suggests that few Nicaraguans experienced educational difficulties due to dialect clash or the lack of bilingual materials that reflected Nicaraguan usage. The relatively high average educational level of their parents is one important factor in accounting for this difference, and it is not irrelevant that most Nicaraguan children have not been perceived as penniless refugees on whom educational resources need be spent. The current generation of Nicaraguan Americans entering the schools is proficient in English, and although some Nicaraguan children continue to be placed in bilingual programs, immigration from Nicaragua has diminished greatly. Nicaraguans from the creole-English-speaking Caribbean coast tended to enter English language programs, although the English spoken by these Nicaraguans differed from U.S. usage. In Miami, where the majority of Atlantic Coast Nicaraguans reside, local schools are accustomed to dealing with West Indian students, and English-speaking Nicaraguan children have largely been able to make a smooth transition to the U.S. educational system. There is no information on the Miskito-Spanish bilinguals residing in Texas; this population is marginal within Nicaragua and appears to have slipped between the cracks of bilingual programs in Texas.

## **Guatemalans in the United States**

### *Demographics and history of migration*

The total Guatemalan population in the United States is not large, even in comparison with other Central American communities. In some areas, however, significant groups of Guatemalans are concentrated, and it is feasible to speak of pockets of Guatemalan Spanish in the United States. These communities are typically formed of indigenous Guatemalans speaking a variety of Mayan languages, and in some instances these languages take precedence over Spanish, even in the United

States. The largest Guatemalan community is located in Los Angeles. A smaller and locally almost unknown group lives in rural southern Florida (Miralles, 1986), where community members work in agriculture alongside immigrants from Mexico and the Caribbean. Smaller groups of Guatemalans are found in Houston (Hagan, 1990), New Orleans, the Pacific Northwest, and Washington, DC. An assessment of Guatemalan Spanish in the United States, requires a focus on bilingual indigenous communities, whose use of Spanish is often little studied and receives little prestige either in Guatemala or abroad.

Guatemalans in the United States are mostly refugees from the desperate political and economic situation that, though always difficult, reached crisis proportions by the late 1970s. It is estimated that between 50,000 and 75,000 Guatemalans died as the result of political violence between 1978 and 1985 alone; during the same period, the Guatemalan army admits to having destroyed more than 440 villages (American Friends Service Committee, 1988, p. 4). By the mid-1980s, some 80,000 Guatemalans lived in Los Angeles, with smaller groups in San Francisco, Chicago, Washington, DC, and Houston (Universidad para la Paz, 1987, p. 178). In 1985, it was estimated that 220,000 recent immigrants from Guatemala were living in the United States (Suárez-Orozco, 1989, p. 57), and by 1988, at least 200,000 known Guatemalans were living there (Aguayo & Weiss Fagen, 1988, p. 23). Some 100,000–150,000 lived in Mexico as well (Aguayo & Weiss Fagen, 1988, p. 58; Ferris, 1987, p. 35; Montes, 1986, p. 56). Some 3,000 Guatemalan refugees lived in neighboring Belize, and at least 1,000 in Honduras. Internally, at least 400,000 Guatemalans were displaced during the first half of the 1980s (American Friends Service Committee, 1988, p. 5; Montes, 1986, p. 56). Like Salvadorans, few Guatemalans have been able to obtain legitimate immigrant or political refugee status. During the 1980s, only about 0.3% of Guatemalan requests for political asylum in the United States were approved (Suárez-Orozco, 1989, p. 57). A breakdown of the location of Guatemalans in the United States during the late 1980s follows (American Friends Service Committee, 1988, p. 24):

Los Angeles	60,000–100,000
Houston	10,000–20,000
Washington, DC	10,000–20,000
New York City	10,000–20,000
Chicago	10,000
New Orleans	1,000–5,000
Phoenix/Tucson	1,000–3,000
Miami	1,000–2,000

In Guatemala, Nahuatl-derived cultures and languages were not the primary indigenous force, although some Nahuatl and Pipil groups oc-

cupied the southwestern coastal regions. The principal indigenous groups belong to the Maya-Quiché family, and given the cultural ascendancy of these groups even after the decline of the Maya empire, Mayan languages were never displaced by Nahuatl, as occurred in El Salvador and Honduras. Among the languages still spoken in Guatemala are some four members of the Quiché group, six members of the Mam group, four members of the Pocomam group, two members of the Chol group, plus a tiny contingent of Pipil (Lipski, 1994). As a group, the Mayan languages have not contributed to Guatemalan Spanish in proportion to their numbers, but some lexical items of indigenous groups are in common use.

### *Linguistic particulars*

Little research has been done on the linguistic peculiarities of the Guatemalan population in the United States; with the exception of a few sociological studies (e.g., Peñalosa, 1984), there is little accurate information on any aspect of the Guatemalan community within the United States. The majority of Guatemalans are undocumented political or economic refugees, usually from rural regions and almost invariably from an indigenous background. Some speak little or no Spanish, and those who speak Spanish most often do so with the linguistic characteristics of second language speakers. Most Guatemalans use *vos*, together with a very heavy reliance on *usted* in rural regions; *tú* is documented as a legitimate variant in urban areas of Guatemala, especially among the middle class (Pinkerton, 1986), but few if any rural speakers use this form. The common denominators found among all Guatemalan Spanish speakers in the United States include a very strong pronunciation of word-final /s/ (similar to Mexican Spanish and different from Salvadoran and Nicaraguan varieties), velarization of word-final /n/, and weak intervocalic /y/. Many Guatemalans pronounce the trill /rrr/ as a fricative, much like the *s* in the English word *measure*. Regional vocabulary items include *patojo* (small child) *canche* (blond, fair-skinned), *chompipe* (turkey), *chapín* (Guatemalan), and *chucho* (dog). Many Mayan speakers from the central highlands of Guatemala reduce or even eliminate unstressed vowels in contact with /s/, thus making *presidente* sound like *presdente*. This is a trait also found in central Mexico and accentuated among speakers of Nahuatl; in many ways, Guatemalan Spanish is similar to central and northern Mexican varieties.

### *Interaction with other varieties of Spanish*

Most Guatemalans living in the United States live and work in contact with Spanish speakers, predominantly of Mexican origin. Although Spanish is not the native language of many Guatemalans, the majority

of Guatemalans in the United States speak Spanish, often having acquired greater proficiency while living there. Superficially, Guatemalan Spanish might be mistaken for a Mexican variety, particularly as regards pronunciation; telltale vocabulary items clearly identify Guatemalans, but few observers from outside the Latino community possess this degree of sophistication. As with the Salvadoran community, many Guatemalans are undocumented and fear detection and deportation; in trying to blend in with the Mexican American population, occasional attempts to deemphasize Guatemalan traits or acquire Mexican traits can be observed. The strategies are normally quite superficial, such as suppression of the pronoun *vos* and the often exaggerated use of stereotypical Mexicanisms, such as *ándale*, *órale*, and the universal obscenity *chingar*. The film *El Norte*, which documents the struggle of Guatemalan refugees crossing Mexico and seeking entry into the United States, contains examples of the sort of informal dialect tutoring that goes on among the refugee community.

### *Educational needs*

Of all the Central American groups in the United States, Guatemalan refugees are in the most precarious situation vis-à-vis the educational system. In addition to their dubious immigration status, most Guatemalans living in the United States are at best only recessive Spanish-Mayan bilinguals, and some speak no Spanish at all. A large number are illiterate, and many are unaware of even the most rudimentary aspects of U.S. immigration and refugee law (Nackerud, 1993, p. 211). In some areas (e.g., the state of Oregon), bilingual court interpreters who speak Mayan languages have been found, but more often than not Mayan-speaking Guatemalan children find no accommodation in bilingual programs and attend school only sporadically, exacerbating the already difficult situation of undocumented itinerant laborers in this country. Spanish-speaking Guatemalans fare little better, since the combination of low literacy rates and little familiarity with urban schools results in poor attendance and academic performance (Vlach, 1984).

### **Small Central American communities: Hondurans and Costa Ricans**

Although the most prominent Central American varieties of Spanish in the United States are those of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, in descending number of speakers, there are significant Honduran communities in several cities. The most prominent is found in New Orleans, where the Honduran community first arose as part of the banana indus-

try, which linked the northern Honduran ports of Tela and La Ceiba via maritime routes with the port of New Orleans. By the late 1980s an estimated 60,000–70,000 Hondurans lived in New Orleans (American Friends Service Committee, 1988, p. 24). Another large group of Hondurans (as many as 80,000), mostly from the central part of the country, is found in New York City, where they do not enjoy the same sense of community identity as in New Orleans (although they have published a small newspaper, *El centroamericano*). Los Angeles has more than 15,000 Hondurans, and smaller numbers are found in other large U.S. cities.

Costa Ricans have never emigrated to the United States in large numbers, since Costa Rica enjoys the highest standard of living and the lowest level of political violence and social unrest in all of Central America (González, 1989; Redden, 1980). The Costa Rican army was abolished in 1948 after a brief civil war, and during a time period when neighboring countries were beset by military coups, dictatorships, and counter-revolutions, Costa Rica devoted its resources to public education, health, and economic infrastructure. The price for demilitarizing the country has been a high level of political dependence on the United States, whose military forces stationed in the Panama Canal Zone have constituted a de facto deterrent to attacks on Costa Rica. The Costa Rican government openly sympathized with the Sandinista rebels during the insurrection against the Somoza dictatorship, but once the Sandinistas were in power, relations quickly soured. The United States pressured Costa Rica into allowing the breakaway ex-Sandinista *comandante* Edén Pastora to establish a counterrevolutionary force in the northern part of the country, and for several years Costa Rica was subject to the whims of Cold War politics in Central America. Despite this brief departure from the customary Costa Rican neutrality and political equanimity, the country has remained relatively prosperous, and those Costa Ricans emigrating to the United States usually come for higher education or as established professionals. The number of illegal immigrants from Costa Rica is vanishingly small; there are no political refugees, and there are no homogeneous Costa Rican neighborhoods in the United States.

### General recommendations

Despite the fact that they come from a well-defined geographical region, Central American groups in the United States are sufficiently diverse – in language and personal background – to warrant individual consideration. The best tool a teacher of Central American students can bring to the classroom is knowledge of the culture, language, and recent so-

ciopolitical history of the countries involved. This knowledge need not entail a major research effort, since the basic facts are available in most libraries. At issue is not so much mastering the peculiarities of individual Central American Spanish dialects but rather reaching out to students by acknowledging their unique background. Knowledge of specific linguistic differences among Spanish dialects, in particular those features that differ in the students' native varieties and textbook presentations, can help the teacher smooth over momentary misunderstandings, and the overwhelming mass of language shared by all varieties of Spanish will facilitate the remaining communication. However, a teacher can use awareness of the students' home language and culture in more subtle ways as a means for drawing the pupils more closely into the educational environment. Acknowledgment of regional words, foods, and cultural practices, accompanied by paraphrases of the remarks to the remainder of the class, goes a long way toward creating an inclusive atmosphere in which student responsiveness can be increased. Teachers who are pressed for time can consult regional glossaries (Lipski, 1994, provides references as well as samples of regional vocabulary). Those with more resources at their disposal can consult collections of folktales and customs from the countries represented by their students. Students themselves, their friends, and their family members are an invaluable resource in teaching the teachers; contacts ranging from brief conversations to extended interviews can provide teachers with the appropriate mix of words, phrases, and cultural referents to enliven the classroom and enhance the self-esteem of students.

### Conclusion

The title of this chapter suggests that Central Americans are a homogeneous group, and, indeed, historical, cultural, and linguistic factors link the peoples of the isthmus. Within the United States, however, Central Americans find little unity in the midst of their great diversity, and a brief recapitulation of the salient social and educational needs of the various Central American groups is worthwhile.

Guatemalans in the United States are predominantly of indigenous background, and many speak Spanish only as a second language, if at all. At the poorest end of the spectrum, Guatemalans who arrived as refugees during the 1980s and 1990s represent the greatest challenge to educators, in view of the double language barrier, high illiteracy rate, rural upbringing, and great distrust of all official agencies.

Salvadorans in the United States represent a broader socioeconomic spectrum; semiliterate rural dwellers share social spaces with practitioners of skilled trades and professions, and lifestyles range from highly

marginalized to solidly middle class. As a group, Salvadorans are saddened with the common misperception that they are all maids and gardeners, occupations that have given prominence to thousands of needy Salvadorans in the nation's largest cities, and Salvadoran children can greatly benefit from explicit recognition of their language and culture as distinct from those of Mexicans and other Latino groups.

Although Guatemalans, Nicaraguans, and Salvadorans have immigrated to the United States in large numbers since the late 1970s, their true story is only now emerging, their language and culture remains as sidetracked by the American mainstream as ever, and when Central Americans make the headlines, it is only with respect to contentious legal battles over amnesty resulting from conditions most Americans only vaguely recall. As with other arrivals from Latin America, Central Americans have arrived to stay; the events that fueled the initial diaspora were only the final stage in a migratory pull whose roots go back over a century. The educational and social needs of the Central American communities in the United States may not be as acute today as during the worst moments of violence and desperation of the 1980s, but they have become a permanent part of the American fabric, and it is only fitting that their voices at last be heard.

### Suggestions for further reading

Lipski (1994) provides detailed information on all Latin American Spanish dialects, including sample vocabulary items for each country; Lipski (1986a, 1989b) deals specifically with Salvadorans in the United States. Peñalosa (1984) provides (somewhat dated) information on Salvadorans and Guatemalans in the Los Angeles area. Saragoza (1995) and Suárez-Orozco (1989) comment on educational issues affecting Central Americans in the United States.

Most linguistic studies of regional Spanish dialects contain more detail than is required by classroom teachers. In addition to the general works mentioned above, the following are useful sources of regional vocabulary: Geoffroy Rivas (1978) for El Salvador; Mántica (1989) for Nicaragua; and Armas (1971) and Rubio (1982) for Guatemala. Good samples of folktales and popular beliefs are Lara Figueroa (1984) for Guatemala, Palma (1987) for Nicaragua, and Gutiérrez (1993) for El Salvador.

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