

Dual Influences on Chicano Naming Practices

LURLINE H. COLTHARP

El Paso, Texas, is a bilingual city and so presents fascinating material on languages in contact. On the window of one grocery store in South El Paso was painted “w-i-n-e-s 39¢ a pound.” Wines? Repronounced, it comes out “wienes,” “wienerwurst.” Languages in contact. El Paso presents this excellent opportunity for study because of its geographical location, its settlement history, and local linguistic developments in the early part of the twentieth century. El Paso is located in the extreme western tip of Texas and has a population of approximately 400,000. Across the river, the Rio Grande, is Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico with a population of some 900,000. Traffic from one city to the other is virtually unimpeded. Thus we have both English and Spanish in contact. The area was settled by the Spanish, but later the Anglos became the dominant group on the United States side of the border. Here again, the two languages are in contact.

In the early part of the Twentieth century in the portion of El Paso known as South El Paso, there developed a *caló* or an argot that is almost a third language. It is a non-prestige language. As one user said to me, “Somos gente bajos,” ‘We are low people.’ In Juarez the dominant group speaks Spanish. In El Paso, the dominant group speaks English, some speak Spanish, and a numerous, non-dominant group speaks a *caló*. The major question to be answered by this study is to determine the comparative influence of English and Spanish on the naming practices of this third group.

This study was conducted by a written questionnaire given at the University of Texas at El Paso to three groups: (1) students who are mono-lingual speakers of American English; (2) students from Spanish-speaking countries with a strong attachment to Spanish as their sole means of relaxed communication; and (3) bilingual students, born in the United States, who consider themselves as having a Latin American background. The last group may be described by other terms such as Mexican-Americans or Chicanos [Coltharp, “Pachuco, Tirilón, Chicano,” *American Speech*, 50(1975), 25-29]. For purposes of simplification only one title will be used for this third group,

“Chicano.” Shortening the phrase “monolingual speakers of English” they will be labeled either “U.S.” or “American.”

At the time this study was conducted, the University had 15,836 students. Of these, 6,484 had Spanish names. The foreign students numbered 867 with 585 from Spanish speaking countries, of these 524 came from Mexico. (Figures courtesy of Dr. Barbara Prater, Office of Institutional Studies).

Numerous restrictions were placed on the investigation in an effort to reduce variables. The most important was that only male given names would be studied. A second restriction was on the age of the informants. Only those between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four were used. Also, in the final tally only the Spanish-speaking students from Mexico were used in order to limit to one dialect of Spanish; therefore, they will henceforth be called “Mexicans.”

The questionnaire itself underwent various modifications (James Alm pre-publication material on “Name Significance” contributed to the form of the questionnaire) and each step was field tested with students before the final form was evolved. It was given in a classroom situation. While this might not be ideal for relaxation and freedom, most students welcome a change of pace and enjoy doing writing that will not be graded. One advantage of this method was that it provided enough respondents to give a large corpus for analysis. Every student in each class was given a form. Only later were those eliminated that were over age or were not in one of the three groups studied.

The questionnaire was on two pages. The first page asked for name and appropriate biographical material. Below this was the statement, “If I were going to name my son, my first choices would be”: There were spaces for five choices. The second page requested information about each of the five choices. Specifically, it was “The first name I chose was _____ I chose it because:

Does any member of your family have this name? Yes ___ No ___
 If so what is the relationship? _____
 Would you use a nickname for it? If so, what? _____”

The questionnaires were given by nine professors (It is a pleasure to acknowledge my indebtedness to my colleagues: Eleanor Cotton, Jean Dunham, Charles Elerick, Stephen Justice, Joseph Leach, Eugene Mason, Roberta Walker and John West.) to fifteen sections, a total of 305 college students. Of the total returned 32 had to be taken out because the form had not been completed. 31 were rejected because the student was over age. A few were removed from the tally for other reasons. After these adjustments had been made, there were 50 forms from monolingual English-speaking students in the United States: 25 male and 25 female; therefore, the other two

categories were reduced to fifty each with exactly $\frac{1}{2}$ male and $\frac{1}{2}$ female. The total number used for compiling statistics was, thus, 150: Each control group had fifty; U.S. 50 and Mexicans 50. The target group, the Chicanos, also had 50.

After all the questionnaires were in, culled and sorted, a tally process was conducted. As an example, the replies of 25 males from the United States were taken and the name choices listed and then re-listed in order of frequency of choice. The same process was then followed for the 25 U.S. females. These two lists were kept separate for later consultation, if necessary, but were combined to provide the basic list for this category. This process was repeated for each of the other groups.

At this point, a decision had to be reached about the basis for the final comparison. Fortunately, there was a good break-point in all three lists at "5 or more instances." This means that 10% of the 50 in each category listed the name as a choice. The numbers presented, therefore, are based on the names chosen five or more times in each category.

The final step was to compare the Chicano choices with those of the two control groups. The Chicanos had fifteen names chosen over five times each. Eleven: David and Robert (Roberto chosen by 2 females and the form Robert chosen by nine males); ten: José (5 Joe's and 5 José); seven: Christopher and Paul; six: Richard; five: Alfredo (3 Alfredo and 2 Alfred); Anthony (2 Antonio and 3 Anthony); Charles (2 Carlos and 3 Charles); also five: Daniel, John, Michael, Ruben and Stephen.

The American had fifteen names chosen more than five times. In descending order from twenty-one to five, they are Michael, Jerry, David, John, Robert, Mark, Richard, Stephen, James, Christopher, David, Paul, Charles, Joseph and Tom. Of these, eleven were also chosen by Chicanos.

The Mexicans had fourteen chosen five or more times. In descending order from twelve to five, they are Alejandro, Carlos, Eduardo, Jorge, Roberto, Antonio, Gerardo, Hector, Juan, Luis, Ricardo, Gabriel, Jose, Jesus. Of these, five were also chosen by Chicanos.

These five were also on the American list and so were double choices. They are David, Christopher, Paul, Daniel, Michael and Stephen.

The Chicano list is central (See Appendix A). The Chicano names are listed in descending order of number of choices; however, the American and Mexican names that correspond were placed opposite the Chicano counterpart with the number of choices preceding each entry.

Four Chicano choices do not appear in either of the control groups. Two are Peter and Anthony. Two others, Alfred and Ruben, did not appear in the top choices, but they were chosen four times each by Mexicans and present a problem in making the statistics valid.

There are several ways to analyze these statistics. One of them is that of the top fifteen Chicano choices, five were among the top Mexican choices and eleven among the top American choices. Thus it could be stated that two-thirds of the influence comes from the dominant culture and one-third from social heredity. These are statistics, but possibly not a true interpretation of the figures.

Also, it could be stated that five names on the Chicano list were influenced by both cultures. In addition to these five, six more were chosen with only the influence of the Anglo contemporaries. These six could form the basis for a statement that the dominant culture of the area exerts a dominant influence on the naming preferences of young Chicano adults. A different interpretation of the data, and one that I personally find tenable, is that the naming preferences of the three groups indicate that there are three separate cultures here.

The questionnaire was written to elicit more information than simple choices of names. One facet concerned the use of nicknames to find out if there were a cultural basis for their use (See Appendix B). There were five choices on each questionnaire which results in 125 male and 125 female or 250 answers in each category. The totals were (out of 250): Americans 103, and Mexican 77, almost 15% less. The Chicanos tended to lean toward English practices with 98, only slightly less than the U.S. 103. However, when divided according to sex, the males showed almost no difference (out of 125): U.S. 41; Mexican 40; and Chicano 45. The females, however, showed a decided difference: the U.S. had 62 out of 125, almost 50%. The Mexicans had only 37. The Chicano again leaned toward English with 53. These figures probably show only that the English-speaking females have more of a "nickname" closeness to males than do Mexican females.

Also a count was made to determine the influence of family names. The figures here vary so slightly that no definite conclusions may be reached (Appendix C). In the total (out of 250 each): U.S. 82; Mexican 93; Chicanos 92: less than 5% difference. Here, the females from the U.S. and Mexico were identical 35 each, with Chicano 31. The differences were in the males, with fewer American males choosing names used by relatives (47) than Mexicans did (58), with Chicanos having the largest number: 61 out of 125—almost fifty percent.

This study, then, could be used as a basis for several conclusions. One minor result is that fifty percent of Chicano males value relatives highly and wish to carry on the traditions of family names. In this they are close to the Mexican heritage. A second minor statement is that American females use more nicknames for males than do Mexican females.

The major conclusions are not as clear cut. Statistics point to a definite

influence of the dominant U.S. culture on Chicano naming practices but also point to a dual influence by the American and Mexican cultures.

University of Texas at El Paso

APPENDIX A

Name Choices

United States	Chicano	Mexican
9-David	11-David	
9-Robert	11-Robert	7-Roberto
	9-Robert	
	2-Roberto	
5-Joseph (Joe)	10-Joe	5-José
	5-Joe	
	5-José	
6-Christopher	7-Christopher	
6-Paul	7-Paul	
	6-Peter	
8-Richard (Dick)	6-Richard	6-Ricardo
	5-Alfredo	
	3-Alfredo	
	2-Alfred	
	5-Anthony	
	3-Anthony	
	2-Antonio	
5-Charles	5-Charles	12-Carlos
	3-Charles	
	2-Carlos	
6-Daniel	5-Daniel	
9-John	5-John	6-Juan
	3-John	
	1-Johnny	
	1-Juan	
21-Michael	5-Michael	
	5-Ruben	
8-Stephen	5-Steven	

APPENDIX B

Nicknames

United States	Chicano	Mexican
	out of 250	
103	98	77
	out of 125	
Males: 41	45	40
Females: 62	53	37

APPENDIX C

Names Chosen for Relationship (relative, husband, or fiancé)

United States	Chicano	Mexican
	out of 250	
82	92	93
	out of 125	
Males: 47	61	58
Females: 35	31	35