
1 Introduction

1.1 The Spanish language today

There are currently about as many native speakers of Spanish as of English (around 350 million), and, with Spanish-speaking populations continuing to grow, it is anticipated it will remain the third most widely spoken language in the world after Chinese and English for the first half of the twenty-first century. It is the official language (or the principal official language) of some twenty nations, and is also widely spoken in the USA, where the rapidly growing Hispanic population is now the largest ‘ethnic’ group. The areas of Central and South America over which Spanish is spoken are enormous: for example, Mexico City is as far from Buenos Aires as Beijing is from London. It can quickly be appreciated, therefore, that the task of providing a guide to contemporary Spanish usage is a daunting one. The linguistic consequence of the diffusion of Spanish in the New World has been the appearance of many local differences in speech; and within Spain itself there are also considerable differences from region to region. At the same time, speakers from different areas are generally mutually intelligible, and the written language, while sometimes reflecting differences in speech, maintains a remarkable degree of uniformity which, because of the wide acceptance of a commonly agreed norm amongst the national Academias (see 1.5), seems likely to last.

1.2 Local variety and standard

The Spanish standard is generally taken to be the speech of Old Castile. Yet it is immediately apparent that, if that is the case, more than 95 per cent of Spanish speakers do not speak ‘standard’ Spanish! In practice, the speech of any national capital or important regional centre tends to create its own ‘standard’. An Andalusian or a Latin-American speaker would only under rather unusual circumstances adapt his or her speech and usage to that of the Castilian ‘standard’. It is important to realize that in the Spanish-speaking world there is no stigma attached to speaking a local variety of the language. This can be rather difficult for

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English (as distinct from British) people to appreciate, since standard English is not identifiable with any local variety, but is rather the variety of a particular socio-economic class; furthermore, speakers of the English standard tend to look down on speakers of local varieties of English (or dialects, as they are often categorized).

1.3 Peninsular and American Spanish

A major distinction is often drawn in reference works between Peninsular and American Spanish, and it is one which will be used in this book. However, it is in some ways misleading. First, although ‘American Spanish’ does have a number of general features, it is not really a homogeneous variety of Spanish: there are many differences in pronunciation and usage from region to region, even within the same country. Secondly, so-called ‘American’ features are often shared with local varieties of Peninsular Spanish, particularly with Andalusian.

Forms marked ‘Am’ (American) in this book are in fairly wide use in Spanish-speaking Latin America. Only the most striking of more localized usages (eg Arg, Mex) are given, and are marked accordingly. Forms marked ‘Pen’ (Peninsular) are not used commonly in Latin America. It is beyond the scope of this book to reflect finer details of local usage.

1.4 Register

Speakers employ a number of styles of language depending upon the situation in which they find themselves; even a single individual may regularly oscillate between a number of such styles, or registers. A formal letter to an unknown person, a chat in a bar, a scientific report – all call for quite different words and constructions, even pronunciations. Three basic registers, described below, are distinguished in this book.

1.4.1 R1

Informal, colloquial usage, characterized by slang expressions, vulgarisms, restricted range of general vocabulary and ‘loose’ syntax involving repetition, ellipsis and truncation. Vocabulary used is often ephemeral, since fashions in slang words come and go. R1 would probably be used in a conversation between family or friends. A special sub-register of R1 would be adults talking to children.

Within R1 we also distinguish R1*. R1* words and expressions are those generally considered indecent or ‘taboo’; they often sound odd on a foreigner’s lips, and a foreigner should in any case be very circumspect about using them. We make no apology for including such terms – they are among the most frequent in colloquial Spanish, and must be understood!

1.4.2 R2

The 'neutral' register: careful, educated speech, characterized by the absence of slang and vulgarisms, and by the use of full sentences. This is also the informal written language register. R2 would probably be used by a teacher and pupils in a classroom, in a radio or TV news bulletin, in a letter to a penfriend.

1.4.3 R3

Formal written language, characterized by 'officialese', archaic expressions, rarer vocabulary and often very convoluted syntax. There are many identifiable sub-registers, such as those used in journalistic writing, financial reports, legal documents, business letters, formal lectures and addresses, etc.

This division between the three registers is rough and ready, but it seems unnecessarily complicated to refine it more. In any case, a piece of Spanish and its constituent elements rarely fall into one register exclusively; and the vast majority of words and constructions (unmarked for register in this book) can be used in all registers.

1.5 'Correctness'

There are two senses in which Spanish can be 'correct'. The first relates to a foreigner's command of the language – if what is said is unacceptable to a native speaker in any variety or register, then it is 'incorrect'. The second relates to the native speaker's attitude to his own language, and is a more complex matter. In both the popular and educated mind, there is a close association between 'correctness' and the 'standard' language: features of local varieties and registers which differ from the 'standard' are deemed in this way 'incorrect' even though they are regularly used by native speakers. The Real Academia Española has traditionally been recognized, even outside Spain, as the guardian of 'correctness' in Spanish. The Academia has generally been sensitive to changes in the language, although inevitably many judgements on 'correctness' are essentially arbitrary.

The problem in presenting contemporary Spanish usage is that sometimes actual usage does not conform to the accepted view of what is 'correct' in this second sense. This is a book with a primarily pedagogical purpose, to be used by learners who will take examinations, and since the assessment of what is 'correct' is sometimes stricter in examinations than it is among Spanish speakers, we indicate such 'incorrectness' by the sign !. Forms and structures marked in this way exist and are in regular use, but are not to be copied by foreign learners.

2 Passages illustrating register and local variety

2.1 Example of R1* (Peninsular Spanish): *Un encuentro en la calle*

- Pepe: ¡Eh! ¡macho!
- Paco: ¡Joder! No te había visto.
- Pepe: ¿Qué hay? ¿Cómo te va?
- Paco: Psa, tirando . . . ¿y tú?
- Pepe: Yo, me voy tirao tirao.
- Paco: Joder, ya será menos.
- Pepe: Quita, tío, quita, que estoy de una mala leche.
- Paco: Bueno, a ver qué coño te pasa ahora.
- Pepe: Que me se ha escacharrao el coche.
- Paco: No, ¿otra vez?
- Pepe: Otra vez, joder, otra vez.
- Paco: Mucha pasta.
- Pepe: Coño, no sé . . . jo, pero como sea mucha lo tiene claro porque hasta que yo no cobre el mecánico no ve un duro.
- Paco: Va, tío, olvídate. Esta noche me voy al cine con unas tías. ¿Te vienes?
- Pepe: Hum, no sé. Tengo faena.
- Paco: Pero que coño vas a tener tú faena. Pero, macho, de que vas. Si es esta noche.
- Pepe: Es que . . . no sé, joder, no sé.
- Paco: Pero coño, tío, si es un rato. No me seas cabrón.
- Pepe: Jo, tío, que plomo eres, pero ¿no te he dicho que no lo sé?
- Paco: ¿Que tienes plan?
- Pepe: Te pego un telefonazo.
- Paco: Bueno, bien . . . Pero . . . jo, es que esta noche no ceno en casa. Mira, yo te llamo y te digo lo que hay.
- Pepe: Hecho.
- Paco: Sobre las nueve.
- Pepe: Muy bien, tío, nos vemos.

2.1 Example of R1* (Peninsular Spanish)

The R1* forms are: the expletives †**joder!** and its shortened form †**jo!** (= *damn*, lit = *fuck*) and (**qué**) †**coño** (= *shit*, lit = *cunt*); the nouns **tías** (familiarily=*girls*, though also=*whores or prostitutes*) and †**cabrón** (lit=*billygoat*, but familiarily=*bastard*), and the expression **de una mala leche** (= *in a foul mood*).

Apart from these R1* forms, the conversation has many features which are typical of R1.

Pronunciation is not systematically represented here, but the dropping of **-d-** in the **-ado** ending is widespread in speech, and is often shown in the representation of R1, as here, in the spelling of spoken forms (**tirao**, **escacharrao**).

Vocabulary and idioms

¿qué hay?/te digo lo que hay	<i>how are things? / I'll tell you what's happening</i>
(voy) †tirando / me voy †tirao	<i>I'm OK / things have got me down</i>
escacharrarse	<i>to break down</i>
†pasta	<i>money</i>
ser (un) plomo	<i>to be a bore</i>
tener †plan	<i>to have a girlfriend, have sth arranged (with sexual connotations)</i>
pegar un telefonazo	<i>to give a call</i>

Forms of address

- †**macho**, **tío**, used between men (= *mate, man*).

Syntax

- **me voy tirao** / **¿te vienes?** In R1 the reflexive form of verbs of motion is frequently used. The reflexive has an 'intensive' value by comparison with the non-reflexive form (see 34.4).
- **a ver** A very common imperative form (see p. 343).
- **me se** ! **ha escacharrao** In standard Spanish, **se** is always the first pronoun in a sequence (see 33.1).
- †**como sea mucha** = **si es mucha**
- †**hasta que yo no** ! **cobre** NOTE: the meaning is *until I'm paid*; the **no** has no literal negative value. It is not used in standard Spanish.
- **pero** / (**de**) **que** / **es que** / **si** are all used in R1 as connectives.
- †**bueno** is an R1–2 connective which often introduces the answer to a question.
- **te llamo y te digo** The Present tense is used instead of a Future (**te voy a llamar**, **te llamaré**). See 28.1.
- Note the elliptical nature of many of the remarks, eg **mucha pasta** = **eso te va a costar . . .**

2 Passages: register and local variety

2.2 Example of R1 (Mexican Spanish): ¡Pélate! Que vamos al cine

- Mario: Ahorita vengo.
 Teresa: ¿Adónde vas?
 Mario: A la farmacia. Necesito unas hojas de afeitar y un rastrillo nuevo. ¿Se te ofrece algo?
 Teresa: No, gracias. Ah, sí, se me pasaba: unas curitas y un paquete de algodón.
 Mario: ¿Es todo?
 Teresa: Creo que sí. No te tardes, gordo. ¿Ya viste la hora? La película empieza al cuarto para las seis.
 Mario: ¿Al cuarto? Tenemos que salir en diez minutos.
 Teresa: Ya lo sé. ¡Pélate!
 Mario: ¿Y Susana? ¿No iba a lanzarse con nosotros?
 Teresa: Sí, dijo que se caería por aquí como a eso de las cinco.
 Mario: Tu cuatita es la impuntualidad con patas. Dale un fonazo a su chamba para ver si ya salió.
 Teresa: Bueno, pero ¡vuélale! Ya sabes que a esta hora el tráfico se pone de la cachetada.
 Mario: Sí, y para acabarla de amolar está lloviendo. ¡Qué lata! ¡Vuelvo!

It is in R1 that specifically regional forms of Spanish are most frequent and apparent.

Vocabulary and idioms

curitas	<i>plasters (Pen parches, esparadrapo, tiritas)</i>
rastrillo	<i>razor (Pen maquinilla de afeitar; Pen rastrillo = rake)</i>
¿se te ofrece algo?	<i>do you want sth?</i>
al cuarto para las seis	<i>at a quarter to six (Pen a las seis menos cuarto)</i>
¡pélate!/¡vuélale!	<i>get a move on!</i>
†lanzarse	<i>to go, come</i>
se †caería por aquí	<i>she would come here</i>
cuatita (<i>diminutive of cuata</i>)	<i>friend</i>
impuntualidad (<i>f</i>) con patas	<i>lateness personified</i>
fonazo (<i>see Chapter 7</i>)	<i>phone call</i>
chamba	<i>job, work</i>
se pone de la cachetada	<i>it's getting hopeless</i>
para acabarla de amolar	<i>and for good measure</i>

Form of address

- †**gordo**, used between men. (Women would consider **gorda** an insult: they use **flaca**.)

2.3 Example of R1 (Peninsular Spanish)

Syntax

- †**ahorita/cuatita** Diminutives which are widespread in R1 but especially common in American Spanish. In the very common **ahorita** the diminutive is attached to an adverb rather than to a noun.
- **no te †tardes** Reflexive corresponding to Peninsular non-reflexive. See 34.3.
- **viste la hora?** The Preterite is used extensively in Mexican Spanish where a Perfect would be expected in the standard language.
- **en diez minutos** = Pen **dentro de diez minutos**

2.3 Example of R1 (Peninsular Spanish): *Cosas de críos*

- Carmen: ¡María! ¡Chisst! ¡María!
 María: Huy, ¡hola! ¿Qué tal? ¿Cómo estáis?
 Carmen: Bien, estupendamente, ¿y vosotros?
 María: Regular, tengo a la nena pachucha.
 Carmen: Sí, chica, ¿qué le pasa?
 María: No, nada, que está muy costipada.
 Carmen: ¡Vaya, mujer!
 María: Vino ayer el médico y le dio un jarabe porque se ha pasado toda la santa noche tosiendo.
 Carmen: No te preocupes, cosas de críos.
 María: Oye, pero es que me asusté un poco. Bueno, y tú ¿qué me cuentas?
 Carmen: Pues me voy al cole a hablar con el tutor de Carlos.
 María: Sí, pero ¿es que tenéis algún problema?
 Carmen: Mira, no sé. Dice que el niño no atiende, que está en la higuera. Vamos, que pasa de las clases, y oye, con siete años es un poco pronto para empezar a pasar de nada, ¿no te parece?
 María: Y él ¿qué te dice?
 Carmen: ¿Carlos? Bueno, según él, pues que se cansa, que se aburre, que le duele la cabeza.
 María: ¿Habéis mirado si tiene algo en la vista?
 Carmen: Ya lo creo. Mira, pasó las revisiones médicas en el colegio y yo lo llevé además al oculista y el niño ve perfectamente.
 María: Se le pasará.
 Carmen: Eso espero porque ya me tiene frita.
 María: Huy, mira la hora que es. Me voy, que se me ha hecho tardísimo.
 Carmen: Me he alegrado mucho de verte.
 María: Yo también. A ver si pasáis un rato a tomar café, o mejor aún veniros a cenar.
 Carmen: Venga, a ver si encuentro un rato y nos vemos tranquilamente. Yo te llamo.
 María: Muy bien. ¡Que no se te olvide! Recuerdos a tu marido.
 Carmen: Gracias, igualmente.

The R1 features covered in 'Un encuentro en la calle', and also found here, are not dealt with a second time.

2 Passages: register and local variety

Pronunciation

- **Costipada** [!] reflects a common R1 pronunciation of standard †**constipada**.

Vocabulary and idioms

estupendamente	<i>fine</i>
†nena	<i>little girl (= niña)</i>
pachucha	<i>sick</i>
toda la santa noche	<i>santa is an expletive (= all the blessed night)</i>
criños	<i>kids</i>
¿qué me cuentas?	<i>what's your news?</i>
el cole	<i>Abbreviation for el colegio. Such shortenings are typical of R1.</i>
está en la higuera	<i>he's in a world of his own</i>
†pasa de las clases	<i>he's not interested in the classes</i>
¡ya lo †creo!	<i>I should say so!</i>
me tiene frita	<i>I'm sick and tired of him</i>

Forms of address

- **chica, mujer**, used to women by women or men.

Interjections

- This exchange has many interjections (Chapter 15): **¡chissst!**, **¡huy!**, **¡vaya!** (invariable for person), **¡oye!**, **¡mira!**, **¡venga!** (invariable for person).

Syntax

- Note the 'highlighting' of the pronoun (see 23.2) in **tú ¿qué me cuentas?** and **él ¿qué te dice?**

2.4 Example of R1 (Argentine Spanish): from *Don Segundo Sombra*, by R. Güiraldes

Y yo admiraba más que nadie la habilidad de mi padrino que, siempre, antes de empezar un relato, sabía maniobrar de modo que la atención se concentrara en su persona.

– Cuento no sé ninguno – empezó –, pero sé de algunos casos que han sucedido y, si prestan atención, voy a relatarles la historia de un paisanito enamorado y de las diferencias que tuvo con un hijo'el diablo.

– ¡Cuenta, pues! – interrumpió un impaciente.

“– Dice el caso que a orillas del Paraná donde hay más remansos que cuevas en una vizcachera, trabajaba un paisanito llamao Dolores.

2.4 Example of R1 (Argentine Spanish)

“No era un hombre ni grande ni juerte, pero sí era corajudo, lo que vale más.”

Don Segundo miró a su auditorio, como para asegurar con una imposición aquel axioma. Las miradas esperaron asintiendo.

“– A más de corajudo, este mozo era medio aficionao a las polleras, de suerte que al caer la tarde, cuando dejaba su trabajo, solía arrimarse a un lugar del río ande las muchachas venían a bañarse. Esto podía haberle costao una rebenqueada, pero él sabía esconderse de modo que naides maliciara de su picardía.

“Una tarde, como iba en dirición a un sombra’e toro, que era su guarida, vido llegar una moza de linda y fresca que parecía una madrugada. Sintió que el corazón le corcoviaba en el pecho como zorro entrampao y la dejó pasar pa seguirla.”

– A un pantano cayó un ciego creyendo subir a un cerro – observó Perico.

– Conocí un pialador que de apurao se enredaba en la presilla – comentó Don Segundo – y el mozo de mi cuento tal vez juera’e la familia.

“– Ya ciego con la vista’e la prenda, siguió nuestro hombre pa’l río y en llegando la vido que andaba nadando cerquita’e la orilla.

“Cuando malició que ella iba a salir del agua, abrió los ojos a lo lechuza porque no quería perder ni un pedacito.”

– Había sido como mosca pa’l tasajo – gritó Pedro.

– ¡Cáyate, barraco! – dije, metiéndole un puñetazo por las costillas.

In this very famous novel of gaucho life, Güiraldes is concerned to reproduce the everyday language of the gauchos, and although written as long ago as 1926 it is still a convenient text with which to illustrate features of rural Argentine speech.

Pronunciation

- The **-d-** of the **-ado** ending is regularly lost: **enamora**o****, **llama**o****, **aficiona**o****, **costa**o****, **entrampa**o****, **apura**o****.
- **d-** is also lost from **de** following a vowel: **hijo’el diablo**, **sombra’e toro**, **juera’e**, **vista’e**, **cerquita’e**.
- **f-** is pronounced very lightly, almost like English *h*, and is represented by **j-**: **juerte**, **juera**.
- **-ll-** is pronounced as **-y-**: **cáyate**.
- **i** and **e**, especially when unstressed, may be switched by comparison with the standard language: **nenguno (ninguno)**, **dirición (dirección)**, **corcoviaba (corcoveaba)**, **perdir (perder)**.
- **para** is **pa**; in **pa’l** the **e** of the article is also lost.

2 Passages: register and local variety

Vocabulary

- There are many **Americanisms**:

†paisano	<i>peasant (= compatriot; civilian in Pen)</i>
polleras	<i>skirts, and hence women (= chicken coop; petticoat in Pen)</i>
rebenqueada	<i>whipping (rebenque = whip)</i>
maliciar	<i>suspect</i>
barraco	<i>pig (here a term of abuse)</i>
- Some words denote local things:

vizcachera	<i>burrow of a vizcacha (type of rodent)</i>
toro	<i>a cabin made of branches</i>
zorro	<i>not fox here, as in Pen, but skunk</i>
pialador (m)	<i>a gaucho skilled in using a lasso; the action is pialar</i>
tasajo	<i>jerked meat (ie meat left to dry in the sun)</i>

Syntax

- Diminutives are widespread here, not only with nouns (**paisanito**, **pedacito**) but also with other parts of speech (**cerquita**).
- **en llegando** This has only an R3 value in Pen (=on doing sth). NOTE ALSO **nadies (nadie)** and **vido (vio)**, which are found archaically in Pen, and **ande (donde)**, which is found dialectally.

2.5 Example of R2 (Peninsular Spanish): *Una agencia de viajes*

- Señora: Buenos días.
 Señor: Buenos días. Un segundo, si es tan amable, y en seguida le atiendo.
 . . .
 Sí, dígame.
- Señora: Me gustaría que me diera información sobre los vuelos de fin de semana a Londres.
 Señor: ¿Para qué fecha tiene prevista la salida?
 Señora: Bueno, pues lo más pronto que fuera posible.
 Señor: Vamos a ver, ahora lo consulto con el ordenador . . . Me temo que no va a ser posible para este fin de semana. Está todo completo.
- Señora: ¿Y en el siguiente?
 Señor: Sí, aquí sí que hay asientos libres. ¿Cuántos?
 Señora: Cuatro, por favor.
 Señor: Muy bien, hasta aquí de acuerdo. Vamos con los horarios. El avión sale el jueves a las trece veinte y tiene la llegada prevista a las catorce treinta a Heathrow.
- Señora: ¿El traslado al hotel corre por nuestra cuenta?
 Señor: No, habrá un autobús de la agencia esperándoles a su llegada para llevarles al hotel y les volverá a recoger el domingo para trasladarles al aeropuerto.
- Señora: ¿Y el horario de la vuelta?