NAMES, Vol. 60 No. 1, March, 2012, 36–45

Onomastics Among Hispanic Migrants in South Central Pennsylvania

AGNES C M RAGONE
Shippensburg State University, USA

This paper analyzes onomastic choices and their possible reasons in the migrant Hispanic population in Pennsylvania. The investigation considers the double Hispanic surname system and first-name choices: Spanish versus English, as well as creative first names. The data were initially collected from the Chambersburg, PA, school district. Interviews with the migrants allowed determining some of the reasons for the choices. In addition, the data from two counties were then analyzed to confirm the trends observed in the smaller pool. The analysis finds that the onomastic choices in this population show a tendency towards keeping the standards of the culture of origin for first names, with some accommodation to American culture, and a tendency to adopt American standards with surnames.

KEYWORDS migrants, patronyms, first names, name creation, acculturation

Chambersburg, in South Central Pennsylvania, is the seat for Franklin County and its Migrant Worker Education Program. The county had a homogeneous population for centuries, of English, Scottish, and Irish origins. Recently, this make-up has changed, with an influx of immigrants and migrants from Mexico and Central America. Between 1980 and 1990, there was a 61 percent increase in the Hispanic population and the growth continued between 1990 and 2000 with a 113 percent increase (Pennsylvania State Data Center, 2010). The information released in 2009, when the initial research took place, showed that 4652 Hispanics lived in the county, whose total population was 138,843 inhabitants (Pennsylvania State Data Center, 2009). The Hispanics represented thus 3.35 percent of the population, a small percentage that does not include migrants, but the county still had to deal with educating a growing number of children for whom English is not the first language, whether permanent or temporary residents.

The Migrant Child Development Program, within the Migrant Worker Education Program, offers venues for the acquisition of English and mainstreaming into the school system. Unlike immigrant children who remain in the same area, these are children whose parents travel in search of jobs and do not reside in the same state

 DOI 10.1179/0027-773811Z.0000000002

year-around. In order to keep track of this transient population, the school district has developed forms for enrollment that provide information about the families and their children, one used when visiting the homes and the other used at school. The fall 2009 roster had forty-two Hispanic families and included the names of the biological or legal parents; the names of the current parents; the relationship to the children; their home base; their ethnicity; their type of employment; the names of the children; and the dates of birth of the children. This provided the basic data for my research.

There was initial resistance to the Hispanic influx in Franklin County and, in previous research, I was told by members of the American-born population that there were no Hispanics in the area, while Hispanics complained of the lack of a welcoming atmosphere. More recently, awareness of the dependence of the county on Hispanics has increased and it is no longer possible to deny their existence. Consequently, in the fall 2009, Chambersburg hosted its first *Fiesta de la Cosecha* or "Harvest Festival," where I interviewed twenty-six persons willing to talk to me about themselves — which was not always the case — and their families.

The analysis of the data from the school and festival is based on three sets of research questions. The first set centers on the double Hispanic surname system — father's name first, mother's name second; or father's name first, husband's name second for married women. How long after arrival in the US is the double surname kept by the migrants and under which circumstances or for what reasons is one of the names dropped? The second set addresses the choice of Spanish versus English first names. Does a family start adopting English names for the children according to birth order, length of stay in the US, or do the country of origin or the ethnicity of the family have any influence on the matter? Why does the family decide for such adoption — is it a function of acculturation, influence of the media or popular culture, or hopes of better integration? — and which names are popular in either language? The third set asks whether name choices can be indicators of integration in the American society and/or used as indicators of the development of Hispanic culture in the US.

Naming follows dicta that are culture specific, and examples abound where those dicta imply lifelong consequences. Since the present research centers on migrants, another layer of connotations is added. Sánchez-Carretero mentions that "[n]aming practices can be at the very heart of transnational existence" (2005: 65) and adds that history provides many examples of compulsory name changes, such as with the Moors and Jews in medieval Spain, or those mandated in Turkey at the end of the Ottoman Empire. Other name changes are not compulsory, but rather strategies for adaptation or blending in a new society. Silverman explains how Gypsies in the US adopt common American names such as John Miller, George Adams, or Dora Stevens, as a strategy "to remain invisible, concealed, and untraceable" (1991: 119). The rejection of Gypsies in many communities explains such decision, even if it is a double edged sword that can lead to accusations of duplicity. In a study of Iranians in the Los Angeles area, Blair states that there are three main reasons for name changes: "(1) to facilitate acceptance by members of the host culture — socially, psychologically, and/or economically; (2) to serve as a barrier against embarrassment, intrusion, insult and conflict; and (3) to distance or dissociate oneself from political conditions of the home country" (1991: 123). The strategies are attempts to avoid trouble and blend in the new community. It is also generally thought that recent immigrants and children born

shortly after the emigration have names from their culture of origin. The longer they stay, the more likely the families are to show integration in the United States by choosing for their offspring names favored in the new country. These anecdotal observations need to be investigated within the Hispanic context to see if naming choices prevalent in the migrant community of South Central Pennsylvania follow the previously discussed patterns.

According to Evans, Hispanic naming patterns are different for males and females: "Because of the machismo and focus on family in traditional Hispanic cultures, there is still a lot of pressure for sons to be named after fathers and grandfathers. This means that many Hispanic-American boys still receive names such as José, Juan, Luis and even Jesus. But girls are often given 'new' names taken from Hispanic media and celebrities" (2008: 39). This propensity for choosing non-Hispanic names or for adapting them to the Spanish language is far from limited to immigrants to the United States: a shift in names is also taking place in Spain. Sánchez-Carretero states that immigrants in Spain translate the names of their own cultures to conform to Spanish mores, especially for girls; those new names are adopted in turn by Spaniards themselves. The male Colombian characters in Vallejo's (1994) novel, *La Virgen de los sicarios*, follow a similar fashion and sport names such as *Tayson* for *Tyson*, or *Yeison* for *Jason*. Vallejo ironically remarks that poor young men have unusual, non-traditional names because their parents want them associated with rich foreign men, even if only by name.

The very nature of migrant life is its transitoriness: the workers are hard to locate and prone to leave without notice. This population fears being identified as undesirable and risk jail or deportation, thus access to information of school districts is invaluable. Migrant workers must provide information in order to have their children accepted into the program. This data let me understand the social background of the families. Most of them are traditional, with the biological father and mother living with the children. In some cases, parents had previous marriages but one of them is a biological parent residing with the children. The few exceptions to the traditional two-parent family list only the mother, and the children do not necessarily have the same father — as attested to by the double surname. In one case, the "brother" is listed as head of household. The double surname allows determining that he is the maternal uncle of the children because mother and brother have the same first surname.

The data were analyzed by establishing lists of the names provided, and counting the number and types of occurrences, for first names and surnames. I will first consider the double Hispanic surnames as found in the Migrant Worker Education forms.

All but one set of parents in this group use one patronym instead of two (41 vs. 1). Wives generally keep their maiden names, i.e. do not have the same last name as their husbands. The majority of the children in this group uses only one surname (33 vs. 9), that of the father. The double surname is used when the children have different fathers, as seen in the following binary list: *Cruz-Ramirez* and *Rojo-Ramirez*; *Rugerio-Soto* and *Salinas-Rugerio*; *Ruiz-Perez* and *Gonzalez-Perez*; *Mendez-Hernandez* and *Hernandez-Mendez*. The names are hyphenated on the forms as is the custom in the United States, although it is not common practice in Hispanic countries. At times the double names do not follow the canonical Hispanic order (father's, then mother's

name), which could be attributed to a lack of understanding from the part of the school or maybe to some unidentified family issues. It could also be that the common occurrence of certain patronyms leads to confusion in the records. A practical reason for the choice of one vs. two names may simply reside in the space allocated for the information on the forms. This space is based on the standard US use of one name and does not allow for lengthy patronyms. The names might have been truncated by the person collecting the information and the truncated name became the *de facto* sole patronym. This would also explain the disparity in surnames between husbands and wives.

Turning now to the Harvest Festival, some interviewees gave their version for the choice of one vs. two surnames. When asking why the children were identified with one patronym only, I heard such remarks as *Los americanos se lo quitaron*, that is "The Americans took it away from him/her," or *Porque les gusta así a los americanos*, "Because that is how the Americans like it," and *Porque estamos en los Estados Unidos*, "Because we are in the US." There was no apparent regret, those were statements of facts. The choice of one patronym would be then to blend in, voluntarily or not, as suggested by Blair. Not all adults interviewed wanted to give their names or discuss them. Of the twenty who did, eleven were using two names (subset A) while nine were using one name only (subset B). In the discussions that ensued, nine adults in subset A had older children who were not schooled in the US; some had younger children not in school yet; others were recent arrivals unaware of local customs. In subset B, all the adults had children in school and all of the children had one patronym. One woman claimed to see no reason for having two surnames because she was a widow, and, although she did not give the names, it could be assumed that hers, i.e. her father's, was the one adopted. A corollary appears when examining this second set of data: as far as patronyms are concerned, the school functions as an agent of integration and of Americanization. This corollary is confirmed by the high incidence of the one name pattern in the data provided by the school.

For first names, an explanation is required as to their types. They fall into four categories: traditional Hispanic; American (I do not want to use the term "English" because some of the names given in the United States are not English in origin); Hispanic/American (i.e. with similar spelling and pronunciation in Spanish and English); and creative (wholly invented or adapted from foreign names as seen in Sanchez-Carretero and Vallejo). Here are the results for the names collected by the school.

The first observation resides in the contrast between parents and children. If the parents are born in Hispanic countries, it is understood that their names reflect the culture of origin. Twenty-eight of the children have names such as *Brian*/*Bryan*, *Alexis*/*Alexi*, *Evelyn*, *Christopher*, *Michele*, *Hailey*, *Anthony*, *Johnny*, *Jonathan*, *Eric*, *Jessica*, *Karen*, *Lisbeth*, *Christian*, *Melanie*, *Martha*, *Katie*, while others are less common or even have fallen out of fashion at the present (*Stephany*/*Stephanie*, *Edwin*, *René*, *Werner*, and the double name *Nancy Marleen*). Twenty-nine of the names were unmistakably Hispanic in origin, with *Carlos* coming up twice, and three compound variations of *José*: *José Antonio*, *José Jaime*, and *José Alberto*. There were other compound Hispanic names such as *Luis Manuel*, *Miguel Angel*, and *Rosendo Enrique*, all common name combinations. Eleven names could be either American or Hispanic (*Tania*, *Alicia*, *Angela*, *David*, *Julian*, *Victoria*, *Celeste*, *Andrea*, *Alan*,

Lydia, *Mario*), with minor phonetic or orthographic differences. Two boys had two names, one Hispanic and then one American, forming unexpected combinations: *Elvis Gustavo* and *Luis Kevin*. Nineteen were of the creative kind: *Citaly*, *Haziel*, *Romi*, *Anahi*, *Anallely*, *Shalim*, *Angelique*, *Jandy Karelma*, *Devani*, *Kiara*, *Marco*, *Radames*, *Rosely*, *Suriel*, *Bethzy*, *Isadora*, and the surprising *Frantz Louis*. The sound /i/ in the last syllable is favored, which is also the case with many American names but is less common in Spanish. Once more, these creative names are mostly for girls. One boy's name (*Shalim*) and two girls' names were references to pop singers (*Anahi* and *Selena*). There was one *Arvey* with deletion of the initial "h" of the standard American spelling (the aspirated "h" does not exist in Spanish). Two names presented clear phonetic adaptation into Spanish phonology: *Banesa* for *Vanessa* — the graphemes "b" and "v" are both realized in Spanish with the occlusive /b/ or the fricative /β/ — and *Yesica* for *Jessica* — the affricate /dʒ/ does not exist in Spanish. Protestant inroads can also be seen in the traditionally Catholic populations of Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador with such biblical names as *Josue*, *Abel*, *Yeshua*, *Isaias*, or *Christian*, giving rise to new creative names.

The difference between parents and children in the number of the creative names seems to indicate that it is a recent trend. There is, however, no statistically significant correlation between the choice of first name and the single or double surname, that is, no increase or decrease in American first names when the family is identified with one or two surnames. This lack of correlation is also the case with birth order or the length of stay in the US — although this last is difficult to determine at times. There are several instances of younger children with identifiable Hispanic names while older siblings have other types of names. This is going against the assumed trend and may reflect a tendency to reclaiming traditions. There is an even split between the Hispanic and American name choices, with a strong favoring for creative naming seen in other parts of the Hispanic world. Yet the difference in the frequency of Hispanic names between adults and children is a clear indication of the desire to conform to the norms of the new environment. The same can be said of the choice of names that can be construed as Hispanic and American, with a possible ambivalence in the decision. Since the place of birth is an unknown in this particular population, it is difficult to determine whether the children with Hispanic names were in fact born in the countries of origin of their parents or if the Hispanic names were chosen to fit traditions of the culture of origin. Nonetheless, a notable accommodation towards American society can be seen.

Table 2 presents the data from the interviews, using the same categories as in Table 1:

Again, in this group there is an almost even split between Hispanic and American names for the children, while the majority of the adults, born and raised in Hispanic

TABLE 1

DISTRIBUTION OF FIRST NAMES IN THE CHAMBERSBURG SCHOOL DISTRICT

First Names (School district)	Hispanic	American	Hisp/Am	Creative
Parents (81)	70	3	7	1
Children (76)*	29	28	11	19

*The numbers do not add to 76 because some children had double names.

TABLE 2

DISTRIBUTION OF FIRST NAMES AMONG INTERVIEWEES IN THE CHAMBERSBURG AREA

First Names (Interviews)	Hispanic	American	Hisp/Am	Creative
Adults (22)*	17	2	1	2
Children (34)	13	12	3	4

*Four of the adults refused to give their names, hence 22 answers instead of 26, yet volunteered the names of their children.

countries, have Hispanic names. The reasons given for the choices of names for the children varied. For traditional Hispanic names, several women said that their husbands had made the decision, while others stated that the names of their children honored a family member, echoing Evans. Some couples just liked the names, while one woman, in the US for fourteen years, searched the Internet for her last child's name, and this name fell in the creative category (*Axel*). Many had no specific reasons and appeared puzzled by my question.

In the interviews, two adults mentioned a first-name change, i.e. far from the majority. One man called *Epifanio* had his name shortened to *Epi* by his co-workers while one woman told me that, now that she lives in the US, she is *Elizabeth*. She would not give her original name.

In order to confirm or dispel the trends found in this initial pool of migrants, I requested in the fall of 2011 the rosters of two entire school districts, those of Franklin and Adams counties, where 438 families were registered at that time. Twenty-one of them had one head of household only (fourteen women and seven men). Here is the distribution for the patronyms within families:

TABLE 3

DISTRIBUTION OF LAST NAMES IN FRANKLIN AND ADAMS COUNTIES SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Last Names (Franklin and Adams Counties)				
Within the same family	**One name for each spouse**	**Both spouses have the same last name***	**One or two names for each spouse**	**Two names**
Parents	365	38	24	49
Within the same family	**All have one name**		**One or two names**	**Two names**
Children	251		20	167

*This is a subset of the set in the previous column.

TABLE 4

DISTRIBUTION OF FIRST NAMES IN FRANKLIN AND ADAMS COUNTIES SCHOOL DISTRICTS

First Names individual count	Hispanic	American	Hisp/Am	Creative
Adults	782	21	25	49
Children	426	156	48	162

For parents and children, the trend is towards a single name, although this trend is not as strong for the children as compared to the initial pool. Fifteen women and nine men have two names while their spouses have one. Most parents retain their own last names while children have their father's patronym. However, while a majority of women continue using their father's name, a new small subset confirms acculturation in the United States: both parents have the same last name, adopting the American custom for wives to take their husbands' name. For the children with two patronyms, it is more common when the parents are also carry two; when the children of a household do not all have the same father or mother; or when the patronym of the father is very common which could lead to confusion (*Aguilar*, *Sanchez*, *Morales*, etc.). In families where children have either one or two patromyms, it appears that the youngest have one, possibly because the family has been longer in the US at the time of their births.

For first names and using the same classification as was previously done, the distribution is similar to that of the initial, smaller pool:

Since the set for the parents and the children set are comparable in numbers, the changes in name adoptions are particularly salient. From one generation to the other, the number of American names increases substantially, but there is no wholesale shift and the shift is not as great as it appeared in the initial pool. Creative names are also on the increase, especially for girls and favoring a final /i/ sound as seen earlier. Traditional Hispanic names decrease but are still preferred for boys, particularly *José*, *Juan*, *Luis*, and *Miguel*. It can thus be said that the trends of the initial analysis are present in this larger group.

Going back to the research questions, I will now answer them based on the analysis of the data. For the first research question on choices of surnames, the interviews show that the shift toward one name is prevalent once children begin school. The school appears to impose the choice of patronyms but on occasion keeps the double surname when children within the same household do not have the same set of parents. The double surname can be a tool of convenience and, when not needed, the American system is adopted. Families favor double patronyms as long as their children are not schooled nor participate in the American community through the school. Prior to schooling, participation in and communication with this wider community is limited and the migrant families keep their double patronyms, maybe because they are not yet aware of the American naming system or of the oddity of the double surname in American culture. It is also the case that, very often, schooling begins after some length of time in the country, when these standards are better known. However, the migrants do not resist dropping one name and rather see it as a necessary or inevitable part of conforming to American standards.

Regarding the second question which addresses the choice of first names, the data shows some of the characteristics found by other researchers in immigrant communities but there does not seem to be a majority shift towards the adoption of American names. This could be explained in light of the type of population in this research. Not only is it an immigrant one, but it is also a migrant population. Thus it sees its integration into American society curtailed or slowed down, and has fewer opportunities to establish roots or to become familiar with local mores. The migrants rely more on the microcosm of their peers for their socialization, i.e. on fellow Hispanics.

A second explanation for the retention of Hispanic names can be found in the information from the interviews, where it can be concluded that many of the interviewees are recent arrivals in the United States, i.e. their children were not born in the US. Despite intentions to emigrate, they could have opted not to chose American names because they were not familiar with these names; they may not have realized that the Hispanic names are difficult to pronounce for non-Spanish speakers; or may not have realized how much the Hispanic names associate them with a specific group and may distance them from society at large. Others may not have intended to move to the United States at the time of the children's births. Many of their choices still conform to the standards of their countries of origin.

From the answers to the two previous sets of questions, it can be concluded for the third one that, as this is a population in transition, the choices of first names reflect the liminality of the group: migrants are at the threshold of the American society and not quite part of it yet, as seen in the lesser than anticipated proportion of American names, and unlike what Silverman and Blair found in Gypsy and Iranian populations respectively. There are still clear patterns in naming that reflect the cultures of origin: creative names, which are a recent development in the Hispanic world, are favored for girls, as found by Sanchez-Carretero; while traditional Hispanic names are dominant for boys, as noted by Evans. On the other hand, the choice of names that can either be American of Hispanic is a definite movement towards integration, concurrent with a desire to continue following or accommodating Hispanic traditions. In the two initial cohorts (school data and interviews), there were only favored first names in Spanish for boys. The larger pool shows that, for traditional names, *María*, *Juana*, and *Ana* are the most common for girls. The types of names did not seem to be determined by ethnicity, birth order, or length of stay in the US, but rather follow Hispanic trends. Of course, it could also be argued that first names are an internal decision, i.e. a decision made within the family or vis-à-vis the Hispanic community, while last names are the face of the family in the US society and decided by this society. The dropping of the double Hispanic surname is imposed rather than willingly chosen and it happens well after the choice of first name, maybe when the parents realize the necessity of integration. The Hispanic migrants of South Central Pennsylvania often complain of the lack in Pennsylvania of civic features such as a Plaza Mayor, sidewalks, or the sidewalk cafés that promote social mingling and which have been prominent in Hispanic towns in Latin America since colonial times (Martínez Lemoine, 2003). Without these features, acculturation becomes difficult at best, or impossible in the worst of cases. The school becomes then a forum for integration by default.

The initial data gathering for this research depended, for the first cohort, on forms containing requests pre-established by the school system. It did not allow for further investigation regarding first-name and surname choices. Consequently, the investigation of these reasons depended on interviews with a second cohort. Although similar in many regards, the characteristics of the two relatively small cohorts do not completely overlap. As a result, the conclusions were tentative and needed to be explored in more depth. The issues of the relation between ethnicity and first name choices and of the choice of creative first names could not be solved either. Choices for first names are linked to fashions in the community, as seen in the regularly

published lists of favorite names in the United States. They correspond to what is appreciated at a particular moment in a particular society, be it popular culture or traditions. It would be then of interest to determine if the families use yet another name within the various ethnic groups present in the area, as attested by patronyms, yet not quite identified in the school questionnaires, and use this name within their communities — in the countries of origin or in the communities formed in the American society. Since the recognition of the value of the indigenous cultures is a fairly recent development, particularly in Mexico (Ragone, 2005), it is conceivable that the persons interviewed wanted to avoid the stigmatization that they had suffered in their countries. The distancing or dissociation from the conditions of the home country mentioned by Blair could have limited the number of respondents acknowledging indigenous origin during the interviews. As for the standards leading to the adoption of creative names, the question was not really answered in the present research, simply because this naming pattern is very limited in the second cohort. However, it can be said that some of the creative names are repeated in the larger 2011 sample and may be turning into the new naming norm. Such names as *Giovanni*, *Jasmin*, or *Lizbeth*, all with alternate spellings, are recurrent in the data and so are biblical names. The association with important men is also present in the data with such names as *Victor Hugo*, *Julio Cesar*, *Marco Antonio*, *Erasmo*, and *Ulices*.

Despite the above caveats, the present analysis gives nonetheless a good overview of the onomastic choices of the migrant population in South Central Pennsylvania and allows a glimpse of the trends favored by the migrants. With the larger name pool for two counties, it became evident that the results of the original analysis could be confirmed and trends established. The desire to blend in with American society appears to be less prevalent in this group than in groups of other ethnic, linguistic or geographic origins. Talking about Hispanics, Guardado states in regards to acculturation that "complex, and sometimes contradictory, processes of socialization, suggesting that informal everyday interactions can indeed contribute to the processes of cultural reproduction of and resistance to English dominance" (2009: 121).While Guardado refers to language use, the observation can be extended to name giving, the life-defining choice for the members of the community. The migrants of South Central Pennsylvania adapt their onomastic choices only when they see a necessity for it.

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Notes on contributor

Dr Ragone is professor of Spanish and French at Shippensburg State University. She is a sociolinguist whose areas of interest are languages in contact, discourse analysis, onomastics, and language acquisition. She has done research and published on Spanish and French in contact in the United States, Mexico, and France.

Correspondence to: Agnes C. M. Ragone, Shippensburg State University, Modern Languages Department, 1871 Old Main, Shippensburg University, Shippensburg, PA 17257, USA. Email: acrago@ship.edu