

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL REALITY OF LINGUISTIC STRUCTURE

By Viola Waterhouse

1. Introduction.

Language includes both structure and vocabulary. In language learning, it is not sufficient just to learn vocabulary; the basic structure into which the vocabulary fits must also be learned. Many so-called bilingual speakers of Indian languages of Mexico never master the structure of their second language, Spanish, but merely clothe their native language structure with Spanish vocabulary. Others do violence to Spanish structure because of erroneous ideas of what Spanish structure is and of how it differs from their own language.

Where the structure of the Indian language coincides with that of Spanish, there is no interference;¹ where the two structures differ, STRUCTURAL INTERFERENCE is set up. Interference due to erroneous ideas of Spanish structural features is called PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERFERENCE. Both types are found in the Spanish of bilingual speakers of Mexican Indian languages.

2. Structural Interference.

Four types of structural interference are distinguished in Mexican Indian Spanish: phonological, grammatical, syntactic, and lexical.

Phonological interference is seen in a number of Indian areas in the addition of final glottal stop in such forms as (siʔ)^{1a} for *sí* 'yes', and (noʔ) for *no* 'no', or in the pronunciation of the Spanish velar fricative phoneme *j* as (h). Less common is the use of (kw) for *pw* in languages which have labialized *k* (or *kw* cluster) but not labialized *p* or cluster *pw*. In Otomi Spanish² one hears (deskwes) for Spanish *después* 'after', or (el kwente del kweblo) for Spanish *el puente del pueblo* 'the bridge of the town'.

An example of grammatical interference in the Spanish of a Popoloca³ Indian is the use of a form (todomos), nonexistent in standard Spanish, for

¹ Weinreich in his *Languages in Contact* (New York, 1953) defines interference as "Those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language." The term is used in essentially this sense here, with an extension to include types as well as individual instances, but applied exclusively to interference in Spanish from familiarity with an Indian language, rather than to forms or loan words in Indian languages.

^{1a} Indianized Mexican Spanish citations will be in parenthesis, Standard Spanish citations in italics, and English glosses in single quotes.

² All Otomi data are from Henrietta Andrews and Doris Bartholomew of the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

³ Data from Judith Steed, Summer Institute of Linguistics.

todos nosotros 'all of us'. In Popoloca, the word for 'all of us' is formed by adding the first person plural morpheme to the word for 'all', hence the Indian speaker attempted to do the same in Spanish, adding the first person plural **-mos** to the word **todo** 'all'.

A more widespread type of grammatical interference in Indian Spanish is in the realm of gender agreement, since many Indian languages do not have grammatical gender that corresponds to Spanish gender. Sometimes agreement is achieved in the contiguous article but not in the more remote predicate adjective: note Otomi Spanish (*la cosa es bueno, no es mal*) for Spanish **la cosa es buena, no es mala** 'the thing is good; it isn't bad'. Sometimes even the adjacent article does not agree with the noun: as in Otomi Spanish (*tiene un cantina*) for **tiene una cantina** 'he has a saloon', and (*levantar el paredes*) for **levantar la pared**⁴ 'to raise the wall'.

In one case of Chontal Spanish the problem was further complicated by the need to distinguish sex gender as well as grammatical gender. In Chontal, there is only one word for offspring of either sex; the form may also be used for grandchild. A Chontal grandmother, seeking to express "my granddaughter is cute", first achieved correct grammatical agreement but used the masculine forms (*chulo mijo*), then sought to reach the proper sex and produced (*chulo mija*), and finally on the third attempt attained agreement of both types of gender with (*chula mija*).

Syntactic interference is seen in the omission of the third person singular object pronoun in the Spanish of Indians in whose languages third person singular subject or object are not overtly marked. An Otomi woman was heard to say, referring to her small daughter: ("Por eso dejé con mi hermana,") for **Por eso la dejé con mi hermana**, 'for this reason I left (her) with my sister.' Similarly, a Oaxaca Chontal girl, referring to her sick baby said. ("Por eso traje,") for **Por eso lo traje**, 'for this reason I brought (him).'

Syntactic interference is also seen in the omission of prepositions, especially in expressions of motion toward a location. Thus in Chontal Spanish we find (*vamos Huamelula*) for **vamos a Huamelula** 'let's go to Huamelula', and in Otomi Spanish, (*ya no regresé mi trabajo*) for **ya no regresé a mi trabajo** 'I did not return to my work'. The preposition may also be omitted in Indian Spanish expressions of location: (*fui a trabajar la colonia*) for **fui a trabajar en la colonia** 'I went to work in the colony', (*yo vivo mi rancho*) for **yo vivo en mi rancho** 'I live at my ranch'.

The frequent use of Indian intonation patterns rather than typical Spanish intonation may also be considered a type of syntactic interference.

Lexical interference is probably more widespread than we have data for.

⁴ This may involve agreement of both gender and number, but the occurrence of the *s* may also be an example of the psychological interference discussed in Section 4.

In Huichol Spanish⁵ lexical interference is seen in the use of Spanish **abuelo** 'grandfather' also for 'grandson', since the Huichol *teuakári* is a reciprocal term for both 'grandfather' and 'grandson'. In Otomi Spanish, **también** 'also' and **tampoco** 'neither' are used virtually interchangeably, since Otomi has several roughly synonymous particles that are used in corresponding distribution. Probably the Popoloca Spanish⁶ response (*nada*) 'nothing', to the greeting question *¿cómo estás?* 'how are you?' is also analyzable as a case of lexical interference.

3. The Example of Oaxaca Chontal.

All four types of structural interference are found in various forms in the Spanish of the coastal Chontales of Oaxaca.⁷ It appears that the language the Chontales learn first consists of Chontal structure clothed in Spanish vocabulary. Those who go to school then learn the structure appropriate to the Spanish vocabulary. At the proper stage of cultural maturity, adolescents begin to learn the Chontal vocabulary that goes with the first-learned structure.

Phonological interference in Chontal Spanish is relatively minor, since the Chontal phonemic system has ample room for all the Spanish contrasts.⁸ Five types of phonological interference have been noted: (1) The insertion of initial glottal stop in the form (no ʔay) for normal Spanish **no hay** 'there isn't any.' Compare the Chontal equivalent **maa ʔóyya**. (2) The loss of initial *d* in (onde) for Spanish **donde** 'where'.⁹ *d* does not occur word initial in Chontal. As an alternative usage in some words, Spanish initial *d* is preceded in Chontal Spanish by *n*: (*ndos*) for Spanish **dos** 'two'. The loss of initial consonant in forms like (*apá*) for **papá** 'daddy' and (*amá*) for **mamá** 'mama', may be a logical extension from the loss of initial *d*. (3) The insertion of medial *g* in such forms as (*fega*) for Spanish **fea** 'ugly' or (*Romego*) for the proper name **Romeo**. (4) The insertion of *i* or *y* before *ñ* in forms like (*baiña*) for Spanish **baña** 'he bathes', (*maiña*) for Spanish **maña** 'defect, vice', or (*kaiña*) for Spanish **caña** 'sugar cane'.¹⁰ This appears to be due to the frequent occurrence of *ñ* after *i* or *y* in Chontal, although *ñ* is not restricted in Chontal to such occurrence. (5) Vowel elision between words. This is common in Chontal as in *tʔép únci* 'an ant bit him' from *tʔépa* 'bit' plus *úñci* 'ant'. It is

⁵ Data from Joseph and Barbara Grimes, Summer Institute of Linguistics.

⁶ Data from Ann Williams, Summer Institute of Linguistics.

⁷ Their long-standing bilingualism is discussed in my "Learning a Second Language First" (IJAL 15.106-09, 1949), but Chontal Spanish was not treated.

⁸ See Viola Watherhouse and May Morrison, "Chontal Phonemes," (IJAL 16.35-39, 1950).

⁹ Since (onde) is a common rural Spanish form, perhaps it should not be included here, but it is equally possible that in Chontal Spanish it is due to Chontal phonological interference.

¹⁰ This phenomenon is also found in the rural Spanish pronunciation of (*maiñana*) for **mañana** 'tomorrow', but its affecting other words appears to be unknown outside the Chontal area.

found in Chontal Spanish in forms like (fua tray awa) for Spanish **se fué a traer agua** 'she went to get water', and (mija) for Spanish **mi hija** 'my daughter'.

Grammatical interference is seen in (1) the use of the plural possessive, (2) the use of the definitive, (3) the use of the simple imperfect subjunctive for obligation, (4) the expression of repeated action.

In Spanish the possessive adjective agrees in gender and number with the possessed item; in Chontal there is no such agreement. Rather, possession is indicated by prefixes which are singular or plural according to the number of the possessor. Thus, in Chontal Spanish one hears (váyanse a sus casas) for **váyanse a su casa (la de ustedes)**, 'run along to your (pl.) house'; (ont ta sus mamá) for **¿dónde está su mamá?** 'where is your (pl.) mother?', (están haciendo sus téquio) for **están haciendo su téquio** 'they are doing their required town service'.

The Chontal definitive prefix allomorphs el- (before consonants) and l- (before vowels, of which the most frequent in occurrence is a) are obviously almost identical to the Spanish definite articles, masculine el and feminine la.¹¹ In Chontal, forms like (elbaka) 'the cow', (elseñorita) 'the young lady' or (el eskwela) 'the school', are perfectly normal; in Chontal Spanish they occur frequently, but sound strange to ears accustomed to standard Spanish.

In Chontal Spanish, the notion of obligation is expressed by such forms as (me dijeras) for Spanish **me deberías haberlo dicho** 'you should have told me,' or (ay, lo hicieras) for **deberías haberlo hecho** 'you should have done it'. The Chontal counterpart, while not a subjunctive, is a simple form, the incomplete: tkom?asa 'you should have told me', pasem?asa 'you should have done it'.

In Chontal, the repetitive morpheme is used to indicate repetition of action without reference to whether it is performed by the same or a different subject. This is reflected in Chontal Spanish in forms like (murió otra vez) (meaning in standard Spanish 'he died over again') instead of standard Spanish **se murió otra persona** 'another person died'; or (yo fui al puerto y fué otra vez mi hermana) (understood in standard Spanish as 'I went to the port and my sister went again') equivalent to Spanish **fui al puerto y fué también mi hermana** 'I went to the port and my sister went also'.

Syntactic interference arises chiefly from the lack in Chontal of a verb 'to be' paralleling ser or estar of Spanish; hence, many Chontal Spanish sentences consist simply of juxtaposed nouns or of nouns and adjectives: (sabrosa la comida) for Spanish **es sabrosa la comida** 'the meal is tasty', (chulo mijo) for **es chulo mi hijo** 'my son is good looking'. These sentences may also be accompanied by Chontal statement intonation, characterized by high pitch on

¹¹ That the coastal Chontal forms are not borrowed from Spanish is evidenced by the corresponding mountain Chontal forms: gal- corresponding to el-, l- to l-.

the final syllable: (buena gente mi mari'do³) for Spanish *es buena gente mi mari'do*¹ 'my husband is a good man'.

Syntactic interference of the same sort is also found in questions. These are frequently begun with *¿qué?* the Spanish equivalent of Chontal *tes* 'what'. used frequently to introduce Chontal yes-or-no questions. The following conversational exchange in Chontal Spanish was noted between two young people: (Q. *¿que no tu primo Ladis?* A. *Yo ni amá Tacha?*.) This was for normal Spanish *¿No es Ladis tu primo? (No) mi mamá es Tacha.* 'Isn't Ladis your cousin?' 'No, Tacha is my mother'. (i.e., I belong to a different family.) A further type of syntactic interference noted in this conversation is the use of the first person pronoun in the reply where normal Spanish would have a negative. This appears to be direct translation from the corresponding form in Chontal. The same conversation in Chontal would be: Q. *¿tes ja'ni loprimo Ladis?* A. *iya layñaana Tacha?*. Literally, 'what not your-cousin Ladis? I (emphatic position, possibly with overtones of 'on the contrary') my-mother Tacha.'

A similar type of syntactic interference is found in exclamatory comments on things like the weather; one hears in Chontal Spanish (*¡calor!*) or (*¡frío!*) instead of *¡qué calor!* or *¡hace frío!* 'how hot it is!' or 'it's cold!' reflecting Chontal *íñu* 'heat!' or *sit'ya* 'cold!'

Examples of lexical interference in Chontal Spanish have not been collected carefully, but the following may be noted: (*todavía*) for normal Spanish *todavía no* 'not yet', paralleling Chontal *inkoxma?* 'not yet'; (*hermanito*) 'younger brother' (also *hermanita* 'younger sister') in the extended sense of 'the child one is baby-sitting' (whether or not one is related), paralleling Chontal use of *-pepo* 'younger relative'; (*donde*) in the sense of 'to or at the home of' as in (*fué donde Shaba*) for *fué a la casa de Shaba* 'she went to Shaba's house',¹² a direct translation of Chontal *maypa jaape Shaba* 'she-went where Shaba'.

4. Psychological Interference.

Psychological interference has not been observed in Chontal Spanish but is found in Otomi Spanish of the State of Mexico, and to some extent in Popoloca Spanish. In both these tribes, but especially among the Otomies, Spanish has high prestige value but is poorly understood and worse spoken. In both languages there are no word final consonants (except glottal stop in Popoloca). Hence, final *s* is to them a notable characteristic of Spanish phonology, and one achieves good Spanish by a random sprinkling of final *s*'s. But since there is no reaction to the morphemic status of *s* as a plural, nor

¹² This use of *donde* is comparable to the use of *cuando* 'when' is standard Spanish in the sense of 'in the time of' as in: *Esto pasó cuando Maximiliano* 'this happened in the time of Maximilian', but is not a standard usage.

of the agreement of plural nouns and adjectives, the sporadic occurrence of final *s*, added where it does not belong, and often omitted where it does belong, gives a distinctly strange flavor to this type of Indian Spanish. Note the following examples from Popoloca Spanish: (*mis sincero saludo*) for Spanish **mis sinceros saludos** 'my sincere greetings', (*cadás los sábados*) for Spanish **cada sábado**, or **todos los sábados** 'every Saturday', (*le esperamos allá*) for **le esperamos allá** 'we will except you there'.

In Otomi Spanish the most serious distortion afforded by this type of interference is the confusion of **nos** 'we, us' and **no** 'no, not'. Forms like (*tu no has concedido*) 'you have not allowed' instead of **tú nos has concedido** 'you have allowed us', or (*no has guardado*) 'you have not kept' for **nos has guardado** 'you have kept us' are typical. Other examples of Otomi Spanish: (*tu me conoce*) for **tú me conoces** 'you know me', (*yo soy un hombre humanos*) instead of **yo soy un hombre**, or **yo soy un ser humano** 'I am a man, I am a human being'; (*tengo muchos gratitud en todo mis corazón*) for **tengo mucha gratitud en todo mi corazón** 'I have much gratitude in my heart'; (*tu pueblos*) for **tu pueblo** 'your people, your village'; (*lo metieron en la carcel juntamentes con el hermano*) for **lo metieron a la cárcel juntamente con el hermano** 'they put him in jail together with the brother'. In the last example, the *s* is added to the adverb **juntamente** which never has a pluralizer in standard Spanish.

Psychological interference is also seen in the haphazard insertion of prepositions. In Popoloca Spanish the subject may be preceded by a preposition: (*a mi primo Francisco se va casar*) for **mi primo Francisco se va a casar** 'my cousin Francis is going to get married'. In Otomi Spanish the object may be preceded by a preposition: (*le quitaron en su reloj*) 'they took away in his watch' for **le quitaron el reloj** 'they took away his watch'. One preposition may be confused with another as in (*venía en [for con] él su secretario*) 'his secretary came in (instead of with) him,' or (*fuí a ver en la sobrina*) 'I went to see in the niece' for **fuí a ver a mi sobrina** 'I went to see my niece'.

A final type of psychological interference in Otomi Spanish is seen in a preference for the use of *des-* as a prefix in a number of words. In one example, the analogy of **desmayar** 'to faint' appears responsible for the used of (*descansar*) (standard Spanish meaning 'to rest') instead of standard Spanish **cansar** 'to tire' as in the sentence: (*¡cómo no iba a descansar y desmayarme!*) meant to carry the meaning 'why wouldn't I be tired and faint!' Initial *d* is added to **escoger** 'choose' in Otomi Spanish to make the form (*descoger*) (meaning 'unfold' in standard Spanish). A final Otomi Spanish example carries more serious possibilities of misunderstanding: the form **destruido** 'destroyed' used in place of **instruido** 'instructed', as in (*nos ha destruido mucho*) 'he has destroyed us greatly' instead of **nos ha instruido mucho** 'he has taught us much'.

Mexico, D.F.