# SALVADORANS IN THE UNITED STATES: PATTERNS OF INTRA-HISPANIC MIGRATION

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## ABSTRACT

Recent large-scale immigration of Central Americans to the southwestern United States is bringing together Hispanic groups whose previous linguistic and cultural contacts have been minimal. The present study focuses on a specific case, arrivals from El Salvador in contact with individuals of Mexican background in Houston, Texas, and describes patterns of linguistic interaction and adaptation into United States Hispanic culture. Central American immigrants have to choose between maintenance of regional linguistic/cultural identity and adoption of prevailing Mexican-American patterns. Of particular interest are the strategies involving retention or modification of regional Spanish usage, acceptance of linguistic Anglicisms, and general orientation toward Spanish- or English-language media, services, work, and living environments. Salvadorans are divided in their response to these options, a reflection of the ambivalence and uncertainty that surrounds their life in the United States.

## INTRODUCTION

The current political conflict in Central America has been the subject of public attention in the United States for the last several years, although currently the involvement of the U.S. government in the Nicaraguan counterrevolution has overshadowed the bloodiest ongoing struggle in Latin America, the Salvadoran civil war.[1] Although the Salvadoran struggle is not constantly on the front pages, its social impact on U.S. society is noticeable in the ever-

[1] The bibliography on the current political crisis and civil war in El Salvador is enormous and constantly growing. Virtually no work on the subject remains unaffected by a particular stance or ideology, which makes a representative summary either hopelessly biased or voluminous. For the present report, we assume only general familiarity with the situation in El Salvador and the concomitant immigration to the United States, and prefer to cite no specific bibliography.

increasing immigration of Salvadoran refugees, some planning to remain in this country and others attempting to reach Canada, which, unlike the United States, offers political refugee status to Salvadorans (see Peñalosa, 1984). Trends of the past eight years suggest that immigration from Central America, particularly from El Salvador, will eventually attain the same proportions as the resident populations from Puerto Rico and Cuba. Since there is no common border between Central America and the United States, and since many families arrive by air or by sea, there is a greater tendency to settle in geographically delimited population clusters, which then form centripetal nuclei attracting further immigration. The largest areas of Central American population in the United States include the Honduran colony in New Orleans, and the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran colonies in Los Angeles. Miami is also experiencing a large influx of Central Americans, as are Chicago and Houston; in the latter city, in addition to numerous Hondurans, Guatemalans, and Nicaraguans, there is a massive immigration of Salvadoran refugees, through clandestine channels, whose numbers are estimated at well over 100,000.

It is common for Central American immigrants, like their fellow Latin Americans, to 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 and/or a major airline terminus, and from the desire to live in a minimally foreign environment. While the Central Americans who move to the already established colonies at first interact principally with their compatriots, it is not long before the inevitable contact with other Hispanic Americans and American-born Hispanics takes place, with the resulting transculturation and expansion of social horizons of all groups involved. Traditionally, 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 smaller numbers, particularly to major cities, while members of the lower working classes, particularly from rural regions of Central America, have not as frequently been represented. As a result of the economic status of the Central Americans living in the United States, contact with their home countries was traditionally 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 in this country.



The recent large-scale political turmoil in Central America is bringing 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 escape violence, destruction, and instability of their homelands and seek a haven in the United States. Wealthy Salvadorans flee the likely possibility of death or injury and loss of their property; middle-class citizens flee to reestablish small businesses in other nations rather than risk certain ruin in El Salvador; left-leaning intellectuals and professionals flee 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 flee 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 the neighboring areas of Honduras and Guatemala. As a result, the cross section of Salvadoran emigrés is very broad, as is the political spectrum, ranging from fierce right wing to revolutionary left wing, passing through a neutralist/isolationist desire for peace at any price.

Inevitably upon arriving in the United States and settling even temporarily in a large urban area, Salvadorans come into contact with members of other Hispanic groups, usually representing the Mexican and Mexican-American communities. On the one hand, this immediate contact with another Spanish-speaking group which shares at least some cultural and historical antecedents is helpful in easing the transition; but on the other, the Salvadoran is thrust into an ambivalent position in regard to the choice among at least three mutually incompatible options: retention of linguistic and cultural identity as Salvadorans, partial or total merging with the predominant Hispanic communities of Mexican origin, or rejection of Salvadoran/Hispanic identity in favor of Anglo-American cultural, linguistic, and social patterns. The following remarks will briefly explore some of the ramifications of this situation, particularly linguistic and ethnic acculturation vis-à-vis the Mexican/Mexican-American communities, based on field work done in Houston, Texas from 1981 to 1988 (see Lipski, 1985a, 1986).

## THE SALVADORAN COMMUNITY IN HOUSTON, TEXAS

Salvadorans in Houston comprise a stable although small nucleus of residents of 20 years or more duration, and a much larger superstructure of recent immigrants, whose maximum period of residence does not exceed three to five years. It is difficult to estimate the number of Salvadorans in any major city, since the immigration continues unabated and the undocumented status of most immigrants entails a lack of accurate demographic data; in Houston, the 100,000 mark has been surpassed even by the most conservative estimates. There is no single geographic center for Salvadoran residents in Houston; originally they tended to live in the large Mexican-American neighborhoods, but more recently groups of Salvadorans have moved into the hundreds of apartment complexes which constitute the majority of Houston's low- and middle-income housing throughout the city. There is not a large degree of coherence in the community, since the political divisions which are tearing apart the nation of El Salvador have also been carried over to the immigrant community, which represents both landed families intent upon preserving the status quo and peasants and/or leftist intellectuals who openly sympathize with the Farabundo Martí rebels. The former group more often congregates with Cubans and Nicaraguans of similar persuasion, of which Houston contains a significant number, while the latter group has more inherent unity, and is also in solidarity with Mexican-American political and labor movements, with both groups often attending the same public meetings and demonstrations. Those Salvadorans whose immigration status is not problematic are becoming integrated into the social and political life of Houston, but the majority of Salvadorans continue to live a more marginal existence.

While a large number of Salvadorans have been informally interviewed, in the course of conversations and meetings, fifty informants were chosen for the present report, representing the professional class (ten informants), the middle class (small business owners in the majority; fifteen informants), and the lower working class (peasants and laborers; twenty-five informants). Each was interviewed for between thirty minutes and one hour, and the interviews were taped and subsequently analyzed. No individual was asked to give a name or other details which would permit positive personal identification on the tapes. Any investigation into



the current conditions of the Salvadoran community in the United States is hampered by the inevitable suspicion, fear, reluctance, and at times resentment which has resulted from conflicting movements in El Salvador and the oftentimes less-than-charitable treatment which homeless Latin American immigrants receive in this country. Even those Salvadorans with legitimate immigration status almost invariably have family members still in El Salvador, have a political or judicial question pending in that country, or have already experienced an unfortunate confrontation with authorities, either in El Salvador or in the United States. Consequently, it is extremely difficult to encourage Salvadorans to participate in interviews, inquiries, and surveys, to answer any questions regarding their life in this country or in Central America, or to comment upon any negative experiences that they may have suffered; this difficulty is compounded by the presence of tape recorders, microphones, notebooks, and the like. The following conclusions are therefore to be regarded as tentative and subject to future verification and revision.

## CULTURAL/LINGUISTIC IDENTIFICATIONS OF SALVADORANS IN THE U.S.

In terms of cultural identity as Central Americans and/or Salvadorans, solidarity with El Salvador is strongest in the lower working classes, being nearly unanimous. Solidarity is less strong among middle-class immigrants, and even less so among professionals, many of whom prefer to be regarded as at least partially Americanized. Solidarity with El Salvador was always manifested in the interviews during discussions of the World Soccer Cup or the need to bring peace to El Salvador, but beyond these universally accepted topics, responses varied widely. Of the working class, 22 out of 25 subjects considered themselves as identified primarily with El Salvador; in the middle class 11 out of 15 considered themselves first and foremost Salvadorans/Central Americans, while in the professional class the number dropped to 4 out of 10. This is also correlated with the choice of neighborhoods and especially with immediate neighbors. The lower working class immigrants live in predominantly Hispanic neighborhoods, or in areas with high proportions of Hispanics living in apartment complexes. Middle-class immigrant families also tend to live in areas with high Hispanic concentrations, while the professional

classes have abandoned the large Hispanic areas of Houston, which are in general not considered desirable, although several live in suburban neighborhoods with a rather high proportion of Latin American professionals.

Houston is like other southwestern United States cities in that any Latin American, particularly one evincing mestizo features, is automatically identified as "Mexican," and protestations to the contrary are generally to no avail. As prejudice against Mexican and Mexican-Americans runs high in Texas, most non-Mexicans are explicit about insisting upon their nationality, although for all practical purposes the results are nil, since the prejudice originally directed at Mexicans is easily and frequently extended to other Latin Americans. Nearly every Salvadoran resident in Houston has had the experience of being taken for a Mexican; of the working-class residents, a very high percentage work with Mexicans, and nearly all Salvadoran immigrants patronize stores and restaurants where Mexicans and Mexican-Americans are found in large numbers, attend theaters where Mexican films are shown, and when coming into contact with a clerk, cashier, telephone receptionist, or other employee who speaks Spanish, nearly always find that such individuals are of Mexican origin.

On a personal level, Salvadorans of all socioeconomic groupings feel no negative emotions toward Mexicans or Mexican-Americans, but rather regard them as fellow Hispanics. 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 qualify for amnesty (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 Anglo-American society are quick to perceive the stigma attached to being Mexican and spare no attempt to highlight the differences that separate Mexicans from Salvadorans. Another aspect of this situation is the Salvadoran laborer who is working under illegal conditions; although many Mexicans in Houston work under similar conditions, the presence of Mexican workers is in itself not sufficient to trigger migratory investigations or raids, 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, at the same time 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 has usually been the case, although with the increased severity projected by the recent amnesty legislation, this situation may change somewhat.

## LINGUISTIC DIFFERENCES AND STRATEGIES

The question of identification and differences vis-à-vis Mexicans and other Hispanic groups resident in the U.S. are most strongly felt in language usage. In the following remarks, we will pay particular attention to the sociolinguistic strategies characterizing Salvadoran integration into U.S. Hispanic society. While a detailed description of the linguistic events is beyond the scope of the present essay, some general comments are in order. Mexican and Central American Spanish (of which Salvadoran Spanish is quite representative) belong to the same dialectological macro-zone consisting of the southwestern United States, Mexico, and Central America as far south as central Costa Rica, and roughly covering the area of the original Spanish Viceroyalty of New Spain (presently Mexico) and its major administrative subdivision, the Captaincy General of Guatemala (presently Central America). In particular, the Nahuatl language was the most significant indigenous contribution in most of this region, and the long-lasting effects of this language contact are noteworthy in the large quantity of lexical items found (with slight regional variations) in this entire region; these include

*zacate* "grass"
*(gua)jolote* "turkey"
*zopilote* "buzzard"
*petate* "sleeping mat"
*milpa* "corn, small garden plot"

and hundreds of others. Some words show only a slight phonetic variation between the two areas, e.g., Mexican *cuates* "twins," *atole*

"sweet gruel," vs. Salvadoran *guates*, *atol*, and so forth.[2] Salvadoran/Mexican Spanish thus cluster together in opposition to other Latin American macro-dialects, including Caribbean, Andean, etc. At the same time, the number of regional lexical items separating the two areas is noteworthy, particulary since in El Salvador the Nahuatl influence was diminished in comparison to Mexico, allowing more local indigenisms to penetrate the national speech modes. Mexicans are perplexed by such items as

*chuco* "sour, dirty"
*chompipe* "turkey"
*chucho* "dog"
*chele* "blond, fair complexioned"
*pisto* "money"
*chiribiscos* "kindling"
*cipote* "child"

and others. Finally, both dialect areas use patrimonial Spanish words with different meanings, as in the Mexican use of *camión* "truck" with the meaning of "bus," or the Salvadoran use of *andar* "to walk" in the sense of "to carry on one's person (documents, money, etc.)".

In the phonetic dimension, pronunciation of Salvadoran Spanish does not differ from that of most Mexican varieties as much as, say, Nicaraguan or Caribbean Spanish, but there is one major difference which is immediately noticeable. Popular Salvadoran Spanish tends to pronounce syllable- and word-final /s/ as though it were a simple aspiration /h/; thus, *mis amigos* "my friends" sounds like *mih amigoh*. Moreover, word-initial /s/ may suffer the same fate; thus,

[2] To date no comprehensive study of any dimension of Salvadoran Spanish exists. The following works provide a mosaic of data on this dialect, particulary as regards to indigenous influences, vocabulary, and pronunciation: Barón Castro (1978), Canfield (1960, 1981), Fidias Jiménez (1937), Geoffroy Rivas (1961), González Rodas (1963), Lipski (1985a, 1986), Mason (1940), Peñalosa (1984), Schneider (1961, 1962, 1963), Salazar Arrué (1970), and Salazar García (1910). These works are set against studies of general Central American Spanish and dialects of neighboring Guatemala and Honduras, including: Agüero (1960a, 1960b), Arroyo (1965), Batres Jáuregui (1892), Lipski (1983b, 1987, forthcoming), and Mantica (1973).



*una semana* "a week" may sound like *una hemana*. The former trait is common in many Spanish dialects, while the latter is nearly exclusive to popular Salvadoran (and Honduran) Spanish; this pronunication, in combination with the highly nasalized articulation characteristic of Salvadoran peasant speech is often sufficient to represent serious obstacles to the casual Mexican listener.[3]

There is another linguistic dimension in which Salvadoran (and other Central American) Spanish differs most significantly from Mexican varieties, namely the use, in Central America, of the familiar pronoun *vos* "you" instead of the Mexican *tú*. Use of *tú* is virtually nonexistent in El Salvador, except among some educated urban residents, while in Mexico *vos* is not used at all, and is considered exotic and at time even indecipherable, given the different verb endings associated with this form.[4] Among Latin Americans in general, use of *vos* is largely associated with Argentina, which is the only country where this form is considered prestigious, and where it figures prominently in Argentine soap operas viewed widely throughout Latin America. Despite the rather large number of Guatemalan and Salvadoran refugees in many parts of Mexico, the average Mexican citizen in that country is quite unlikely to encounter *vos*, and most Mexicans are simply unaware of its existence. In U.S. areas such as Houston and Los Angeles, on the other hand, the recent demographic shifts which have brought the Central American into prominence have carried with them increased awarenenss of linguistic differences, foremost among which is this significant pronominal usage. In formal surveys undertaken among Mexican-Americans in Houston, as well as in numerous informal conversations and comments, including jokes and imitations by nightclub comedians, use of *vos* was the first trait associated with Salvadorans, and in a radio commercial by a Mexican-American meat market in Houston which was attempting to expand its clientele to the Salvadoran community, a humorous and exaggerated imitation (by a Mexican-American) of Salvadoran

[3] See Canfield (1961), Lipski (1983b, 1984, 1985, 1987, forthcoming).

[4] For use of *vos* and its ramifications in Latin America in general, and Central America in particular, see Chart (1943), Lipski (1896), Mantica (1973), Páez Urdaneta (1981), and Rona (1967).

Spanish contained an extraordinarily high number of *vos* forms (as well as a stereotyped phonetic accent).

Among Salvadorans in El Salvador, awareness of the status of *vos* vis-à-vis other Latin American nations varies widely. Individuals with some formal education and/or who have traveled outside of Central America are usually aware that *tú* is more frequent in other countries (including Spain, where according to popular stereotypes throughout Latin America, the "purest" Spanish is still spoken), and many upper-class Salvadorans adopt the *tú* as a sign of good breeding. Although some school textbooks and teachers scorn *vos* as vulgar and plebian, all Salvadorans use this form, and uneducated rural and urban residents frequently are not aware of alternative usage in other countries. Once in the United States, Salvadorans become instantly aware of the use of *vos* as an ethnolinguistic identifier of Central American origin, and react accordingly, along a number of dimensions. Progressive intellectuals may tenaciously cling to use of *vos* as a defiant nationalistic impulse, although the most frequent outcome is the incipient formation of a three-way system (already begun in El Salvador for some educated Salvadorans) of *vos* for maximum solidarity among fellow Central Americancs, *tú* for friendship among other Hispanic individuals, and the universal *usted* for respect/social distance. Salvadoran laborers and peasants, on the other hand, are more likely to attempt complete suppression of *vos*, a task which usually proves difficult if not impossible, based on the premise that easy identification as Salvadorans will lead to denunciation by Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, increasing their chances of being picked up in an immigration raid or otherwise discovered. In fact, linguistic mimicry of Mexican-American speech is impossible for most Salvadorans; moreover, physical features alone are frequently sufficient to positively differentiate Salvadorans from natives of most parts of Mexico. On the other hand, it is ironic that U.S. immigration officials, even those from Hispanic backgrounds, make little or no attempt to apply linguistic criteria in the identification of suspected illegal residents, and Salvadorans frequently benefit from stereotypes which group all Latin Americans together linguistically and physiologically. In most instances, Salvadoran residents perceive a greater level of linguistic and cultural sophistication on the part of immigration officials and other area residents than is actually manifested. The only official recognition of these linguistic differences within the United States occurs in training and testing programs for federal court interpreters, where regional differences can lead to distortion or lapses in translation, and where the legal ramifications of incorrect translation are immediately manifest.



## SALVADORANS' USE OF SPANISH LANGUAGE SERVICES

As a group the majority of whose residents enjoy neither legal resident status nor extensive formal education, Salvadorans in the United States make only hesitant and sporadic use of the various services and institutions in Spanish, and the results of this linguistic interaction are only beginning to become defined. In the area of education, only a small number of Salvadoran children are entering the public school systems, of necessity being placed in bilingual classes where these are available. The number of bilingual teachers with any knowledge of Central American vocabulary and grammatical characteristics is miniscule, while the possible results of inadequate teaching materials and teaching personnel will be severe at such time as the Salvadoran population comes to represent a significant proportion of recipients of bilingual education.

In the Houston area, various communications media have attempted to reach the Salvadoran community, with only limited success. While many Salvadorans read one of the several (small, parochially-focused) Spanish language papers published in Houston, most find the coverage of Central American affairs hopelessly inadequate, and lament the total lack of coverage of Central American communities resident in the United States. At the same time, attempts to establish columns dedicated exclusively to Salvadorans and other Central Americans living in Houston have had a disappointing response, as have the various attempts to found a newspaper entirely dedicated to this subset of the Hispanic community. Several Spanish language radio stations have aired periodic programs devoted to the Salvadoran community (which is also an enthusiastic audience for established Mexican music channels), which were apparently well-received but which have invariably disappeared after a time. The possible reasons for this lack of media coverage are many, but all center on the precarious status of most Salvadoran residents, their lack of economic and political power and cohesion, and the significant political overtones of the Salvadoran immigration to the United States. Although

Houston boasts several small Salvadoran restaurants and stores, the majority of Salvadoran residents more frequently patronize businesses with a wider Hispanic clientele, and several businesses which attempted to exclusively attract a Salvadoran clientele were eventually forced to close. Most of Houston's Spanish language news media, in particular the small newspapers, are in the hands of decidedly right-wing business interests, many of them run by Cuban exiles, who view the entire Central American conflict exclusively in terms of the struggle against international communism. These same interests, despite the demographics of Houston, make only token concessions to Mexican-Americans: for example, over 95 percent of the music played on Houston's commercial Spanish language radio stations come from Mexico, with the amount of aired Mexican-American music almost negligible, a situation strikingly at odds with preferences expressed by Houston Hispanic residents in clubs, dances, and concerts.[5] Salvadorans have always been reluctant to openly participate in community meetings, such as those held by church groups, civic action organizations, or openly political movements. The recent revelations of extensive FBI infiltration and subversion of the activities of the largest pro-Salvadoran political group in the United States, CISPES (Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador), suggests that more than unfounded paranoia may be operative.

## Attitudes Toward Mexican-American Spanish

When Salvadorans of all classes were asked if they could understand Mexican Spanish readily, all answered affirmatively, but among the least educated Salvadorans, it was frequently remarked that repetition was often necessary because of differences in vocabulary, including extensive use of Anglicisms in the U.S. setting. In no instances were such problems insurmountable, since most such words fall into the category of household items or job-related terms. While the Nahuatl influence was historically strong in El Salvador as well as in Mexico, time and other intervening factors

[5] Gutiérrez (1976) studies more general aspects of U.S. Spanish-language radio broadcasting, while linguistic characteristics are studied in Lipski (1983a, 1985b).



have created differing vocabularies with respect to may basic concepts.

All the Salvadorans interviewed in Houston were asked to comment on their impression of available services and public media in Spanish, and their own use of the same. Their opinions of Houston's Spanish language popular music radio stations was generally favorable since the programming differs little from that found in Central America, where northern Mexican *ranchera* music is also popular, in combination with raucous DJ deliveries and news reports delivered in high oratorical style and through an echo chamber. When asked to comment on the quality of Spanish used in the public media in Houston, all the Salvadorans stated that it was quite acceptable, although obviously Mexican in flavor. The same opinion was not extended to the spoken Spanish of public employees, since the general impression (not always factually accurate) is that these were Anglo-Americans who had learned only a few words of Spanish, or Hispanic Americans who mix English and Spanish to such an extent that they are nearly unintelligible to Salvadorans. Those Salvadorans with children were adamant in stating that if bilingual education, including an active Spanish component, were to be provided they would object to their children being taught Spanish with such a high proportion of Anglicisms and English grammatical patterns. From an objective standpoint, these statements were often hard to reconcile with the speech of the Salvadorans themselves, since even those who had lived in Houston for only a short time had already assimilated a large quantity of Anglicisms, particularly in work- and government-related domains.

The entire question of Anglicisms and the English influence in Mexican and Mexican-American Spanish is of special relevance in the linguistic acculturation of Salvadorans in the southwestern United States. The situation of the Salvadoran arriving for the first time in the U.S. is somewhat different from that of the Mexican immigrant, since in Mexico, there already exists a series of stereotypes and notions regarding *pochos* and *chicanos*, i.e., Mexican-Americans and Mexican residents in the U.S. who speak Spanish poorly if at all, who may speak English with an unacceptable accent, and who despite attempts to imitate elements of Anglo-American culture, are linguistically, socially, and culturally

rejected by Mexicans and Anglo-Americans alike.[6] Part of the accompanying notion is the idea that all varieties of U.S. Spanish have hopelessly degenerated beyond reasonable recognition, and have become so overladen with Anglicisms as to be unusable in other environments. Mexican-Americans visiting Mexico frequently receive disparaging comments, at times even from relatives, although the opposite comment, of being pleasantly surprised that individuals born and raised in the U.S. can speak Spanish so well, is also frequent. The linguistic reality is much more complex than is implied by stereotypes held in Mexico, since within the U.S., at least four linguistic modalities of Mexican-American speech may be identified, some of which are by definition mutually exclusive in the same speaker, but all of which may be found in typical U.S. Hispanic communities. They are: (1) fully fluent Mexican Spanish, essentially indistinguishable from comparable sociolinguistic varieties in Mexico; (2) fluent Spanish as in (1) but with numerous well-integrated loan translations, of individual words and idiomatic expressions; (3) "code-switching," or use of both Spanish and English within the same sentence, and; (4) vestigial or "semi-speaker" Spanish, containing universally acknowledged grammatical and lexical errors as well as interference from English, and spoken by individuals of Hispanic descent who speak Spanish ony infrequently, only with certain family members, or who spoke the language only in childhood.[7] Mexican immigrants arriving in the U.S., regardless of socioeconomic situation, must align themselves with prevailing linguistic traits of U.S. Hispanic bilingual interaction; most commence adopting Anglicisms from the beginning, at times because such forms are already widely recognized in much of Mexico. There is also a direct although not exceptionless correlation between socioeconomic status in Mexico

[6] Needless to say, these observations often are at odds with linguistic reality, and reflect general attitudes towards U.S. Hispanics which are widely held in other Latin American countries. See Sánchez (1983), Peñalosa (1981), and Lipski (1984b) for some additional ramifications of this situation.

[7] See Sánchez (1983) and Peñalosa (1981) for a view of the linguistic situation from the viewpoint of the Mexican-American community. Lipski (1985c) provides information on code-switching within the same community, including a representative bibliography. The notion of the "semi-speaker" was refined by Dorian (1977); for some applications to groups of Spanish speakers see Lipski (1985d).



and acceptance of nontechnical Anglicisms within the U.S.; professional class Mexicans claim to reject Anglicisms with ready Spanish equivalents, although many use them unconsciously, while lower working class Mexicans rarely have strong opinions on this matter. Among Hispanic communities on both sides of the border, there is considerable ignorance as to the "purity" or "impurity" of the Spanish language, and few Mexicans or Mexican-Americans totally escape the clutches of linguistic ambivalence.

## PARAMETERS OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION

The situation of the working class Salvadoran refugee in the United States is unique in several respects, and leads to a complex series of interlocking linguistic and sociocultural parameters, all of which represent dichotomies with mutually unresolvable endpoints. In each individual and collective case, a choice must be made for each dichotomy, which inevitably implies paradox and ambivalence, and the structural incompatibility of these choices leads to a natural instability, which accounts for the low level of social/linguistic integration of the Salvadoran groups into either Hispanic or Anglophone U.S. Society. The fundamental choices are not of equivalent import in determining the eventual outcome of accomodation within the U.S. society, but rather are hierarchically ordered, defining an implicational grid. We briefly ennumerate the dichotomies and their consequences.

### RETENTION OF HISPANIC IDENTITY

For all but a tiny group of Salvadorans, no effective choice is possible in this dimension, since Hispanic identity is indelibly marked in the combination of Spanish language dominance (little or no functional ability in Enlgish, or at best a strong foreign accent), conscious or unconscious maintenance of Hispanic cultural patterns (food, dress, and grooming, family structure, religious observance, world view, and even such mundane features as manner of walking and standing), and of course general phenotype. Despite the lack of true options in this dimension, many Hispanic residents of the U.S. do attempt complete suppression of Hispanic identity, usually resulting in cultural schizophrenia, frustration, and rejection by both Hispanic and Anglo-American groups. In the case of second- and

third-generation Mexican-Americans, linguistic and cultural identification with prevailing Anglo-American patterns may be possible, although individuals who take this path are at times scorned by the overall Hispanic commuity, and upon eventually discovering impenetrable barriers in Anglo-American society, may discover themselves to be without a true identity. Most Salvadorans are so far from attaining the goal of blending into Anglo-American society that such identification is not even contemplated, but the Salvadoran community is not without those residents who seek, through dress, area of residence, and overall behavioral strategies, to imitate Anglo-American patterns. Inevitably, such individuals either are legal residents of the U.S. or stand a good chance of obtaining legal status.

## RETENTION OF CENTRAL AMERICAN IDENTITY

Although objectively it may be as difficult for a Salvadoran to suppress Salvadoran/Central American identity as to dissimulate Hispanic origin, possibilities for behavioral modification and cultural focus are much wider, as noted in previous sections. Few Salvadorans opt entirely for complete retention or rejection of Central American identity, but rather ramify the level of integration along the various dimensions which characterize identifiable Salvadoran/Central American origin:

(a) use of the familiar pronoun *vos*;
(b) use of recognizable Central American lexical items;
(c) retention of Salvadoran accent, pronunciation of individual sounds and intonational patterns;
(d) patronage of identifiably Salvadoran restaurants and other businesses;
(e) choice of residence in identifiably Salvadoran neighborhoods or apartment complexes;
(f) use of expressions typical of Mexican and Mexican-American speakers;
(g) use of unmodified Anglicisms in Spanish.

Clearly, items (a) and (b), combined with (f) and (g), represent the linguistic features under direct control of individual Salvadorans, and choices in this dimension cover a wide spectrum. In the personal dimension, (d) and (e) are also real choices, although at



times dictated by circumstance; fewer Salvadorans appear to consciously ponder these options. Finally, point (c), elimination of Salvadoran accent, is virtually impossible for most individuals, although awareness of Salvadoran phonetic patterns among Mexicans and Mexican-Americans (to say nothing of Spanish-speaking Anglo-Americans) is usually low enough as to render this dimension insignificant.

## USE OF (SPANISH LANGUAGE) PUBLIC SERVICES

Despite the precarious legal status of most Salvadorans, certain government services are available without a large risk of detection and deportation. The selection of such services, which include bilingual forms and announcements, bilingual personnel in government offices, and adult education programs, becomes even wider when tacit identification with the Mexican-American community is assumed. However, this availability is not automatically reflected in the Salvadorans' use of such services, given the ambivalent status of this community. Naturally, the widest array of Spanish-language services is available within the police and judicial system (court interpreters and court-appointed attorneys, bail bondsmen, police officials), all of which implies infraction of the law and a concomitant situation which will eventually result in detection and deportation of illegal residents. The second largest source of Spanish language services lies within the domain of social work and economic assistance (welfare and food stamp offices, social workers, hospital personnel, and so forth), i.e., a dimension associated with poverty and social marginality. As a result, the stigma and fear associated with openly soliciting or using Spanish language services frequently impedes the expected effectiveness of these services, and may result in self-inflicted deprivation of essential services. The same holds for bilingual education programs, essential for Salvadoran and other Spanish-speaking children, but which are rarely utilized by illegal Salvadoran residents, who frequently keep their children out of school rather than risk detection by registering them. A small group of Salvadorans with sufficient resources utilizes the (enormous number of) private schools and daycare centers in Houston, in some cases as an attempt to avoid exposure as illegal residents. Remaining Spanish language services are largely found within the private sector, among churches and religious organizations,

museums, and many businesses interested in expanding their Hispanic clientele, but these services frequently become lumped with official programs in terms of avoidance by Central American residents.

## Acquisition of Active Competence in English

The Spanish-speaking immigrant to the southwestern United States, particularly to an urban area such as Houston, is faced with a number of options with regard to learning and using English at any level, in a fashion which is not necessarily the complement of retention and use of the Spanish language. Unlike the Hispanic immigrant to other regions of the U.S. or Canada, who must either rapidly acquire a useful command of English or suffer severe marginalization, the Spanish speaker in Houston is able to utilize the default parameter of total reliance on the large Hispanic population for both employment and personal needs and services. This default has traditionally been used by a large number of Mexican immigrants and even first generation Mexican-Americans, and with the expansion of the Houston Hispanic community into small and medium-sized businesses, providing a wide variety of personal and professional services, communications media, politics, law enforcement and the judiciary, the consequences of relying solely on Spanish language environments are becoming less restrictive. While older Mexican immigrants, particularly women not employed outside the home, may consciously opt for this strategy, the majority of recent Mexican immigrants acknowledge the need to learn English and most do so rather rapidly, by a variety of means.

The situation of the Salvadoran immigrant is more complex, given the very nature of Salvadoran immigration to Houston, in most cases motivated by a combination of political pressures and extreme economic necessity. Unlike many Mexican residents, who arrive with the intention of staying in the U.S. for a considerable period of time, or arrive at that decision shortly after arriving, the Salvadoran immigrant continues to be characterized by the desire to stay in the U.S. for the shortest possible time. Traditionally, Salvadoran men have immigrated alone in order to earn money to send back to their families, and there is a large number of Salvadoran women, married, unmarried, and widowed, who have also left behind their families in order to increase their earning



power. The reality of the combined situation in El Salvador and the United States is that return to Central America is ever more illusory, and the future of many Salvadoran immigrants appears headed in the same direction as that of Cubans and many Nicaraguans, albeit without official approval. Despite this changing situation, the need to acquire usable fluency in English has not yet been urgently felt in the Salvadoran community as a whole, given the wide distribution of Spanish speakers and services in Houston.

Another factor influencing the low rate of acquisition of English is the considerable intragroup coherence, not of the entire Houston Salvadoran community, but of smaller groups (of 10-30 individuals) whose immigration and residence histories are intertwined. In such groups, it is not infrequent for one or two members to be quite fluent in English, either through prior training, or through study or other intensive contacts within the U.S. Other group members rely on their English-speaking compatriots for help in such matters as renting apartments, dealing with telephone and utility companies, obtaining employment, and so forth. Once employment has been secured, opportunities for learning and using English vary widely, as does individual motivation. Those Salvadoran women employed in domestic service (the most common form of employment) usually learn a rudimentary form of English, although the author's extensive observation of many such situations has revealed that it is more frequent for one or more household members (most frequently the wife and/or an older child) to learn some Spanish, thus precluding the imperious necessity for learning English. Many individuals who employ Salvadorans as babysitters or housekeepers already have some abilities in the Spanish language; many are teachers, business owners, frequent Latin American travelers, etc., who hire Salvadorans precisely because the group's reputation of knowing little English entails willingness to work for very low wages. Similarly, Salvadoran men who find jobs on construction gangs, in plant nurseries, in car washes, and as busboys in restaurants (all these being among the most common places of employment) normally find themselves working with Mexican immigrants, at least some of whom speak enough English to act as interpreters when required.

Finally, although Houston has a number of courses in English for adult speakers of other languages, many of which are free of charge and available without presenting proof of legal immigrant

status, few Salvadorans of the peasant and lower working class attend these classes. The reasons vary, but include lack of time and energy for study after working, distrust of all official institutions, and in the cases of totally or functionally illiterate peasants, a general attitude of indifference to formal education of any sort.

## CONCLUSIONS

The preceding discussion has illustrated the impossibility of postulating a simple implicational scale which, in the absence of the social conflict described above, would seem to follow logically from the situation of Salvadorans in the United States: retention of Central American identity >> retention of Hispanic identity >> low level of acquisition of English >> use of (official) Spanish language services. In reality the situation is more multifaceted, given the polarities described above, and only a multidimensional analysis gives an adequate portrayal of Salvadorans' linguistic, cultural, and social integration into the urban society of southwestern American cities.

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