



Spanglish: The Making of a New American Language (Spanish Edition)

Ilan Stavans

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In exploring the formation of Spanglish, award-winning essayist Ilan Stavans reflects on, and also codifies, the most transforming linguistic phenomena in America in the last one hundred years -- one that may predict our future as a nation and that of our entire hemisphere.

No tool is more useful in understanding the changes in culture than language. In today's America, communication is built around inclusion and efficiency, and this is no more apparent than in the blending of the two most spoken languages in the United States: English and Spanish.

Spanish, the nation's unofficial second language, is immediately obvious and audible on airwaves and media screens, streets and classrooms, from one coast to the other. But *el español* has not spread on this side of the Atlantic in its unadulterated Iberian form. Instead it is metastasizing into something altogether new: an astonishingly creative code of communication known as Spanglish, which in large part is the result of sweeping demographic changes, globalization, and the newly emergent "Latin Fever" that is sweeping the country. It is used predominantly by people of Hispanic descent but is also embraced by others in the United States, the Americas as a whole, and even Spain.

Naturally controversial, Spanglish outrages English-language-only proponents, who seek to ban all languages other than English north of the Rio Grande. Equal in their outrage are Spanish-language purists and the supporters of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language in Madrid, as they deem Spanglish a cancer to their precious and centuries-old tongue. With elegance and erudition, Ilan Stavans reflects on the verbal rift that has given birth to Spanglish. He fascinatingly shows the historical tensions between the British and Spanish Empires, and how in 1588, with the sinking of the grand Spanish Armada, the rivalry between the two empires was solidified, and to this day, the differences in religion and culture continue their fight linguistically.

He ponders major historical events, such as the Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaty of 1848 and the Spanish-American War fifty years later, as agents of radical linguistic change, although, as he rightly states, it is in the second half of the twentieth century that Spanglish sped into our daily reality.

Stavans also points out the similarities and differences Spanglish has with Yiddish, so thoroughly blending into the American vocabulary, and the much-debated Ebonics, which made headlines in the early 1990s as a uniquely African American blend of proper English and urban slang. Ultimately, Stavans deftly proves that the manner in which a language stays alive is through mutation and that its survival doesn't depend on academies but on the average person's need for expression. This explains why it is increasingly used not only in kitchens and school but in music, TV, film, and literature, all expressions of the American collective soul.

Coupled with Stavans's insights is a substantial lexicon that shows the breadth and ingenuity of this growing vocabulary -- at times, semantically obvious, then also surprisingly inventive. An ingenious translation into Spanglish of the first chapter of *Don Quixote de La Mancha* comes as a bonus. The added impact proves that Spanglish is more than a language -- it is the perfect metaphor for an America that is a hybrid, a sum of parts.

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