

Analysis Paper 1

Tom Haverford

1. Introduction

I am originally from the southern USA, but I did move around a lot as a kid. I grew up speaking only English, although I was exposed to foreign languages quite a bit sometimes. Both of my parents are monolingual speakers of English. They are bidialectal in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and in Standard English. When I was about 7, German was introduced in my school as a foreign language. We learned songs, games, and some very basic words and phrases like greetings, numbers, and how to tell time, etc. When I was in high school I took three years of Spanish and then I took some Spanish classes in college. In high school, the focus was on learning to use the language in real world situations. Most of those classes were in English, but we also had to memorize lots of verbal inflections and we were frequently tested. In college, most of my Spanish classes focused on literature. So, we read lots of short stories and some short novels. I was also exposed to very literary language and most of my Spanish classes were in Spanish. I have also lived in Central America and I have since been exposed to lots of colloquial Spanish. While in college, I also studied a bit of ancient Greek. These classes were completely different from my Spanish experience. Because this language is not spoken anymore, we didn't study greetings or useful expressions like "Where is the bathroom?". And we learned the sounds of the language and the alphabet so we could read, but there was not much attention paid to precise pronunciation. The goal of the class was to get students ready to read classics in Greek. So the focus was on memorizing the many many inflections on verbs and nouns and unpacking very complicated sentences. Since that time, I have traveled and learned a little French and Italian to get around. Since I have a background in Spanish, I found these relatively "easy" use, although the sounds are quite different, especially French.

2. Slang

I do not keep up on the latest trends, but I am aware of some current slang terms. Here are three.

salty-I heard this a couple of years ago. To me, “salty” means that a person is annoyed or somewhat angry. If you say that someone is “salty”, it implies that perhaps they are overreacting or they are annoyed about something trivial.

ghost- To “ghost” someone means that you cut off all digital contact with someone without warning. My impression is that this is usually used when talking about a romantic relationship.

lit-If something is “lit”, it means that it’s awesome, exciting, and fun. You can say, “That poetry slam was lit.”, if you go to a poetry slam and it’s super cool.

There are also slang words or expressions that I can think of that we no longer use. Here are a three:

Groovy-To me, this is a word from the 1960s. It means “cool, nice, good”. So you can say, “The pour over coffees are groovy at the Coffee Commissary on Fairfax.” People still do use this word sometimes, but if the person saying it is under 60, I have the feeling that they are being ironic.

Have a cow-This usually means that someone got unnecessarily or dramatically upset, or the person got disproportionately upset. You could say, for example, “My dad had a cow when I told him that UCLA doesn’t let us off for Arbor Day.” Arbor Day is real, but it’s not really a holiday and people don’t really celebrate it. In fact, most people don’t know what day it falls on (the last Friday of April). So it would be ridiculous to get upset about it.

Give someone a knuckle sandwich- This expression refers to hitting someone with your fist. (“The guy was being such a jerk, I gave him a knuckle sandwich.”) This sounds very old fashioned and I would only use it if I were trying to sound funny.

Dialect

I think that my dialect more or less has the same sounds as Standard English. One way that my native dialect is different from Standard English in terms of sound is that while my dialect has both [ɛ] and [ɪ], they don't pattern the same in the dialects. Specifically, in my dialect the sound [ɛ] cannot occur immediately preceding a nasal sound. For example, in Standard English, there are two words, [tɛn] 'ten' and [tɪn] 'tin', that are pronounced distinctly. In my dialect both 'ten' and 'tin' are pronounced as [tɪn]. The same goes for [pɛn] 'pen' and [pɪn] 'pin' in Standard English, which are both pronounced as [pɪn] in my dialect. Ditto for a word like 'lemon', which is pronounced as [lɪmɪn] in my dialect, but [lɛmən] in the standard language.

There are some words that are used in my native dialect, that are definitely not used in Standard English. For example, we really do use the word *y'all* to mean "you plural". I also grew up using the word *ain't*. In school we were taught that using *ain't* was wrong and at the same time, that it wasn't a real word. I am not sure how dialect-y it is, but we also use words like *reckon* to mean "think, determine, surmise".

A third difference between the two dialects is that mine allows you to put multiple auxiliary verbs into a single sentence in a way that is impossible in Standard American English. In Standard English, you can say, "I **have been** working", with more than one auxiliary verb. But, I can say things like, "I **may can** go tomorrow" and "She **might should** have done the reading". (I looked online for similar sentences and I think that these are called "double modals".)

Comparison of Sounds

I have studied Spanish as a second language. (I looked at my Spanish textbook to write this section.) Among the sounds of Spanish that do not exist in English are **voiceless velar fricative** and **voiced bilabial fricative**. In IPA, the voiceless velar fricative is [x] and the voiced bilabial

fricative is [χ]. In IPA, the voiceless velar fricative is [χ] and the voiced bilabial fricative is [β]. In the Spanish writing system, [χ] is written as “j” and [β] is written as “b” and sometimes as “v”.

The letter “b” in Spanish is used to represent two sounds: [β] and [b]. The letter “v” is also used to represent two sounds [b] and [β]. Some sample words with these sounds are:

[xalapeño] ‘jalapeno pepper’, ‘from (the city of) Jalapa, Mexico’	[beβer] ‘to drink’
[xamon] ‘ham’	[uβa] ‘grape’
[axedres] ‘chess’	[aβentura] ‘adventure’

The voiceless velar fricative is made by raising the back of the tongue to the velum, as if to make the sound [k], but not completely cutting off the flow of air. The result of this not-quite complete constriction produces the voiceless velar fricative. The voiced bilabial fricative is made by closing the lips, as if to make the sound [m], but not actually stopping the flow of air completely.

Native speakers of English usually have a hard time with [χ] and [β], although they may not know it! Oftentimes, English speakers pronounce [χ] as [h]. These do sound kind of close to English speakers, but they are distinguishable. In my experience, English speakers pronounce [β] as [v] or [b]. So, in a word like *beβer* ‘to drink’ (see above), the underlined letter “b”, is pronounced as [b], whereas native Spanish speakers would have [β]. In all fairness, most native speakers of Spanish are also unaware that there is a difference between [b] and [β]. (I talked to my TA about this.) However, they know when to use one sound or the other. It’s their knowledge of language!

Conclusion

In writing this paper, I realize that there are lots of slang words that I can think of that people no longer use seriously. Also, I see now that there are a number of differences between my dialect

and Standard English. These do not interfere with communication, but they do make the dialects different. Now that I'm taking a linguistics course, I realize that the sounds of Spanish are much more complicated than I was taught in school.