TEACHERS GUIDE TO SUPPORTING MEXICAN AMERICAN STANDARD ENGLISH LEARNERS

Understanding the Characteristic Linguistic Features of Mexican American Language as Contrasted with Standard English Structure

A Collaborative Work by
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PREFACE

Mexican Americans make up six out of ten of the Hispanic census count (2000) – the majority of which live in California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. They are US born Americans of Mexican descent whose language is predominantly English. Speakers of Mexican American language are English Only (EO) speakers, as identified per the LAUSD Home Language Survey, of Mexican descent, and have a history of underachievement throughout their schooling experience.

This teachers guide uses Chicano English (CE) and Mexican American Language (MxL) interchangeably in acknowledgement of its linguistic characterization (Chicano English) in the research and it's correlation with the ethnic population in which this linguistic variation resides–Mexican Americans. The sociolinguistic framework for the description of Chicano English draws heavily from the work of Dr. Carmen Fought. Many of the linguistic features demonstrated in this guide have been drawn from her research in the L.A. area and tested against the oral and written samples of Mexican American students in LAUSD.

The general purpose of this guide is to serve as a reference manual for teachers and introduction to the characteristic linguistic features of Mexican American Language (MxAL) also referenced as Chicano English. The specific objective of the guide is to facilitate the acquisition of standard American and academic English in Mexican American Standard English Learners (SELs) through the use of culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy including "contrastive analysis."

The History of Mexican American Language (Chicano English)

The history of Chicano English like the history of any language is the product of the collective historical experience of a people. For Mexican-Americans or Chicanos the development of the language known as Chicano English can be understood as the living spoken history of the Chicano people. Emerging from the contact between Mexican Spanish and English, Chicano English has now developed as an independent, systematic, and rule-governed language that can count itself among the various original language varieties found in the U.S.

Chicano English as a language is the product of two major relexifications that took place in the history of México over the past 500 years (relexification is a term from linguistics for the mechanism by which one language changes its lexicon to that of another language). To properly understand the origin of Chicano English it is important to understand the history of language contact and colonization in México. The first major relexification occurred at the time of the Spanish conquest of México where a variety of Uto-Aztecan indigenous languages were spoken. Of these Uto-Aztecan languages, the predominant language of central Mexico was Náhuatl. Náhuatl (Ná-watl) was the indigenous language spoken by the Mexica (Aztecs) and was utilized as the administrative language throughout the Aztec Empire. After the destruction of the Aztec Empire by the Spanish and during the time of colonial rule, Mexicans learned the Spanish language in the context of their own indigenous languages. Mexican Spanish, while similar to the Spanish from Spain in terms of its comprehensibility, is distinct in that it has been influenced by the Uto-Aztecan languages, especially Náhuatl in terms of prosody, vowel reduction (preference for the consonant), and vocabulary. Thus, Mexican Spanish retains the history and distinctiveness of México in its language. This is a very important fact to consider as this applies to the development of Chicano English.

Having gained complete independence from Spain in 1821, México would enjoy a brief period of national influence in the territory now known as the Southwestern United States. It would be here where the second major relexification would occur as the result of war with the United States of America. In 1848 after the conclusion of the Mexican American War, México was forced to cede almost 1/2 of its territory to the U.S.A. In the ensuing settlement of former Mexican territory by Anglo-Americans, contact between speakers of Mexican Spanish and American English increased. In time, Mexicans would come to learn English as a second language and speak a variety of non-native English that could be characterized as a learner's English. This learner's English contained various patterns such as phonology, syntax, and semantics from Mexican Spanish. Within the germ of this interlanguage or learner's English, a new language would be formed and codified by the children of these English learners. This language is known as Mexican American language.

Chicano English emerges from the linguistic setting where there is contact between Mexican Spanish and American English. Linguists describe this language as a contact "dialect" because it develops independently after a period of time and begins to distinguish itself from the interlanguage of learners. Carmen Fought (2003) describes how this interlanguage forms the foundation of Chicano English:

> However, particularly within the phonological component, the various non-native English patterns of the immigrants were inherited by their children, modified somewhat, and can still be seen in the new (native) dialect. To a lesser degree, there may be syntactic and semantic elements that also reflect the influence of Spanish. Chicano English now has independent phonological and syntactic norms of its own, which will be discussed later. It is important to reiterate the inaccuracy of the idea that Chicano English is simply English influenced by Spanish. (p. 14)

It is important to note that Chicano English is not simply English influenced by Spanish. Speakers of Chicano English have acquired English perfectly, albeit their English is of the variety found in their community. Chicano English therefore, is a variety of English spoken by fluent English speakers who are not English learners. For further clarification we can refer to Dr. Otto Santa Ana's discussion of the importance of utilizing the term Chicano to refer to the language variety that is spoken by native English speakers:

> Chicano English is an ethnic dialect that children acquire as they acquire English in the barrio or other ethnic social setting during their language acquisition period. Chicano English is to be distinguished from the English of second-language learners… Thus defined, Chicano English is spoken only by native English speakers. (1993:15)

Interestingly, Chicano English can now stand on its own as it has features that are not directly attributable to Spanish influence. Perhaps the most interesting fact about Chicano English aside from the fact that it is developing on its own, is how it shares certain features with other varieties of English. Given the sheer number of generational Mexican-Americans, as well as the growing size of the vast Mexican community in the U.S., the number of Chicano English speakers will continue to grow.

<div align="right">Javier A. San Román</div>

Mexican American Language (Chicano English)

Features of Phonology

RULES FOR COMBINING FEATURES OF SOUNDS INTO SIGNIFICANT SPEECH SOUNDS

1.1   Introduction to Chicano English Phonology

Chicano English phonology represents the sound system of the Mexican American community. As a result, CE phonology is heavily influenced by contact with Mexican Spanish. As we shall see it is this precise contact that causes confusion to many a casual observer of Chicano English speech.

Chicano English phonology is characteristically different from Mainstream American English in terms of sound, stress patterning, intonation, and prosody. So different in fact, that Chicano English speakers are often mistaken as having a Spanish accent by the general public. Since Chicano English speakers are native speakers of English, the appearance of a foreign language accent is certainly not possible. In fact, many speakers of Chicano English are monolingual or limited in their ability to communicate in Spanish.

The persistence of the myth that CE speakers are speaking accented English probably lies in the fact that Chicano English phonology is closely related to yet distinct from Spanish. Certain phonological features of Chicano English (MxAL) run parallel to the interlanguage of English learners and may lead casual observers to draw the erroneous conclusion that Chicanos are speaking with a Spanish accent. What is occurring in reality, is that these observers are hearing the phonology of a language that was formed across generations in the Mexican American community.

1.2   Word Final Consonants in Chicano English (MxAL)

Final Consonant clusters in Chicano English are not produced because the rules of the language require this pronunciation. Consonant cluster variation occurs when you have a final consonant cluster in a word reduced to a single sound. The final product results in a word that is pronounced differently from Mainstream English.

For example: mind⟶ nd⟶ n = mine.

consonant cluster variation

CE/MxAL example: He doesn mine if you talk, as long as you're not too loud.
MAE translation: He doesn't mind if you talk, as long as you're not too loud

Chicano English phonological rules do not permit the production of consonants in clusters in the following contexts:
  • When both consonant sounds are voiced
      ex: MAE (mi<u>nd</u>)   CE/MxAL (mine)
      ex: MAE (li<u>ve</u>s)   CE/MxAL (lifes)
      ex: MAE (prized)   CE/MxAL (price)

  • When both consonant sounds are voiceless
      ex: MAE (wor<u>st</u>)   CE/MxAL (worse)
      ex: MAE (strict)   CE/MxAL (strick)

The following are additional examples of sound clusters which CE phonological rules do not allow to exist.

Two-Consonant sequences:

Sound Cluster	MAE		CE (MxAL) Contrasts
-ft	left, draft, shaft,	-	lef, draf, shaf
-sk	risk, disk, mask,	-	ris, dis, mas
-sp	crisp, clasp, grasp	-	cris, clas, gras
-pt	slept, kept, crept	-	slep, kep, crep

1.2a   Consonant cluster variation and other consonant sounds.

There is a tendency in CE (MxAL) to <u>vary consonant clusters, even in final consonants that are not clustered:</u>

Lea*st*	realized as	[lis] lease
Ha*rd*ware	realized as	[haw∂] harware
Me*t s*ome	realized as	[mɛs∂m] mesum
Ni*ght*	realized as	[naj] nai

1.3   The merging of the /CH/ and /SH/ digraph.

Chicano English is characterized by a unique merging of the ch sound with the sh sound and vice versa, /sh/ with /ch/. /X/ in the Náhuatl language is a sh digraph sound in English, hence the merging of the ch/sh digraph sound in Chicano English (CE). The use of the ch/sh digraph sound differs according to regional variation. For example, Tejanos (Chicanos from Texas) tend to exhibit this feature more than Californianos.

		MAE			CE (MxAL)
ex:	/ch/ ⟶	teacher	⟶	/sh/	teasher
		watch			wash
		chop			shop
		chair			share

ex:	/sh/ ⟶	shake	⟶	/ch/	chake
		shy			chy
		shame			chame
		shop			chop
		share			chair

1.4 /Z/ and /V/ Sounds

/z/ Sound

ex: MAE   CE (MxAL)
         prized   price
         fuzz   fuss
         raise   race

MAE: When I don't raise my hand the teacher makes a fuss.
CE/MxAL: When I don't <u>race</u> my hand the tea<u>sh</u>er make a <u>fuzz</u>.

/v/ Sound

ex: MAE   CE (MxAL)
         lives   lifes
         save   safe

MAE: The hero <u>saved</u> many <u>lives</u>.
CE/MxAL: The hero <u>safe</u> many <u>lifes</u>.

1.5   Chicano English Language Homophones

Due to the influence of CE phonological rules, many words that are <u>not</u> homophones (words that sound alike but are spelled differently) in Mainstream American English <u>are homophonous in CE.</u>

Examples:

MAE	CE/MxAL
find	fine
ten	tin
fuzz	fuss
pen	pin
den	din

1.6   Stress Patterns

In Chicano English, stress is often placed on one syllable prefixes as well as roots. The stress on one syllable prefixes and roots is elongated.

Examples:

MAE	CE/MxAL
today	tooday
decide	deecide
refuse	reefuse
repeat	reepeat
resist	reesist

1.7　Intonation (Circumflex patterns)

This pattern involves a rise and sustain or a rise and fall at the end of the spoken word phrase "this distinctive musical line … of the phonetic group is probably the most striking trace that the Náhuatl language has left …" (Matluck 1952;119)

ex:

MAE	CE /MxAL
Don't be bad.	Doont be baaad.
I have to do it soon	III have to do it sooon.

1.7a　/h/ in the Nahuatl language is a breath /h/ sound resulting in a regularization of the /wh/ consonant cluster in English words like what, where, when and resulting in <u>Chicano English</u> sounds and words like _whith_ –with, _whill_-will, whind- wind.

Mexican American Language (Chicano English)

Features of Morphology

RULES FOR COMBINING SOUNDS INTO BASIC
UNITS OF MEANING (WORDS).

Features of Syntax

RULES FOR COMBINING WORDS INTO ACCEPTABLE PHRASES,
CLAUSES, AND SENTENCES.

2.1 Introduction to CE Morphology and Syntax

Chicano English syntactic and morphological features demonstrate certain commonalities with other language varieties. In fact, several features of Chicano English (MxAL) are shared with other language varieties such as African American Language. The reasons for these commonalities suggest similarities surrounding the context in which these languages were acquired; particularly the shared historical experiences of oppression and forced assimilation. While Chicano English (MxAL) syntactical features share commonalities with other language varieties, the syntactical structure is highly independent.

2.2   Morphological Sensitive Rule

/the/, which is conventionally pronounced with a schwa [ə] before consonants, but a tense /i/ before an initial vowel, e.g., /ə/ in the bus. But /i/ in the ocean.

Speakers of Mexican American Language (MxAL) East LA variety Chicano English(CE) retain the schwa pronunciation before vowel, as if written: *thuh ocean*.

MAE	CE/MxAL
The apple	thuh apple
The eagle	thuh eagle
The auto	thuh auto

2.3   Pluralization

Mainstream American English

/ -s / following voiceless sounds   ex: five cents

/ -z / following voiced sounds   ex: different foods

/ -iz / following "hissing" sounds   ex: kisses-ditches

Mexican American Language (MxAL) Chicano English (CE):

The plural marker /s/ is dropped when forming a separate syllable.

ex: five cent
ex: different food
ex: kiss-ditch

2.4 Substitution of the negative element not with until which alone, can stand as the negative element in a sentence.

Mainstream American English (MAE)

The obligatory use of the negative word *not* with *until* in Standard English. Negation with the word *until* indicates a period of duration after which something will begin or end.

ex: He <u>won't</u> be home until seven o'clock.

In Chicano English (CE) Mexican American Language (MxAL) <u>*Not*</u> is omitted and <u>*until*</u> can stand in as the negative element.

ex: He'll be home <u>*until*</u> seven o'clock

2.5   Past Tense Marker

In Chicano English the /-ed/ suffix which forms the past tense marker in Mainstream American English is not produced due to the phonological rules that prohibit the clustering of consonants at the end of words.

Mainstream American English:		CE/MxAL
/-t/ following voiceless consonants	ex: cooked	ex: cook
/-d/ following voiced consonants	ex: moved	ex: move
/id/ following word final /t/ or /d/	ex: kidded	ex: kid

Mainstream American English: Past Tense
Ex: Yesterday he started selling newspapers.

Chicano English (CE) Mexican American Language (MxAL)
Ex: Yesterday, he start selling newspapers.

2.6   The copula (to Be)

In Chicano English (CE) Mexican American Language (MxAL) the copula (be) is often not present.

MAE	CE/ MxAL
And they are too old	And they… too old.
This is a school.	This… a school.
She is carrying her.	She… carrying her.
He is sleeping with a bear.	He… sleeping with a bear.

2.7   Serial or Multiple Negation

Mainstream American English: Double or multiple negatives are not evident.

Chicano English (MxAL): Double and multiple negatives are evident.

MAE:
I didn't have a birthday party or anything.
I don't know any stories.
The little kid doesn't have any shoes of his own.

CE/MxL:
I <u>didn't</u> have <u>no</u> birthday party or <u>nothing</u>.
I <u>don't</u> know <u>no</u> stories.
The little kid <u>don't</u> have <u>no</u> shoes of his own.

2.8   Embedded Question Inversion

Embedded Question Mainstream American English (MAE)

ex: I asked myself what would I do?
ex: Could you please tell me where the bank is?
ex: Can you tell me where Carlos went last night?

Embedded Question Inversion Chicano English (CE) (MxAL)

ex: I ask myself what I would do?
ex: Where is the bank could you please tell me?
ex: Where did Carlos go last night can you tell me?

2.9   Topicalization

Topicalization in English Grammar is the placement of the topic at the beginning of a sentence.

MAE: **What I learned was from the teacher.**

CE/MxL: **What I learned it was from the teacher**

Mainstream American English (MAE)

ex: My brother is going to the movies.

In Chicano English (CE) the Topic is inverted.

ex: My brother he's going to the movies.

2.10   Intensifiers (East LA Variety)

Use of Intensifiers before adjectives
All, replaces the colloquial use of terrible and very.

CE/MxL ex:
He's all proud, passing out papers and all.
The Movie was all weird.

"For reals", replaces the colloquial use of really.
ex:
Did you give it to her for reals?
For reals he didn't know it was me.
Did you for reals sell your car?

2.10a   Use of Intensifiers (East LA Variety)

"Barely" replaces the colloquial use of <u>timeliness or scarcity</u>.

ex:
He barely came yesterday.

(Meaning, "He just came yesterday.")

I barely have two pieces.

(Meaning, "I only have two pieces.")

2.11 Prepositional Substitution

Chicanos have a tendency to substitute the following prepositions with other prepositional combinations. Aside from the other syntactic features described in this section, this feature is clearly tied to Spanish. This characteristic feature of CE is found extensively in the written and oral language samples of LAUSD students.

MAE	CE/MxL	examples:
at	on	He's pointing <u>on</u> a cat on a treetop.
	to	He's smiling <u>to</u> the cat.
	from	He's pointing <u>from</u> the cat.
	in	The person <u>in</u> the highest level of the social pyramid is the pharaoh.
on	in	He's putting a towel <u>in</u> his head.
		He write <u>in</u> the paper.
	to	One day that teacher took her <u>to</u> a trip.

2.11a   Prepositional Substitution

MAE	CE/MxL	examples:
in	to	He's up <u>to</u> heaven.
	of	They took part <u>of</u> the mummification process.
	on	We get out of here <u>on</u> June.
of	in	The pharaohs were basically the kings <u>in</u> Egypt.
out of	off	They got <u>off</u> the car and went inside.
so	for	<u>For</u> my mom can understand. <u>For</u> she won't feel guilty.

Mexican American Language
(Chicano English)

REGULARIZATION

Regularization refers to the process of regularizing irregularities that are found in Mainstream American English

3.1 Introduction to Regularization in Chicano English (MxAL)

"Regularized" features cause uniformity of the irregularities that occur in Mainstream American English (MAE). MAE is highly irregular, with exceptions to many linguistic patterns. In Chicano English (MxAL) features are "regularized", resulting in the elimination of the irregularities of mainstream American English. Chicano English shares this characteristic regularization feature with African American Language as well as other non-standard varieties of English.

3.2   Third Person Singular

Mainstream American English: Irregular Third Person

Singular	Plural
I jump	we jump
you jump	you jump
he jumps	they jump

Chicano English: Regular Third Person

Singular	Plural
I jump	we jump
you jump	you jump
he jump	they jump

ex:

Mainstream American English
He jumps rope to get into shape

Chicano English (CE) MxL
He jump rope to get into shape.

3.3   Indefinite Article

Mainstream American English: Irregular Indefinite Article

Before a consonant   Before a vowel
<u>A</u> girl   <u>An</u> umbrella

Chicano English (CE) (MxL): Regular Indefinite Article

Before a consonant   Before a vowel
A girl   A umbrella

ex:

Mainstream American English
A girl opened <u>an</u> umbrella when it began to rain.

Chicano English(CE) (MxL)
A girl opened <u>a</u> umbrella when it began to rain.

3.4   Reflexive Pronoun

Mainstream American English: Irregular Reflexive Pronoun

Possessive	Objective	Reflexive
My	Me	Myself
Yours	You	Yourself
His	Him	Himself
Her	Her	Herself
Its	It	Itself
Our	Us	Ourselves
Their	Them	Themselves

3.4 Reflexive Pronoun

Chicano English: Regular Reflexive Pronoun

Possessive	Objective	Reflexive
My	Me	Myself
Yours	You	Yourself
His	Him	Hisself
Her	Her	Herself
Its	It	Itself
Our	Us	Ourself
Their	**Them**	***Theirselves**

3.5   Pronoun Usage

Number

Mainstream American English	**Mexican American Language**

ex:

There's a big tree with leaves on it.	**There's a big tree with leaves on <u>them</u>.**

Omission

Mainstream American English	**Mexican American Language**
ex:He is washing his hair.	**… is washing the hair**

Mexican American Language (Chicano English)

Semantics

THE LEVEL OF MEANING OF INDIVIDUAL WORDS AND WORD RELATIONSHIPS IN MESSAGES

Mexican American Language (Chicano English)

Pragmatics

**THE LEVEL OF LANGUAGE
AS IT FUNCTIONS
IN VARYING SOCIAL CONTEXTS.**

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