30 Mockery and Appropriation of Spanish in White spaces: Perceptions of Latinos in the United States[1]

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1 Introduction

In the United States, Spanish often suffers from an identity crisis. To many, the language is familiar, local and homegrown. Centuries after Spanish was first spoken in North American via the colonizing conquests of Ponce De León, its speakers today include United States natives and newly arrived immigrants alike; collectively they make the United States the fifth largest Spanish-speaking country in the world. Yet to others, Spanish is an undesirable "import," its sounds and signs a marker of cultural and social disorder. The use of Spanish in public spaces and forums is often actively monitored by its *non*-speakers: those who identify with the monolingual, English-speaking majority. The visibility of the language itself becomes a proxy for a racialized population that is perceived as threatening, and anti-Spanish sentiment in the United States has been translated into anti-immigrant and English-only legislation. Ironically, studying Spanish (commonly institutionalized as *foreign* language study) is as popular a choice as ever for both second language and heritage learners across all levels. And both in and outside classrooms, Spanish can be a source for mockery and jocular imitation – particularly in public and private spaces where native speakers are notably absent.

This chapter is about the production of Spanish-inspired humor in monolingual English discourse. More specifically, I aim to explicate the proposal that Spanish and Spanish speakers provide an endless repertoire of linguistic (and non-linguistic) resources to be *appropriated* by White[2] speakers and audiences. This act

The Handbook of Hispanic Sociolinguistics, edited by Manuel Díaz-Campos
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of *appropriation* – a "type of theft," a forceful shift in power and access to these resources (Hill 2008) – takes different forms, from overtly racist acts to well-intended gestures of politically correct "with-it-ness," (Zentella 2003) and everything in between. Scholarly discussions of these topics are relatively new, and originate chiefly from the work of linguistic anthropologist Jane Hill, a pioneering scholar of language and racism. I intend to survey the conceptual lineage of her work, from the first appearance of "Junk" and "Anglo Spanish" (1993a, 1993b) through its elaborations, authored by Hill and others (cf. Barrett 2006; Hill 1994, 1998, 2001a, 2005, 2008; Rodríguez González 1995; Schwartz, 2006, 2008; Urciuoli 1996; Zentella, 2003).

2 Everyday mockery and the "symbolic resource": a case of the Chihuahua

To capture the sense of these productions in everyday language, I begin by sharing a few personal observations from a recently concluded research project. In an effort to understand how the aforementioned "identity crisis" might manifest in the lives of students in and outside language classrooms, I recently immersed myself in nine months of undergraduate-level, basic language instruction in Spanish at a large research university in the US Southwest. During this period, I continuously interviewed 11 key participants enrolled in basic Spanish coursework and spent countless hours in these students' classrooms, hoping to capture the context for their interactions and involvement with both a course and a language.

In my field notes, Spanish appeared very tangibly in conventionalized representation, or in Hill's terms, as a *symbolic resource* (1998, 2008, see also Ochs 1996): as cigars, cockfights, flamenco music, Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. Drugs and alcohol made frequent appearances, too. Store-bought chips and salsa were a popular accompaniment to class activities. At one point, I caught a glimpse of a mix CD designed to accompany the portion of curriculum authored by the university's Spanish department, distributed exclusively for instructors' use in teaching grammatical structures (transcripts of some songs were included in the course syllabus). Curiously, tracks included the Gipsy Kings' cover of "Hotel California" and Ricky Martin's popularly lampooned "She Bangs." A few key dialogues, however, captured precisely *how* students engage these symbolic resources to "interact" and "participate" with Spanish.

Several exchanges took place as students enrolled in third semester Spanish concluded the semester with mandatory oral presentations. These presentations, which are also required in the second semester course, require a student to speak entirely in Spanish on a cultural theme somehow connected to a geographical location in Latin America. These are executed independently of notes or outlines, and must be accompanied by a "visual artifact" and an "interactive component." In essence, this culminating assignment is intended to assess a student's abilities to confidently, competently and interactively communicate in Spanish. The prohibition of a written "script" is intended to encourage improvisation and "off-the-cuff"

talk, although I found students attempting earnestly to memorize "their lines" prior to presentations.

A few days before presentations were scheduled to begin, one instructor asked her students to briefly and spontaneously share their topics with the class. One female student responded with an enthusiastic "Chihuahuas!" Later, upon further thought, the same student suggested she might present more generally on "the animals of Spain." The instructor, responding with "I think you're gonna have some trouble finding information on that," was met instead with a jubilant, matter-of-fact "I'll just talk about Chihuahuas."

While this could have been dismissed as a humorous outtake on the part of a student, I recall the instructor responding to the exchange with a hint of reserved disgust. On one hand, Chihuahuas are charismatic, petite animals loved by their share of admirers, this student being one of them (the instructor admitted to owning one of her own). However, it is hard to acknowledge the dog's recent popularity without considering its association with Paris Hilton, Disney's 2008 family comedy *Beverly Hills Chihuahua*, or the wildly popular Taco Bell commercials from the 1990s, the latter especially beloved among the corporation's target audience: its mostly non-Latino, English-speaking customers. Hill argues that the success of these commercials rested on a talking dog's ability to deliver a sales pitch in simplified, and later, *Mock Spanish* (Hill, cf. 1994, 2008): the infamous, Mexican-accented "Yo quiero Taco Bell," quickly made room for more parodic, ungrammatical utterances. The commercials inspired a near-endless production of the Chihuahua as Spanish-speaking commodity. One knock-off found by Hill was a t-shirt "where the Chihuahua, poured into a beer bottle, says, 'I don't want no stinking tacos, aiee! Yehaa!, cerveza!' Mock Spanish 'cerveza' (beer) is firmly established" (Hill 2005: 116).

In short, symbolic resources like Chihuahuas, tacos, and beer span the full range of markets, from a vulgar parodic t-shirt to a language classroom where a student insists on their utility in a "presentation." These objects as symbols are popularly conflated with all that embodies Spanishness and Mexicanness, and the dialogue between the instructor and her student directly indexes this conflation. Furthermore, because Spanish is the language imagined to be spoken by this dog, and the people from where this breed is native, its essence is also (wrongly) associated with Spain as a geographic location. The Chihuahua, ironically, serves as an interesting choice for a cultural presentation, as its popularity – like that of the food item *burrito*, for instance – is almost entirely American in production. Regardless of the student's intent to present the symbol as "cultural content," its association with the Spanish language lends itself to *gringo* convention (a term I will later explore in further detail).

Students drew on plenty of similar symbolic resources during these presentations. Among students presenting on more tropical Latin American countries, discussions of the beach and resort locales often required some sort of nod to alcohol, drunkenness, and at times, scatology. In-class presentations were certainly not the only sites where these "jokes" carried weight (Hill's *The Everyday Language of White Racism* (2008) includes a survey of where and how such parody appears in daily

language and discourse). But, although these conventionalized, symbolic resources seem to carry cultural weight and provide an outlet for humor (although certainly at the expense of Spanish speakers), questions still remain. To use the preceding story as an example, what about her student's excitement with Chihuahuas took the instructor aback? More specifically, what perhaps was unintentionally implied by the student's suggestion to "present" on such a topic? And further, why did this student feel that a formal language classroom was a space to do so? To begin to answer questions such as these, I introduce "indexicality" and "White space" as key terms in understanding the powerful register that Hill (cf. 1998, 2008) has established as "Mock Spanish."

3 The means by which to mock: indexicality and white public space

Early in her work, Hill undertook an exploration of Mock Spanish (at the time she called it "Anglo" or "Junk" Spanish) starting from the idea that Anglo-Americans in the US Southwest do not necessarily "manifest some abstract zero degree of monolingualism. They do use Spanish, but in limited and specialized ways that support a broader project of social and economic domination of Spanish speakers in the region" (Hill 1993a: 147). As her studies indicate (Hill 1994; 1998; 2008), native speakers of English and those identifying with the White majority often actively aid in subordinating non-White, non-English speaking Others. The appropriation of Spanish vocabulary and phraseology into English discourse, for example, not only allows Anglos to reference Spanish as linguistically imperfect and therefore representative of imperfect peoples; it also suggests an elevation of Whiteness and reinforcement of larger patterns of social and economic domination. For example, Hill points specifically to the expression *no problemo* in Mock Spanish to support the claim that monolingual Anglos freely add the suffix *-o* to any English word in order to create a kind of colloquial English. The adding of the Spanish masculine definite article to English nouns (along with an added *-o*) is also a popular means to raise a chuckle in Mock Spanish. *El cheapo and El waleto* (found in my own data) are fine examples of this. The application of such syntax patterns is loose and often downright ridiculous. My in-class observations also revealed a token of one female student telling another, *"Move-o out-o of my way-o."* The phrase associated with the fame/notoriety of the Taco Bell Chihuahua, "Yo quiero Taco Bell," similarly reduces Spanish functionality to an animalistic need for food, in this case. No translation is assumed necessary for the little dog that simply desires his "native" cuisine (i.e. Chihuahuas → Mexico, Mexico → Mexican food: "tacos, Taco Bell," Chihuahuas → comic association with Mexican food). And, certainly the symbolism of a golden retriever or beagle could not activate these same representations. Nor could the utterance be as humorously successful if delivered in English. But why?

Hill explains that Mock Spanish has been long established as a linguistic space for "orderly disorder" (Hill 1998; 2008). This disorder depends on a "distancing"

from Spanish phonology, as well as "utter neglect" of grammatical structures, but the space itself is "orderly" in relation to those who have re-claimed the language for their use. Of course, Hill is referring to largely White, English speaking monolinguals and the power this normalized population can wield over a language pegged as socially subordinate. More specifically, these unmarked cultural norms assign Spanish a "non-serious function" which depends on this inattention to grammatical and phonological detail (Hill 2008: 149). The utterance "Yo quiero Taco Bell" may not qualify as Mock Spanish, but it succeeds as a simplified demand to achieve its same humorous ends. For this, the Chihuahua's cry is a punch line everyone – even the most staunch, conscious supporters of English monolingualism – may enjoy.

The subordination of Spanish in relation to the normative White, monolingual order is a process activated by this sort of language use. Yet such usage still doesn't explain why Spanish and those who speak, or identify with it, is acceptably "non-serious," disorderly, or worthy of such humor in the first place. To answer this question involves understanding *indexicality* as a semiotic process. For any symbolic resources – linguistic or otherwise – to be effective, interlocutors must be aware of what is said and left unsaid. In addition, as Ochs (1990) explains, language often comes in tow with "broad indexical scope" (p. 294), or wide dimension of contexts that make language meaningful. These contexts can be overt and covert (or, obvious and hidden); respectively, this contextualization is known as *direct* and *indirect* indexicality. Both types of indexicality help us to construct and navigate social interactions and social life, including the ways in which we see and make race, define ourselves in relation to others, and position ourselves and others within larger systems of power, privilege and oppression.

To return to an earlier example, "No problemo" presents a fine case for *direct indexicality*. So does the well-worn good-bye "See ya mañana" (see Hill 2005). In the same vein, I've heard "Hasta la pasta" upon various occasions. There are countless others. Because there is an "unmediated relation between one or more linguistic forms and some contextual dimension," these expressions qualify as direct indexes (Ochs 1990: 295). In other terms, something about these phrases might describe "a direct index of the speaker's feelings," (p. 295) or some other experience, activity, or emotion the interlocutors may be sharing. And Ochs would be correct in this case. All three of these seemingly clever (although perhaps not all unique), hybridized quips commonly pepper English discourse, and in so doing, present "speakers as possessing desirable personal qualities" (Hill 1998: 680). In other words, one might say those using these phrases are positioning themselves as hip or linguistically "in fashion." Their choice of words might raise a chuckle, set a casual tone, or end a conversational exchange on a light note. As Hill has found (1995), loyal speakers of Mock Spanish say they use it because they have been exposed to Spanish living in the United States, and these cultural allegiances give license to appropriate the language in an ostensibly cute, harmless way. Of course, Mock Spanish is widely distributed and understood beyond the political and cultural borders that denote localized "Spanish-speaking places."

Internationally released blockbuster films (Hill has credited *Terminator II* as a watershed moment for Mock Spanish in the 1990s), cartoon "classics" (Nericcio 2007 has written extensively on Anglicized Spanish, among other symbolic resources, as instrumental to the "Mexicanization" of Speedy González) and globally distributed corporate advertising indicate the worldwide success of these indexes.

Distance aside, Mock Spanish remains a cultural and communicative discourse which is specifically "American" (United States), monolingual and White in production. This consistency calls for an examination of *indirect indexicality* (Ochs 1990). Unlike their relationship with direct indexes, speakers never acknowledge indirect indexes, and may be unaware of their indexical scope. Consciousness of these indexes requires access to contextual knowledge less obviously related to an immediate "communicative event," (Ochs 1990) as they are linked to features relayed second-hand through an existing direct index. Silverstein (2003) points to this sociolinguistic relationship as "indexical order," a means of connecting "macro-social to the micro-social frames of analysis" (p. 193).

Using Mock Spanish as an example, Hill (2008) guides us through this order of indexical references. She relies on the use of "cerveza" in reference to middle-class White Americans talking about beer drinking:

> Planning a casual hour or two, made more agreeable by inexpensive alcohol, they might say something like "Let's go have a beer." Or "Let's get together for a few cold ones." Or they could say ... "Let's get together and crack a few cervezas."
> The last utterance is in the same register or level of usage as the locution "a few cold ones." It is vaguely euphemistic and slightly humorous. (pp. 41–2)

In the example thus far, Hill indicates that the conversational installment of "cervezas" directly indexes a need for cheap alcohol and relaxation. Yet, the choice of "cervezas" over the non-Spanish "cold ones" is purposeful; it achieves an indirect index that cannot be implicated in English. Hill vocalizes this unspoken dialogue:

> "On this occasion, we will be relaxed about alcohol, rather than careful and responsible and sober like White people." That is, our imagined party planners recruit a small piece of a stereotyped "Mexican" identity to excuse their own relaxation, and in doing so they briefly make available a very ugly stereotype of the "drunken Mexican." Access to the stereotype is probably required in order to participate in the feeling of relaxed sociability that the utterance should produce. (p. 42)

Indirect indexes are key to the operation of Mock Spanish. For instance, in order for "cervezas" to carry weight – to understand its connotations – speakers require access to sort of negative, ugly stereotypes articulated above, whether or not they profess agreement with such stereotypical representations. Other "candidate stereotypes" for Mock Spanish indexicality include representations of Chicanos and Latinos as stupid, politically corrupt, sexually loose, gluttonous, lazy, dirty, and disorderly. It is impossible to "get Mock Spanish – to find these expressions funny

or colloquial or even intelligible – unless one has access to those negative [images and ideas]" (Hill 1995: 5–6).

Furthermore, this access to a particular set of pejorative cultural resources (such as stereotypes and other offensive representations of Spanish speakers; notably Mexicans, in the case of Mock Spanish), implicates Whiteness and English monolingualism as the larger, dominant social order. By proxy, indirect indexicality racializes the Chicano/Latino Other; their "Mexicanness" and association with a disorderly language (not English, for one) marks "them" as racially different. As both Hill (cf. 1993a) and Otero (cf. 2008) have chronicled, Anglos have long held power in making Spanish and Spanish-speaking culture invisible. But Spanish can be made selectively visible for the purposes of Mock Spanish, a register that has always been "organized mainly around its role in the constitution of the 'Mexican' Other. It has been incorporated into English primarily as a form of parody where the 'Mexican' voice is sharply opposed to the English one" (Hill 1993: 153).

These oppositions are accommodated in what Hill later identified as *White public space* (1998). This notion is constructed twofold:

(i) intense monitoring of the speech of racialized populations such as Chicanos, Latinos and African Americans for signs of linguistic disorder
(ii) the invisibility of almost identical signs in the speech of Whites, where language mixing, required for the expression of a highly valued type of colloquial persona, takes several forms (p. 680).

As I mentioned above, Whiteness is consistently indexed as an unquestioned, normalized order in these spaces. Hill relies on the work of Page and Thomas (1994) here, which also characterizes Whiteness as practiced "racializing hegemony" and invisible normalcy, but also points to the appearance of non-White populations in White public spaces as "visibly marginal." The objects of *their* monitoring may range "from individual judgment to Official English legislation" (Hill 1998: 682–683).

In my own research of Spanish language learners – and curricula designed for White, monolingual students – I have found examples of this double standard to be readily available. Identifying and "calling out" Spanglish in these White spaces was one such avenue by which to monitor the speech of imagined, authentic "native speakers" (cf. Train 2007), although students often relished the chance to mix, code switch, and even inject Mock Spanish into their own talk. In an interview, one student even confessed, "as long as you get everything down, the order (of words and grammatical structures) doesn't matter so much." His comment was not unusual. And although students' own definitions of Spanglish varied, the term usually acted as a proxy for the introduction of English lexical, morphological and syntactical features compromising the grammatical purity of a "proper" (and a geographically distant variety of) Spanish as maintained in these textbook-centered foreign language classrooms.

Davis (2000) argues that these public white spaces are defined by ideological, social and cultural "third borders" that "police daily intercourse between two

citizen communities" (p. 71). Where the "first border" is an imaginary line dividing the United States and Mexico as nation-states, and the "second" represents the constellation of INS checkpoints skirting the northern stretches of that geo-political region, the "third borders" are found in daily social and cultural interaction in the United States: "invisible to most Anglos, [the "third border"] slaps Latinos across the face" (p. 71). Unspoken policies and mores of language use are tremendous factors in the organization of these third borders. Years before Davis's work, Hill (1993a) articulated how Anglo and Mock registers relied on such border work, particularly in the Southwest United States (today, of course, this policing is hardly limited to one corner of the country):

> Anglo Spanish today is not the passive result of casual contact in the sort of environment that permits only limited bilingualism ... A durable regional political economy based on racial hierarchy ... requires Anglos to produce and reproduce the subordination of Spanish-Speaking and Native American populations who have a prior claim to the resources of the region. Anglo uses of Spanish are strategic, constituting an important symbolic component of a broader project through which Anglos have reduced the... Hispanic community, in both cultural and economic domains, to a profound marginality from which recovery is only just beginning.
> (Hill 1993a: 147)

With respect to Anglo (Mock) Spanish, I should note that White space cannot be defined independently of the aforementioned "racial hierarchy," as it "requires Anglos to produce and reproduce" the oppression and subordination of local Spanish-speaking populations. Yet, this (re)production of power, particularly as inscribed by and through the language practice (Ochs 1990) of monolingual English speakers, is often performed unconsciously, and as Hill has explained, *covertly*. Challenging Whites on their use of mock registers almost always invites defensive reactions. To re-consider Hill's "cervezas" narrative (2008), it may be painfully difficult for one to admit that his/her choice in lexical taste has indeed indexed pejorative stereotypes of a defenseless, Mexican Other. Confronting the idea that one has actively reproduced racist discourse through unchecked "everyday" language is to reconcile one's place and privilege in a larger social and racial order.

3.1 *Mock Spanish as "covert racist discourse"*

To sum up, Mock Spanish may employ up to four indexical strategies at once. These include (Hill 1998: 682–683, as cited in Barrett 2006: 164):

(1) Semantic pejoration of Spanish words – the use of positive or neutral Spanish words in humorous or negative contexts (e.g. *nada* to mean "less than nothing" *peso* to convey "cheap")
(2) Mock Spanish euphemism – the use of obscene or scatological Spanish words in place of English equivalents (e.g. the use of *cojones*)

(3) The use of Spanish grammatical elements – the addition of the "Spanish" suffix *+o* to nouns and the use of the definite article *el* (e.g. *el cheapo*)

(4) Hyperanglicization – parodic pronunciations and orthographic representations that reflect an exaggerated English phonology (e.g. *Fleas Navidad* on a Christmas card).

As Hill has established (2001b), these linguistic practices are regularly normalized in their appropriation for White audiences. And yet, as scholarship in linguistic appropriation argues, "Contemporary racist culture ... is reproduced especially through practices which are never condemned as racist – practices which appear (at least to many Whites) to constitute mere common sense" (Hill 2001b: 246). Mock Spanish functions as an intentional source of humor (most speakers are well aware that the mock register is incorrect), but it is never challenged in conversation as racist discourse. It indexes negative and racist stereotypes of Spanish-speaking people *covertly;* the humor itself centrally relies on the unspoken nature of its implicit message. Intended for and consumed by monolingual, English-speaking white audiences, Mock Spanish generally requires no qualification, as common in other racist talk (for instance, the phrase "I'm not a racist but...," often found preceding otherwise offensive statements, aims to soften the blow for those listening to the talk that follows. This qualification (cf. van Dijk 1993) aims to lessen the risk for the user to come off as an inherent racist – an ultimate disaster for any socially conscious White person in post-civil rights "America." And as Hill has mentioned, one would be pressed to hear Mock Spanish delivered in the key of "I'm not a racist, but that sofa's gonna cost us mucho dinero."

In his recent study of languages in contact at an Anglo-owned Mexican restaurant, Barrett (2006) documents how monolingual English-speaking employees and managers draw upon Mock Spanish to create social alignment. This is achieved "by performatively entailing social contexts that place [Spanish-speaking employees] from dominating groups in positions of relative power" (p. 169). As a participant observer at "Chalupatown," Barrett explains that even though Anglos used Mock Spanish to invoke an "Anglo social identity and affect" (2006: 169), monolingual Spanish *listeners* do not (necessarily) perceive it the same way. For them, the

> "disorderly" use of Spanish is typically interpreted as an inability or unwillingness to speak Spanish. In such interactions, Anglo speakers disregard the referential function of Spanish in favor of the metalingual and emotive functions associated with Mock Spanish as a marker of Anglo identity. (Barrett 2006: 169–170)

The Mock register is perhaps the most widely commodified form of racialized, disorderly Spanish, although there are many others. Hill (1993a) prefaces her discussion of Mock Spanish by chronicling the use of "Cowboy" and "Nouvelle" Spanish, the former a historically lexical form of reclamation of non-White cultural novelties in the Southwest (Hill specifies highly anglicized vocabulary for geographical, architectural, and justice-related purposes, among others,

i.e. *mezquita, adobe, vigilante*). Nouvelle Spanish, a regionalized Anglo Spanish, indexes the Southwest as inherently harmonious in its linguistic and ethnic diversity. This symbolism for regional allegiance is reflected in exotic-sounding street names, for instance, where "translation meaning often seems to be secondary to an elegant Spanish sound" (Hill 1993a: 159). While Hill uses the Tucson foothills as site for these examples, streets in my childhood Los Angeles suburb followed suit, as well. Nearby cul-de-sacs doubled as Maleza ("Shrub/undergrowth/weeds") Place, Via Apuesta (Castilian "bet/wager" or perhaps the more sensible adjective "of nice appearance or disposition"[3]), Triste (adjective "sad/gloomy/dreary") Place and the syntactically vague Trancas (plural noun "beams/bars," present indicative verb, second-person singular "(you) barricade/block") Place.

My own research of "Domestic," or "Household" Spanish (Schwartz 2006), revealed a register dependant on Anglo/Mock features that indexed Spanish-speaking employees as passive, silent recipients of unidirectional commands. While Barrett's study (2006) locates the same indexes in less private settings ("Household Spanish" relies on handbooks to convey easy-to-learn directives and choice vocabulary for "communicating" with housekeepers and gardeners), both sets of interactions actively ignored the need to produce "grammatical (or even understandable forms)" (p. 163). As Spanish-speaking employees may struggle to decipher their employer's poorly constructed requests, the power relations in place have dumped this communicative responsibility upon them. Meanwhile, the Spanish-speaking other is effectively marginalized as child-like and slow, unable to understand his/her native language. Barrett adds, "The Anglo use of Mock Spanish to index a particular Anglo ethnic stance (or, I might add, social distancing) diminishes the ability for Spanish to serve a communicative function" (2006: 164, parentheses my own). Domestic Spanish fulfills this same function, since Spanish is taught in narrow contexts for purposes of ordering about household help, so that dirty work gets done – and done correctly.

Independent scholar and journalist Gustavo Arellano, the columnist of the very popular serialized weekly *¡Ask a Mexican!* (archived at http://www.ocweekly.com/columns/view/32466) explained the success of Mock Spanish in conversational (and even more socially elevated) English discourse. Arellano offered the quip "Spanish is a language so easy, even Mexicans can speak it" as referential of a widely circulated assumption among even the most well-intended Anglos needing to "pick up" a bit of the language (Arellano, personal communication). In other words, because stereotypes of Mexicans and Spanish-speaking immigrants so readily reflect these Others as stupid and simple-minded, the language "They" speak is assumed as stupidly simple to acquire. Hence, the allure of Spanish mockery, Domestic Spanish, and other varieties/registers persists.

Racist discourses certainly fall on a spectrum of covert-ness. Barrett's work exhibits highly racist practices (although as I explore later, those participating would likely deny these as such) as he shows how symbolic resources actually uphold such a state of racial order at "Chalupatown," for the sale of Anglo-appropriated Mexican cuisine. Mockery is employed via linguistic means to reinforce racial inequality in order to maintain a working social order. And, the

same techniques are employed outside Mock Spanish, in other cultural forms by which White public space establishes normalcy and order.

3.2 "Gringoism" as a larger framework for mockery and appropriation[4]

Barrett confirms the often-racializing functions of Anglo appropriation of Spanish vocabulary and phraseology. And, as Spanish becomes "an iconic marker of Latino ethnic identity" in the United States (Barrett 2006: 165, citing Urciuoli 1996), the presence of Spanish in any context among Anglo interlocutors "(even grossly distorted or obscene Spanish) indexes an acknowledgement of ... racial difference in an interaction" (Barrett 2006: 165). Hence, the appropriation of Spanish into dominant (and as Hill has indicated, *popularized*) English discourses is directly related to *being* white and thereby performing Whiteness in spaces where Spanish is spoken.

To advance Hill's (2008) arguments of linguistic appropriation as a social practice to maintain cultural order, Barrett's examples of making sense of a linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic variety of Spanish reflect a covert "possessive investment in Whiteness" (Lipsitz 1998). According to Andersen (2003), three central themes inspire the studies of *Whiteness*. The first encompasses the aforementioned idea that whiteness acts as an invisible, unspoken proxy for normalcy. The second posits that *White privilege* involves unconsciously benefiting from the advantages of normalized, institutionalized social organization (cf. Lipsitz 1998). The third theme exposes race – and therefore whiteness – as an imagined, social construction. That is, "race is not 'real' but stems from (its role as an organizer in) social relations; therefore, whiteness has constructed 'others' while also constructing itself" (Andersen 2003: 26).

These notions of privilege and Whiteness attach to the racializing dynamics of Hill's (1998) White public space. My own work (Schwartz 2008) examines the enactment and performance of a White, monolingual (un)consciousness, which I call *Gringoism*. Its most obvious manifestation, and the phenomena for which the term is coined, lies in the re-appropriation by Anglos of the term *gringo*. Despite uncertain etymological origins, *gringo* is historically couched in anti-Anglo discourse. Yet this term involves more than terminological conquest.

I should be clear that Gringoism is a larger framework in which Mock Spanish finds its place. Like Hill (2008), I have argued that a denial of White racism facilitates Anglo audiences to re-appropriate or reclaim *gringo* as a term not necessarily of empowerment, but one of in-group-by-virtue-of-out-group membership. Yet a *re*-appropriation of the term secures a solidarity among those not only identifying as privileged monolingual Anglos, but more importantly, those taking mutual comfort and *pride* in their inability to speak Spanish.

As in Mock Spanish, an active distancing takes place between *authentic* Spanish and its gringo appropriation, a distinction that solidifies boundaries between White and non-White public space. The need for Anglos to actively reclaim positions of power and elevate Whiteness as symbolic of linguistic and cultural order (see also Otero 2008), therefore, strategically plays out in exercises like the creation of literature on Domestic Spanish (Schwartz 2006). And as per Anglo or Junk Spanish (Hill 1994), this reclamation by Anglo monolinguals of the Spanish language itself is indeed a fashionable act – there is something oddly chic and cool about embracing the stereotype of ignorant gringo. In an opposite twist to what Vélez-Ibáñez points to as the "fetishized commodity identity" of Mexicans (1992, as cited in Hill 1994; see also Vélez-Ibáñez 1996), this "something" might well serve as a commodification of self-identifying as gringo.

I often question if the Spanish foreign language classroom, for instance, can indeed be considered a bona fide Gringo space. Irvine and Gal's notion of fractal recursivity (2000) implies a semiotic process in which speakers construct and perform ideological representations of linguistic differences. In the case of formalized Spanish language education, it might be argued that Anglos and those identifying with the White majority are 'interacting' with Spanish through available discursive channels (textbooks written for an Anglo, middle class, monolingual majority, videos, instructors, each other) in order to once again "support a broader project of social and economic domination of Spanish speakers" (Hill 1993: 147).

In measuring recursivity in Gringo spaces, through language and cultural practice, conventionalized representations of Spanish speakers deserve attention once again. I stress that *conventionalized* serves as a key qualifier, as cultural conventions are generally set by gringo authorities (i.e. language texts) and co-constructed by gringo audiences who rely on symbols to commodify and "understand" a language and the people imagined to natively speak it.

Conventionalized representations and symbolic resources are essential to selling "Spanish-speaking culture" to White, monolingual English speaking audiences. White audiences are directed to exploit these conventions through guidebooks (Schwartz 2006; 2008) to sites where they may loosely experiment with Spanish: the Mexican beach resort, a cookbook of "Gringo-Mex" cuisine (subtitled "Mexican cooking for the American kitchen"), the Mexican-themed party (perhaps adjacent to the aforementioned kitchen), and so on. Other Gringoisms may be completely Spanish-free in their content, such as one token I encountered on a recent trip to Orlando, Florida. While visiting Winter Park, a wealthy white, brick-paved suburb, home to numerous celebrities and the prestigious Rollins College, I passed by "P.R.'s Taco Palace," a Mexican restaurant whose motto underlined its marquee. Flanked by décor evoking a beachside cantina, it read, "Don't drink the water!" Unfortunately, the restaurant was closed as I passed by in the morning; if its airbrushed exterior was any indication, I imagined its dining space a treasure trove of symbolic resources indexing tourist-inspired "Mexicanness."

Out of its linguistic and cultural context (in English, welcoming White patrons of a Mexican restaurant in Winter Park), this motto would be pointless; its indexicality non-functional. Casual Mexican dining succeeds in a space where customers can imagine – or perhaps lightheartedly "re-live" – a visit to a Cancún resort, or a carefree jaunt on an Acapulco beach. "Don't drink the water!" has endured as timeless words of caution for these US natives heading southbound, securing a

hygienic, safe Gringo stance from perceptions of filth and bodily disorder, marked as inherent to a nation and its people. For Gringos, the careless consumption of unclean water (the effects of which can be nightmarish to anyone, anywhere) is a symbolic resource humorously associated with the Mexican vacation. The restaurant's motto is not meant to scare passersby, but instead, it indexes a scatological, Gringo-friendly joke that signals "P.R.'s" as a safe, fun and "with-it" White space to enjoy tacos and related cuisine. I imagine the "Water!" exclamation functions extraordinarily well, and regularly earns hearty laughs. I am certain, however, that such mockery is much less appreciated by Mexicans, or perhaps the restaurant's employees who may well be Spanish-speaking. Here their voices are effectively erased and their humanness disempowered, which precisely supports the motto's success as a Gringo performance (Schwartz 2008). And, I have no doubt "Chalupatown" (Barrett 2006) offers very similar cultural comforts in its reliance on similar resources.

3.3 *Just joking: Denying racism in defense of "harmless fun"*

As mentioned previously, "calling out" of Mock Spanish or Gringoism can invite trouble. Exposing one's privilege in relation to a greater social and linguistic order often will put Anglos in a position to deny any wrongdoing. Associating one's admiration for a Chihuahua as engagement in racist behavior is a difficult connection for many to consider logical. In fact, Barrett (2006) argues that because Mock Spanish has been so widely circulated and embedded into English discourse, it "may be better understood as an example of appropriation and not generally a form of overt mocking" (p. 165). He compares the borrowing and appropriation of African American (AAE) vernacular into standard English as similar to the process by which Spanish has been utilized, and at times, de-racialized:

> Hill notes that Mock Spanish may be used in discourse unrelated to race and in speech to apparent Spanish speakers (1998: 684). ... Mock Spanish patterns more like AAE crossover in that its context-of-occurrence is largely unrestricted. For example, white speakers may just as well say *Whassup?* to an apparent speaker of AAE as they would say *¿Que pasa?* to an apparent speaker of Spanish. (Barrett 2006: 166)

In addition, as both Barrett and Hill have claimed, many Whites often "interpret the use of any Spanish *at all* as an index of egalitarian attitudes toward Latinos and, by extension, general sympathy with minority groups" (Barrett 2006: 165, emphasis my own). In this key, Spanish produced by Anglos is hardly a mocking performance, and by no means an intentional assertion of power or racial order through linguistic appropriation. Of course, just as may be the case for the receivers of AAE appropriations, these "open-minded" gestures may not be interpreted as such by native Spanish speakers. Ferguson's work on "foreigner talk" (cf. 1981) applies here. In his/her exchanges with the racialized Other, often even the most

well intended speaker of an appropriated variety speaks with exaggerated pronunciation and facial features and in heightened volume.

Yet as discussed, mockery and appropriations of Spanish are predominant in discourses about US Latinos. And, as Urciuoli (1996) has identified, perceptions of ethnicity, race, and social class are regularly conflated with these discourses. Thus, a great deal is at stake when a scrawny, "Spanish-speaking" Chihuahua is called upon to speak in the interests of penny-pinching Mexican fast food – as opposed to, perhaps, Smokey the Bear or Mickey Mouse.

While many are quick to dismiss these symbolic resources as irrelevant silliness, "only a joke" or "harmless fun," Santa Ana (2009) assessed the severity of lighthearted mockery in a venue hardly criticized as racially tenuous: late night comedy shows. In specific critique of a series of episodes from Jay Leno's *Tonight Show* during nationwide Latino immigrant demonstrations and walkouts of 2006, Santa Ana demonstrates how mockery was used as an instrument to establish distance from (and divisiveness with) criminalized, immigrant populations. In so doing, Leno's humor relied on the racialization of Spanish speakers to provide the butt of the joke and define a social boundary. In this light, this joking serves as a powerful strategy in establishing his audience as a hegemonic "in-group," cohesive in their social and political orientations. But,

> it also contributes to in-group versus out-group boundary maintenance by making it safe to explore the nature and limits of the boundaries. Poking fun at the out-group is comfortable and entertaining when the out-group members are safely out of range. (Holmes and Marra 2002: 395 as cited in Santa Ana 2009: 30)

Like gringoisms and other performances of mockery, humor becomes evidence of social identity and (co-membership), "because the laughing audience simultaneously confers a social reality to itself'" (Santa Ana 2009: 40). Social hierarchies and power differentials re-inscribe in seemingly the least harmless of spaces, and "when the out-group members are safely out of range," the limits of jocular, racializing talk can evade being contested as more than "just a joke."

Similarly, Hill (see 2007: 284) has defended lingering accusations that her analysis of Mock Spanish is humorless and/or hypersensitive. And a few Latinos, like columnist Arellano, are regularly attacked in their attempts to undo the various gringo appropriations, such that symbolic resources are redirected to empower those from whom they were originally stolen. Arellano freely calls on Mock Spanish, Spanglish and entirely new lexical/syntactical inventions with the intent to "mock the mocking..." and "talk back" to the often unchecked practices of satirizing Spanish (Arellano, personal communication). In a column from late 2007, Arellano fielded a question regarding one ever-persistent symbolic resource, which asked if a Chihuahua could fairly represent its stereotypes: "a nation of macho men and feisty women." His response included,

> Chihuahuas are ... quintessentially Mexican: Napoleonic in complex, clannish, usually brown but available in all colors, maligned by *gabachos* as puny runts but

secretly ferocious and smart, and bearers of *muchos, muchos* babies. Some p.c. *pendejos* might cringe at the comparison, but hey: better the anthropomorphic conversation deal with dogs than with cockroaches, *qué no?* (Arellano 2007b)

In this response, like so much of his commentary (see Arellano 2007a), Arellano rides completely on vulgar stereotypes and imagery to lampoon ignorant, public assumption. In many ways, it works, and a massive readership might confirm that national audiences are paying attention. Assuming that most of his readers have access to portraiture of Mexicans as highly fertile, foul-mouthed, and clan-like (see above), his bilingual discourse may effectively undercut power as assumed through the traditional indexical order. A substitution of *gabacho* for the less profane and more Americanized *gringo* reinforces this sharp authoritative stance.

Of course, differentials persist, even when the subversion of such a power structure seems attainable for Latinos who feel culturally and linguistically disenfranchised (if not hijacked by systems of appropriation) under a greater monolingual order. I therefore close in expression of solidarity with Ana Celia Zentella's concern, as she wonders if there can ever be a means to "escape the strangle-hold imposed by white public space." For now,

> *Me explico.* If we try to resist by not apologizing for – or not trying to change – our accents, or refuse to restrict our use of Spanish, or eliminate the other ways of speaking that the dominant society judges as disorderly, we end up entrenching damaging evaluations of us as dangerous and in need of control. On the other hand, the more we force ourselves to function within the limited linguistic space allotted to us – no accent, no switching, watching our ps and qs – or thetas (θ) and ss – the more we confirm the notion that linguistic purity and compartmentalization are valid objectives and achievable goals, if only we Latin@s tried hard enough. And, consequently, we distance ourselves from those members of our communities, particularly immigrants, who cannot perform as if a bilingual were two monolinguals stuck at the neck, that is, with one tongue in control of two inviolably separate systems. Is there really no way out?" (Zentella 2003: 53)

Questions for discussion

(i) What is indexicality, and what is White public space? Why are these two terms essential to understanding the mocking of Spanish in monolingual English discourse?

(ii) Given the present discussion, how does appropriation differ from linguistic borrowing?

(iii) Why might Mock Spanish or other appropriated forms rarely be challenged as racist discourse, yet daily conversation in monolingual English is often aggressively qualified in order to avoid being perceived as such? (See previous discussion of van Dijk's (1993) marker "I'm not a racist but …")

(iv) Take a second look at Zentella's profound assessment of the "strangle-hold" imposed upon Latinos by White public space. Could Arellano's journalism be an example of the successful subversion of this strangle-hold? How and/or how not?

NOTES

1 This chapter – not to mention my commitment to the study of its topics – has benefited tremendously from the wisdom, generosity, and scholarly advice of Jane Hill. With each read and re-read, her work never ceases to inspire. I am grateful to have this chance to represent her scholarship. In addition, I am indebted to the wisdom of my friend, colleague, and fellow educator, Brendan O'Connor.

2 As is common in identifying the unmarked, European-American majority in the United States, I hereafter use "White" and "Anglo" interchangeably. However, as I have shown previously (Schwartz 2008), "White" remains a vague denotation of origin, particularly by the United States Census Bureau, and the label can be (and is) highly contested by Latinos and non-Latinos alike.

3 I want to thank Ana Sánchez-Múñoz for suggesting the latter definition.

4 Portions of this sub-chapter appeared as early drafts from Schwartz (2008).

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