

SABINE RIVER SPANISH:

VESTIGIAL 18TH CENTURY MEXICAN SPANISH IN TEXAS AND LOUISIANA

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1. Introduction: Sabine River Spanish. In addition to the major Spanish-speaking groups in the United States (of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban and Central American origin), and smaller groups found in major cities (e.g. Dominicans and Colombians in New York, Hondurans in New Orleans), there exist a number of isolated groups whose use of the Spanish language has virtually no interaction with the remainder of the country's Spanish speakers. Sephardic Spanish immediately comes to mind, not only in large cities such as New York and Seattle, but also in smaller communities. Another interesting group, whose use of Spanish is now nearing extinction, is the *isleños* of St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana, descended from Canary Island settlers who arrived in then Spanish Louisiana towards the end of the 18th century.¹ Tampa Spanish, representing a blend of Cuban and Peninsular Spanish dialects which arrived on American soil only a few decades after the *isleños*, has now been overpowered by recent Cuban arrivals, as has the 19th century Cuban dialect of Key West.² A further group still remains, completely unknown outside of the immediate area in which they reside, and whose linguistic characteristics are only now being explored. These speakers are found on either side of the Sabine River, in northwestern Louisiana (Sabine and Natchitoches Parishes) and in northeastern Texas (Nacogdoches County), and their Spanish dialect stands in contrast both to the *isleño* dialect and to those now current in other parts of Texas, although related typologically to the latter.³ The present note will describe the salient characteristics of the Sabine River Spanish dialect, and will attempt to situate this speech community in a wider dialectological perspective.

The majority of the Spanish speakers in question are found in northwestern Louisiana, in and around the towns of Zwolle and Noble (Sabine Parish) and in the Spanish Lake community near Robeline (Natchitoches Parish), and in Texas, in the Moral community just to the west of Nacogdoches; it is possible that other vestigial speakers are found closer to the Louisiana border, in San Agustine County. Even more so than with the *isleños*, the Spanish language has nearly died out along the Sabine River; the total number of individuals with significant active competence in Spanish is probably no greater than 50 on each side of the state border, with perhaps only half being truly fluent.⁴ Apparently a larger number have some passive competence in Spanish, recognizing words and phrases, but are neither able to sustain a conversation nor even grasp the entirety of spoken

Spanish sentences, thus placing them below the level of the 'semi-speaker.'⁶ All Spanish speakers are among the oldest community residents; the youngest speakers are in their 60's, although a few younger individuals have some Spanish language abilities, while the oldest are over 100. As with the *isleños* the Spanish language died out along the Sabine River in the course of little more than a single generation, largely for the same reasons.

The Sabine River Spanish speakers in Louisiana have traditionally had an extremely simple lifestyle, raising and hunting animals, cutting timber and to a lesser extent growing cotton. Even today, many of the oldest community members still live in log houses, raise animals and maintain truck gardens, and most heat and cook only with wood. Some younger community residents have achieved relative prosperity by local standards, but many of the oldest residents qualify for federal assistance programs, augmented by support from church and volunteer organizations. While there are residents with no Spanish-speaking heritage, the majority of community members come from families with such a background, and all older residents recall a time when Spanish was more widely spoken than English. In the Louisiana communities, some French was also spoken in previous times, as indicated by the presence of French loan words in the local Spanish dialect and the existence of a major French outpost at Natchitoches, but in this century, little or no French language usage is found in northwestern Louisiana.⁷

In the Moral community of Texas, most Spanish speakers were raised on small ranchos, either as sharecroppers or as owners of small tracts of land. Although their lifestyle was also simple, the overall standard of living appears to have been slightly higher than in Louisiana. Less emphasis was placed on hunting and woodcutting, and farming, both for home consumption and for commercial sale, was the predominant activity. Today, the remaining Spanish speakers and their relatives in Moral are characterized by a general economic level significantly above the Sabine River Spanish communities in Louisiana, being comparable to that of the current generation of *isleños*.

Racially, the Sabine River Spanish speakers present a varied panorama, but, particularly in Louisiana, a significant number are of Native American extraction. In recent years the Ebarb community near Zwolle has obtained federal recognition as an Indian nation under the Indian affairs programs. Currently, no speakers of regional native languages remain in the community, although a few songs and words persist, but as late as a few generations ago it was still possible to encounter individuals who could speak Native American languages. The Ebarb residents have largely identified with the Choctaw nation, but historical and linguistic evidence suggests that many descend from natives of Mexican territory. For example, the Aguayo expedition which founded the mission at Los Adaes in 1721 consisted of 117 conscripts, of which only 44 were Spaniards, the rest being of mixed race.⁷ In the Moral community, there is less evidence of

racial mixture, and while residents freely acknowledge that many are *trigueños* ('having a dark complexion') there is no identification with or even awareness of Native American culture.

Curiously, the Sabine River Spanish communities have no lexical items (such as, for example, the term *isleño* as used in St. Bernard Parish) which identify the ethnic Spanish-speaking group, although the term *Adaeseño* (a derivative of the traditional *adaesano*, or resident of Los Adaes) has been applied by some investigators⁷ to the Spanish Lake dialect, derived from the Spanish settlement of Los Adaes, which was located nearby. When questioned (in Spanish) as to what words would be used to describe local Spanish speakers, most community residents replied simply *españoles*, although without great conviction. In English, no general designation exists; some residents use the term Spanish, but most simply indicate that an individual 'knows Spanish.' Stark (1980: 167) cites the word *choncho* as used in Zqwolle and Ebarb as a term used by non-Spanish speakers to refer to Sabine River Spanish speakers, but the present investigation was unable to verify this word. Despite incontrovertible linguistic and ethnographic evidence to the contrary, Louisiana residents reject the designation *Mexican/mexicano* and do not identify themselves as descendants of arrivals from Mexican territory. In Moral, on the other hand, the term *mexicano* is freely used, and even the local Spanish dialect is frequently referred to as *mexicano* rather than *español*.

Little accurate information is available to trace the formation of the Sabine River Spanish communities, but such evidence as exists indicates that immigration occurred in several stages for more than half a century.⁸ As will be shown below, the Sabine River Spanish dialect is a derivative of 18th century Mexican Spanish, but this does not necessarily indicate direct immigration from Mexico.

Spain made several attempts to settle eastern Texas and adjoining areas of Louisiana, but it was not until 1716 that missions and then permanent communities were established, at Los Aes (San Agustine), Nacogdoches and subsequently at Los Adaes, near present-day Robeline, Louisiana. Indiana attacks and French interference forced the abandonment of these settlements in 1719, but they were reestablished in 1721, in an expedition led by the Marquis de Aguayo. These communities prospered, despite general disinterest by the Spanish government and occasional raids by hostile Indians, and by the second half of the 18th century the settlements were well established and the residents knew no other home. Homesteads of the Spanish settlers stretched from the extreme eastern boundary of Texas at Los Adaes to Nacogdoches, with the majority of the population concentrated around the missions. Spain had intended to settle eastern Texas to create a buffer zone against incursions from French Louisiana, particularly the outpost at Natchitoches, but when the Louisiana territory was ceded to Spain in 1762, such a front line was no longer needed, and the Spanish government decided to withdraw all settlers from the troublesome border region. In 1773, the order

arrived in East Texas to abandon the settlements at Nacogdoches, Los Aes and Los Adaes within five days, for immediate resettlement in Béxar (San Antonio), and despite bitter protests most residents were forced to abandon homes and crops and make an onerous journey of more than three months to the principal Spanish settlement in Texas. Upon arrival, the newcomers were treated poorly, given inferior land and left to languish, and immediately they began planning for a return to the only place they knew as home. Finally in 1779 and with only reluctant approval by the Spanish authorities, many settlers moved back to eastern Texas, led by the quasi-mythical Adesano Antonio Gil Ybarbo (Ybarburu), who founded the town of Nacogdoches in 1779 at the site of the old mission of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe (Nacogdoches). Buildings were still left standing at this site, whereas the mission at Nuestra Señora de los Dolores (Los Aes) had been completely dismantled. The Los Adaes mission was apparently also reoccupied somewhat later, although never attaining its former status, and thus the isolated Spanish outposts were definitely implanted along the Sabine River. It appears in fact that many of the original residents, including members of Ybarbo's immediate family (brother, mother and sister-in-law), never left the region with the 1773 evacuation order, remaining instead in the area surrounding Los Adaes, at Ybarbo's ranch near Los Aes and in other outlying regions, and thus some sort of continuous Spanish occupation can be postulated for this region. These settlements sat astride the *camino real* which went from Natchitoches to San Antonio, thence to Mexico City, and thus participated actively in trade and contact with central Texas and the remainder of Mexico. Smugglers (including Ybarbo himself) also used a route which circumvented the *camino real*, bypassing the frontier customs post at Nacogdoches, and increasing the incipient cosmopolitanism of the Spanish settlements. When the Louisiana territory once again came under French sovereignty in 1800, the Spanish settlers remained, and with the Louisiana purchase by the United States government in 1808, immigration of English-speaking Americans became a significant factor.

From the time of the founding of Nacogdoches until Mexican independence from Spain (1821), the town experienced little growth, and in fact nearly disappeared. Between 1821 and 1836, however, considerable growth occurred, with the population reaching approximately 1,000 inhabitants. Thus, unlike the remnants of the Spanish population in Louisiana, the Nacogdoches area experienced direct Mexican political and presumably linguistic influence well into the 19th century. It is not clear, however, to what extent the old Spanish residents in Nacogdoches identified with or were influenced by Mexico in the 1821-1836 period. It is known, for example, that the remaining Spaniards sided with Anglo-American settlers in several confrontations with Mexico, including the Fredonia Rebellion (1826) and the Battle of Nacogdoches (1832). At the same time, immigration of Anglo-Americans from the central and southern United States made up the bulk of the population growth,¹⁰ while

the Mexican government exercised little centralized control over East Texas; as a result, the old Spanish residents were increasingly cut off politically, socially and linguistically from Mexico well before the Texas Revolution. Following the independence of Texas from Mexico, immigration from Louisiana to Texas increased even more, but some immigration in the opposite direction also occurred,¹¹ particularly by Spanish speakers who were not encouraged by the invasion of profit-seeking Anglophones immediately following the Texas Revolution. Spanish residents at Nacogdoches mounted an unsuccessful counteroffensive to the Texas Revolution (the Córdova Rebellion), and subsequently resisted assimilation to Anglo-Texas culture. Since Mexico had received its independence from Spain only in 1821, a sense of national identity as 'Mexicans' would not have been formed by the time of the Texas revolution or the Mexican-American War, except as regards confrontations with the United States. At the time of Mexican independence, only three significant Spanish-speaking settlements remained in what is now Texas: San Antonio, Bahia del Espíritu Santo (Goliad) and Nacogdoches. By the time that Texas joined the United States in 1845, massive immigration of English-speaking residents into Nacogdoches was well established, and before long the population balance had tipped irreversibly in favor of the Anglo-Americans. Although Spanish-speaking residents retained some voice in local affairs, their importance constantly diminished, and as the city of Nacogdoches grew, most of the old Spanish families remained to the west, along the Moral Bayou. In Louisiana, the arrival of Anglo-Americans had begun even earlier, following the Louisiana Purchase, and the Hispanic character of the old Los Adaes settlement soon became a thing of the past.

The preceding historical sketch gives some idea as to the origins of the Sabine River Spanish community, but does not entirely answer the question of the linguistic sources of the local Spanish dialect. Local folklore in Nacogdoches often maintains that the Spanish speakers are a branch of the original *isleños*, who upon arriving at New Orleans, travelled up the Mississippi to the Red River, thence to Natchitoches, and subsequently settled in Los Adaes (Abernathy 1976: 25). Such a trajectory would qualify the *Adaesanos* as pure Spaniards, much as the *isleños*, but neither historical nor linguistic facts bear this out. The founding of Los Adaes by Spaniards arriving from Coahuila, Mexico and Texas has already been described, although it is natural that, given the high ratio of men to women among the original settlers, some Spanish men would marry French women from Natchitoches, or local indigenous women, thus accounting for the greater apparent racial mixture in the Louisiana communities. When Los Adaes was abandoned by the Spanish government, the remaining settlers undoubtedly intermarried with nearby French and indigenous residents. Linguistically, Sabine River Spanish shares no similarities with the *isleño* dialect, but is an offspring of rural Mexican Spanish. The number of subsequent direct arrivals from Spain among the Sabine River

Spanish communities was evidently minimal, if any such immigration occurred at all, and such dialect mixing as did occur consisted of successive overlays of Mexican Spanish, from a variety of regions, social strata and time periods. If this historical reconstruction is accurate, then the vestigial Spanish found among the Louisiana Sabine River Spanish speakers is a direct continuation of 18th century Mexican vernacular, while the dialect spoken in the Moral community may reflect some aspects of Mexican Spanish from the first decades of the 19th century. Stark (1980) mentions the arrival of a few Mexicans in Zwolle around 1900 to aid in the railroad construction, but none of the informants for the present investigation claimed knowledge of such individuals. Both speech communities, then, represent the survival of some of the earliest varieties of Spanish still found in the United States.

The Spanish language was retained by the Sabine River residents for several reasons, most of which involve geographic and social isolation. In the Moral Community, the takeover of Nacogdoches by English-speaking immigrants and their descendants created a strong sense of ethnic unity among the old Spanish residents, who travelled to town only for essential provisions, and who maintained their lifestyle, their religion and their language in what was up until a few decades ago a rather disconnected rural settlement. In Louisiana, ethnic solidarity appears to have been less, but social isolation was greater, since the remaining Spanish speakers lived a considerable distance from any large community, were poor, were racially distinguishable from local French- and English-speaking residents, and generally spoke a 'foreign' language (Spanish). Public education was limited in the Moral area and virtually nonexistent on the Louisiana side until well into the 20th century (Smith and Hitt 1952: 103-8), and those Spanish-speaking children who did attend schools suffered a linguistic handicap and pressure from peers and teachers to use English exclusively. Use English they did, although the old Sabine River Spanish speakers retain an identifiable accent in English, and the introduction of better roads, electric power lines, telephones, motorized transportation and commercial job opportunities further increased the necessity and desirability of speaking English.

Currently, those individuals in both Sabine River Spanish communities who have some abilities in the Spanish language exhibit ambivalence towards that language. Although residents in both areas are aware of the former prevalence of Spanish, a certain prejudice still attaches to use of the language, particularly in view of previous social and educational difficulties occasioned by limited abilities in English. The Spanish language is associated with 'old folks,' most of whom deliberately chose not to teach the language to their children, although many younger residents regret not having learned Spanish. Among the Spanish speakers themselves, most are apologetic about the quality of the language they speak, saying that it is 'broken,' 'old-fashioned' and otherwise idiosyncratic.

These sentiments have perhaps been augmented by the recent incursions into both settlements of linguists, ethnographers and historians, many of whom speak contemporary educated varieties of Spanish. Since Spanish is rarely used extensively, being limited to occasional greetings and remarks among the 'old folks,' most speakers are naturally hesitant about initiating conversations in Spanish, and nearly all exhibit increased fluency towards the end of conversations prolonged for several hours or spread over a few days. Speakers find difficulty in remembering words, often confuse the meaning of words they do produce, and extensively mix English even when attempting to speak 'pure' Spanish, not only involving loan words and syntactic calques but also code switching of the sort not found among balanced bilinguals. Only a literal handful of speakers in each community speak Spanish without hesitation and with total fluency; nearly all such speakers live in the Moral community, although two or three of the Louisiana residents are quite fluent.

By all indications, the settlers at Los Aes, Nacogdoches and Los Adaes, both at the time of the first founding and following the reoccupation led by Ybarbo, came from the lowest socioeconomic classes of Spanish Mexico, being largely conscripts and poor farmers. Even relatively prosperous landowners like Ybarbo were several rungs below that of the Spanish intellectual class in terms of literacy and formal education, and the majority of the settlers were totally illiterate and, judging by contemporary accounts and historical reconstructions, entirely ignorant of the world outside of their own communities. One would naturally expect that the linguistic characteristics of the Spanish dialects derived from these settlements would reflect not only archaic elements, but also a rural, uneducated background; this in fact is manifest upon considering Sabine River Spanish.

2. Phonological characteristics: Being a derivative of Central and particularly northern Mexican Spanish (since the original settlers came from Coahuila and west/central Texas, with a few perhaps being from as far away as Mexico City), Sabine River Spanish is phonologically rather conservative.¹² This is manifest in the general retention of consonants, the slow speech rhythm and the lack of wholesale neutralizations found in other dialects. At the same time, the rural/popular origins of Sabine River Spanish result in numerous phonological misidentifications and analogical creations. Detailed features include:

(1) Syllable- and word-final /s/ is normally retained as [s], with a much lower proportion of cases of aspiration [h]. Certain cases of the change /s/ > [h] are pan-Hispanic, such as the popular pronunciation of *nosotros* as *nojotros* (or *lojotros*, more common in Sabine River Spanish). Phrase-final /s/ may occasionally be lost, but this may be a consequence of imperfect learning among the last generation of vestigial Spanish speakers.

(2) Phrase-final and word-final prevocalic /n/ is uniformly

alveolar [n]: *también* [tambien], *un otro* [unotro].

(3) The fricative variant of /b/ is pronounced as a labiodental [v] in a high proportion of cases: *hablar* [avlar], *trabajo* [travaho].

(4) The opposition between the single flap /r/ and the multiple trill /F/ is partially neutralized, with the majority of cases of the latter phoneme realized as [r]: *perro* [pero], *radio* [radio], *terrible* [terible]. This neutralization is frequent in other vestigial Spanish dialects but also occurs sporadically in other Spanish-speaking regions (Lipski 1985, Granda 1969). The presence of this neutralization in Sabine River Spanish may be a function of vestigial usage among semi-speakers, but the widespread nature of the change /F/ > [r] in both Sabine River Spanish communities suggests an earlier date of inception. Syllable and word-final /r/ is normally realized as [r], but in phrase-final position elision of /r/ is relatively frequent, particularly in verbal infinitives. Examples from the corpus include *para comer* > *pa comé*, *hablar inglés*, *calor* > *caló*. Stark (1980) also cites *quitar* > *quitá*, *juntar* > *juntá*, etc.. Elision of final /r/ is not normal in contemporary Mexican Spanish, and its presence among the Sabine River Spanish speakers is most likely the result of gradual phonological erosion and misidentification stemming from a prolonged isolation from other Spanish-speaking communities.

(5) The phoneme /y/ is weak, and frequently falls in contact with /i/ (*gallina* > [gaína], *silla* > [síla]) and after /e/ (*seño* > [seo]). This feature is shared with most contemporary dialects of Central American, Mexican and Mexican-American Spanish, and probably dates from the formative period of Sabine River Spanish (Canfield 1981: 15; Ross 1980).

(6) The posterior fricative /x/ is pronounced with little velar friction, being more frequently a simple aspiration [h]: *caja* [kahə], *trabajo* [trabajo]. In contemporary Mexican Spanish, a more velar pronunciation is prevalent, while [h] predominates in Central America and the Caribbean.

(7) The opposition between intervocalic /d/ and /r/ is partially neutralized in favor of [r] (e.g. *cada* > [kara]); this pronunciation is not consistent among Sabine River Spanish speakers, and probably results from English interference, since the same variation is found among other vestigial Spanish-English bilinguals.

(8) The phoneme /t/ is occasionally given an alveolar realization, and may emerge as an alveolar flap [r]; as in the preceding case, this is evidently a transfer from English: *ejote* [ehore], *zacate* [sacare].

(9) Sabine River Spanish speakers normally reduce unstressed vowels, giving them a centralized realization [ə] or [ɔ]: *azúcar* > *azúcara* [asukarə], *cushca* [kuškə], *estaba* > *taba* [tabə]. Many Mexican speakers devoice and elide unstressed vowels, but the high rate of centralization rather than simple elision in the Sabine River area is most probably a consequence of the prolonged isolation of this dialect (Lope Blanch 1966,

(10) As in *isleño* and other vestigial or isolated Spanish dialects, Sabine River Spanish exhibits many cases of phonological misidentification, both sporadic and unstable variations, and total relexification. Common examples include: *buja* < *aguja*; *rabilán* < *gavilán*; *bujero* < *agujero*; *jolote/jalote* < *guajolote*; *murcégalos*; *murciélagos*; *los/losotros/lojotros* < *nos/nosotros*; *azúc(a)ra* < *azúcar*; *amaricano* < *americano*, etc.

3. Morphosyntactic features.¹³ Sabine River Spanish is characterized by a high concentration of archaisms, forms typical of rural and popular Spanish, and analogical formations, not to mention syntactic transference from English among the last generation of semi-speakers. Among the salient morphosyntactic peculiarities are:

(1) Archaic forms, including *trujo/truje*, *vido/vide*, *mesmo*, *muncho*, *asina/ansina*.

(2) Numerous analogical verb forms, largely resulting in verbal paradigms with a single canonical root: *cierramos* < *cerramos*, *dijeron* < *dijeron*; *cocinear* < *cocinar*, *tenimos* < *tuvimos*, etc.

(3) Use of *zero* instead of general Spanish *isso* in the sense of 'same, one and only': *aquí zero* 'right here,' *éste zero* 'this very one.' *Zero* also appears in the expression *ya zero* 'almost'; this use of *zero* is current in Mexican Spanish but is not normal in other dialects, thus indirectly demonstrating the Mexican origin of Sabine River Spanish.

(4) The combination *de nosotros* completely supplants *nuestro/nuestra* in the Sabine River area, as in some forms of popular Mexican and Caribbean Spanish.

(5) Expressions with *no más* 'only, precisely' are used as in Mexican Spanish, to the complete exclusion of *sólo/sóloamente*. Whereas use of postposed *no más* is fairly general in Latin American Spanish, and is extremely frequent in the Andean region of South America (e. g. *siéntate no más* 'sit right down,' *¿qué no más quieres?* 'just what do you want?'), the appearance of *no más* in clause-initial position is rare outside of México (*no más quería platicar contigo* 'I only wanted to talk to you').

(6) Among Sabine River Spanish speakers there is consistent use of *estar* in cases where other Spanish dialects, including those of Mexico, employ *ser*, particularly with predicate nouns. This may be a function of vestigial usage among semi-speakers, but nearly all Spanish speakers interviewed in both communities exhibit some nonstandard use of *estar*, leading to the supposition that this verb gradually evolved away from general and Mexican Spanish patterns at an earlier date. Examples include:

tao la gente que ta aquí ta blanco 'all the people around here are white'

los Peñas están trigueños 'the Peñas are dark skinned'

el tacuache no ta malo 'possums aren't bad'

una coquena ta medio amarillo 'a Guinea hen is sort of

yellow'

si 'taban novios por mucho tiempo' 'if they were engaged for a long time'

(7) As in Mexican Spanish, the Sabine River dialects use questions with *¿qué tanto?* / *¿qué tan?* nearly exclusively, instead of *¿cuánto?*; thus *¿qué tanto ganas?* 'how much do you earn?' *¿que tan vieja es esta casa?* 'how old is this house?'

(8) Curious and significant in Sabine River Spanish is the use of expressions with *para atrás* (*patrás*) in combinations where English uses the verbal particle back: *venga patrás* 'come back,' *vamos patras* 'let's go back,' *te pago patras* 'I'll pay you back.' That this expression is a syntactic calque from English is beyond doubt, since the combination is only attested in areas of Spanish-English bilingualism. At the same time, expressions with *patrás* are found in such unrelated Spanish dialects as Gibraltar, Belize, Trinidad and *isleño* Spanish, in addition to be characteristic of Mexican-American, Puerto Rican (particularly within the United States) and most recently Cuban-American Spanish.*² In the latter cases it is possible to propose a single as yet undetermined place of origin for calques with *patrás*, although until recently contact among the various Hispanic American groups was quite limited. The existence of identical combinations among the *isleños*, Gibraltar and in other isolated bilingual areas suggests the possibility for independent development in several areas, and the presence of *patrás* calques in the Sabine River area adds substance to this hypothesis. There has been some slight recent contact between old Spanish speakers and Mexican-Americans in Nacogdoches, while no documented contacts have taken place in the Louisiana community. Even in the former case, no other demonstrable borrowings from contemporary Mexican or Mexican-American Spanish are found, all of which supports the possibility for independent formation of *patrás* calques, undoubtedly aided by the characteristically Mexican use of *para* to indicate directions: *se voy pa'l pueblo* 'I'm going to town,' also frequent in Sabine River Spanish. Examples from the Savine River dialect include:

habla patrás en español 'answer in Spanish'

venga patrás mañana 'come back tomorrow'

unos vinieron patrás con él 'some came back with him'

4. Lexical characteristics.*² The Sabine River Spanish lexicon is a combination of Mexican, archaic, and rural/popular Spanish items, with an admixture of French loans in the Louisiana community, and a handful of indigenous elements. Several lexicological surveys of Sabine River Spanish are now underway, and the results are eagerly anticipated. A few brief comments will illustrate the hybrid nature of these dialects.

(1) Mexicanisms. These are most abundant in Sabine River Spanish, and definitively prove the Mexican provenance of this dialect. Common items include: *atole* 'thin sweet gruel,' *guajolote* 'turkey,' *tecolote* 'owl,' *zopilote* 'buzzard,' *cacahuate* 'peanut,' *zacate* 'grass, weed,' *camote* 'sweet potato,'

yam,' tamal 'hot tamale,' tortilla 'Mexican corn tortilla,' comal 'griddle for cooking tortillas,' nixtamal 'hominy,' metate 'grinding stone,' molcajete 'mortar for grinding herbs and chiles,' petate 'mat,' secate 'rope,' cuate 'twin,' tacuache 'possum,' tejón 'raccoon,' güero 'blond, light complexioned,' elote 'tender cob of corn,' ejote 'snap bean,' charola 'tray,' labor 'division of land (approx. 177 acres),' blanquillo 'egg,' tuza 'mole (rodent),' ándale 'let's go, OK,' pinche 'damned, cursed,' tapanco 'ceiling beam,' coquena 'Guinea hen,' and the universal Mexican expletive *chingar* and its derivatives, originally referring to the sexual act, but now merely vulgar expressions.

(2) Archaic/rustic items. These include mercar/marcar 'to buy,' calzón/calzones 'pants,' túnico 'ladies' dress, calesa 'horse-drawn buggy,' la provisión 'supplies, provisions,' noria 'water well,' truja/troja 'barn,' palo 'tree,' encino 'oak tree,' peje 'fish,' fierro 'iron, tool,' lumbre 'fire,' borrego 'sheep,' prieto 'black.'

(3) Other items. Among the miscellaneous words of possible Latin American Spanish, French, English and Amerindian origin, only a few are found among Sabine River Spanish speakers. These include: huaguín (*waguin*) 'farm wagon,' payaso 'bat' (alternating with the popular murcéLAGO < *murciéLAGO*), the Caribbean maní 'peanut,' which alternates (in Louisiana) with English *goober* and the normal Mexican cacahuate, ojo negro 'black-eyed pea,' pan de molino 'corn bread,' and the most curious form cusca/cushca 'buzzard,' which alternates with the Mexican zopilote. Stark (1980:169) cites the form cuscú/cushcú in Zwolle and Ebarb, but I was unable to confirm this variant in either Louisiana or Texas. No convincing etymology has been offered for cusca/cushca, but in Mexico and other Latin American areas, the similar words cusca/cushca often means 'dissimulated prostitute, slovenly woman' and this designation may have been applied metaphorically to the ill-omened bird; the use of payaso 'clown' to refer to the common bat supports the possibility of a metaphorical extension of cusca.¹⁴ The terms cusca/cushca also refer, in other Latin American areas, to a lap dog (Lerner 1974: 118; Kany 1960: 188), to a busybody or flirtatious person (Solé 1956: 102; Lerner 1978: 118), to a greedy individual (Cobos 1983: 41; Santamaría 1959: v. 2, 86), to a hunchback (Sopena 1982), or to decomposed flesh (the last designation only attested for northern Argentina: Solé 1956: 131), so a number of other etymological possibilities are also available.

Also of interest in the Sabine River Spanish dialect is the absence of certain contemporary Mexicanisms, such as chazaco and huérco 'small child,' chavalo/chavala 'boy/girl,' and gabacho 'Anglo-American'; this suggests, although does not prove definitively, that the former items were not common in 18th and early 19th century Mexican Spanish. The absence of gabacho may be explained by the origins of the dialect in the pre-Anglo-American period of Texas and Louisiana, when national and racial conflict had not yet emerged. The term gabacho, originally

applied by Spaniards to the French, apparently arose in Mexico following independence from Spain and probably after the Mexican-American War and succeeding events, when racial and cultural differences between Mexicans and Anglo Americans became a source of constant discord. It is interesting to note the existence of *bolillo*, still a common designation among Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, among the Sabine River speakers; in the latter group the term refers generically to anyone from outside the ethnic Spanish community, who by extension does not speak Spanish. In support of the suggestion that the absence of certain ethnic slurs in the Sabine River dialect reflects colonial Spanish attitudes, we note that *gachupín*, a derogatory epithet for Spaniards in Mexico, does not appear in Sabine River Spanish.¹⁷

5. Conclusions. A detailed description of the original Sabine River Spanish dialect is probably impossible to achieve, given the small number of remaining speakers, but the general nature of this early Texas variety of Spanish does emerge from the preceding considerations. It is clear that, at least from the beginning of the 18th century, the Spanish language brought to the Texas frontier was more Mexican than peninsular, and that the Mexicanisms had penetrated the speech of Spanish citizens with no demonstrable indigenous background. At the same time, the low sociocultural level of the Spanish/Mexican frontiersmen is also reflected in the features of Sabine River Spanish, which contains a high proportion of rustic and popular elements. Further research is called for on this significant Spanish-speaking group, which is on the verge of extinction, in order to close some of the gaps in our knowledge of the growth and spread of the Spanish language in North America.

NOTES

1. The standard work on *isleño* Spanish is MacCurdy (1958, 1975); cf. also MacCurdy (1959), Armistead (1978, 1979, 1981a, 1981b, 1982, 1983a, 1983b, 1985, a), Varela (1978, 1979), Guillote (1982), Lipski (1986, a, b).
2. For Tampa cf. Canfield (1951) and for Key West, Beardsley (1972).
3. The only linguistic references to these groups are by Stark (1980) and Armistead (1983a: 41-2; 1985); cf. also Armistead (1982), Armistead and Gregory (1986). The contemporary existence of Spanish speakers along the Sabine River has occasionally been commented on; cf. for example Sepulvedo (1977), Montero de Pedro (1979: 120-1), Fernández Shaw (1972: 344-6), Abernathy (1976), Smith and Hitt (1952: 47), Gregory and McCorkle (1981).

4. My ongoing research program on Sabine River Spanish was begun in late 1985. Special thanks are due to the following individuals without whose help no material progress could have been made: Prof. Hiram Gregory of Northwest State University in Natchitoches, Louisiana; Prof. James Corbin of Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas; Prof. Samuel Armistead of the University of California, Davis; Ms. Mary Van Rheenen of Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge; Mr. Sam Montes of the Moral Community, Nacogdoches, Texas.
5. The linguistic notion of the 'semi-speaker' has been most carefully developed by Dorian (1977, 1980). For a survey of phenomena common to vestigial Spanish dialects, including Louisiana *isleño* Spanish, cf. Lipski (1985).⁵
6. Cf. Armistead (a) and Armistead and Gregory (1986) for examples and analysis.
7. Abernathy (1976: 25); Tjarks (1974: 326), who indicates that Ybarbo himself was a "mulatto," although it is known that at least one of his parents came from Andalusia.
8. Cf. Armistead (1983a, 1985). The term *Adaesanos* was used by Bolton (1915: 394), but there is no evidence of this designation being used by residents of the area at any time period. Armistead (1985: 251) notes that the term *adaeseño* has been used by him as a designation not used by community members themselves.
9. The most comprehensive study is Bolton (1905); cf. also Bolton (1915: 375-446; 1921: 227-51). Other useful information is provided by Carlos E. Castañeda in the series Our Catholic Heritage in Texas published by the Knights of Columbus (1936: 144-5; 1938: *passim.*; 1939: 298-302; 1950: chap. 8). Other important sources for a composite history of Spanish colonization along the Sabine River include Crockett (1932: 19-58), Nardini (1963: 55-88), John (1975), Carruth (1970), McReynolds (1976a, 1976b, 1978, 1980a, 1980b), Stewart (1976), McDonald (1980), Robinson (1943: 41-7), Bridges and Deville (1936), Acosta Rodriguez (1979: 19-33), Hatcher (1917), Faulk (1964: 14-5; 1965: 127), the collection Documentos para la historia eclesiástica y civil de la provincia de Texas o Nuevas Filipinas 1720-1779 (1961), esp. the 'Carta del señor Barón de Ripperdá al Caballero de Croix,' pp. 335-42; Dunn (1917: 110-45), Belisle (1912: 39-60), Alessio Robles (1945), Jones (1979: 44-5).
10. Robinson (1943: 90-2), Sánchez (1926: 282-3).

11. Lathrop (1949: chap. 3), Barker (1923), Atwood (1962: chap. 1), Tarpley (1964: 19), Smith and Hitt (1952: 212-3), Ericson (1974).
12. Sources for rural Mexican Spanish pronunciation (and grammar) include Matluck (1951), Boyd-Bowman (1960), Cárdenas (1967), Marden (1896), Perissinotto (1975), Canfield (1981: 60-4).
13. Sources of information on rural/popular Mexican Spanish characteristics, in addition to those cited above, include Espinosa (1911, 1917, 1930), Ornstein (1951, 1972), Espinosa, Jr. (1957), Post (1933), Rael (1939), Hensey (1973).
14. Cf. Lipski (1975, 1976, c), Sánchez (1972), Pérez Sala (1971), García (1979, 1982), Varela (1974).
15. Lexical sources for Mexican Spanish include Santamaría (1942, 1959), Islas Escacega (1945), Prieto Mejía (1981), Galván and Teschner (1977), Bayo (1931), Cerdá, Cabaza and Farias (1953).
16. Santamaría (1959: v. 1, 445, 552), Prieto Mejía (1981: 38), who explains that *cusca* comes from *cuscuta*, a parasitic sucking plant. The term is not used with the sense of 'buzzard' in contemporary educated Mexican Spanish; cf. Centro de Lingüística Hispánica (1978: 558).
17. Stark (1980: 168) uncovered the form *gachupín* in Zwolle, but none of my informants in Texas or Louisiana recognized this word. Stark's attestation may be a vestige of the small number of natives of Mexico who apparently worked on the Zwolle railroad at the turn of the century.

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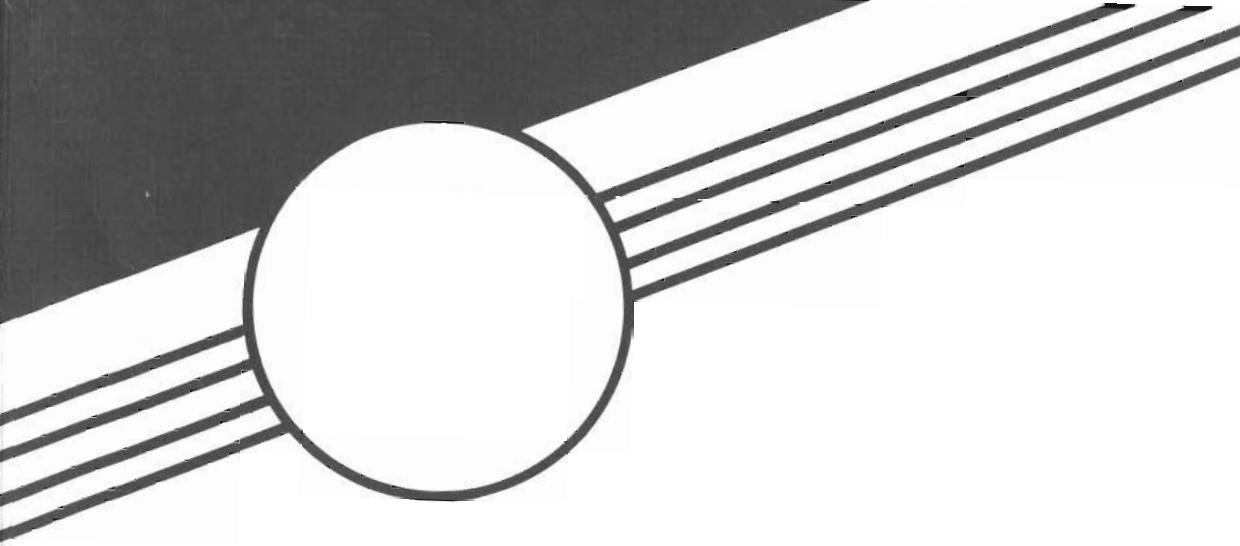
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SOUTHWEST JOURNAL OF LINGUISTICS

SPRING 1985

Vol. VIII, No. 1
ISSN 0737-4143