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## Hispanic Linguistics in the USA

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The field of Spanish Linguistics has been growing steadily for the last few decades. At a growing number of Spanish Departments there are now separate graduate tracks in Spanish Linguistics, which often attract as many applications as the Literature and Culture track. A more recent trend has been the creation of Hispanic Linguistics tracks within Departments of Linguistics.

A parallel phenomenon has been an increase in the number of annual or biennial meetings in this field. For many years already, the Linguistics Symposium on Romance Languages has been the main annual conference in North America for many scholars in Hispanic Linguistics. To this well-established meeting, we must now add the Hispanic Linguistics Symposium and The Conference on the Acquisition of Spanish and Portuguese as First and Second Languages, which, after meeting jointly for several years, will fuse from now on as an annual international conference on Hispanic Linguistics. There are also a number of more specialized meetings of recent creation.

In my own area of research, phonology, I have been pleasantly surprised to see the development of a biennial conference on Laboratory Approaches to Spanish Phonology, whose first meeting was organized by Tim Face at the University of Minnesota and is going to have its third edition this year in Toronto. This conference has obviously been conceived as a small-scale replica of the very prestigious Conference on

Laboratory Phonology, but focused on research on the Spanish language. As far as I know, Spanish is presently the only language for which there is a specialized conference in this area. At the same time, work on Spanish is usually well represented at linguistics meetings that do not have a language-specific focus. In fact, there are even several conferences of a general nature where research on Spanish is typically an important part of the program. Work on Spanish regularly appears in the pages of the top journals in Linguistics. All of this shows that, at present, the field of Spanish Linguistics is in good health.

Spanish linguists are linguists with specialized knowledge on the facts of the Spanish language. Given this, it is not really possible to speak of developments in Spanish linguistics as if it were somehow a separate field with its own dynamics, theories and methodologies. Instead, what goes on in a given area of Spanish linguistics, be it syntax, phonetics, sociolinguistics or the acquisition of Spanish as a second language, to give a few examples, will be a reflection of the situation in the larger field of syntactic theory, phonetics, sociolinguistics or second language acquisition.

In the general field of Linguistics, then, I believe that the most important recent developments have to do with an increased emphasis on empirically sound work that makes use of either large corpora or experimentally obtained data. Researchers in phonology, morphology and second language acquisition (and to a lesser extent syntacticians) are adopting experimental and statistical techniques that already have a long tradition in phonetics and psycholinguistics. Linguists with an interest in language variation and diachronic change have always relied on corpora. In this respect the electronic corpus of texts that has been made available by the Spanish Academy and, especially, Mark Davis' tagged *corpus del español* promise to become essential tools for Spanish linguists. Research in Computational Linguistics is also poised to make a major contribution to our understanding of language and how it is processed and produced.

A consequence of this more empirical approach is that Linguistics is coming out of its self-imposed isolation. The Conference in Laboratory Phonology is an example of this trend, since a stated goal of the conference is precisely to build bridges with other disciplines by promoting dialog with scholars concerned with the study of the sound systems of human languages from the perspectives of Psychology, Speech and Hearing Science, Computer Science and Electrical Engineering, among others. As research in Linguistics adopts commonly recognized scientific methodologies it becomes more relevant to other scientists.

But if a Spanish linguist, like any other linguist, must be a scientist, well versed in experimental methodologies, she or he must also be a philologist. A specialist in the Spanish language should be familiar with texts from all the different time periods and geographical areas of the language. A Spanish syntactician should know about stylistics. A Spanish phonologist should be familiar with the metrical tradition of the language. All of this justifies that Spanish Linguistics should be firmly rooted within Spanish studies, whatever its other affiliations are. Roman Jakobson proclaimed that the fields of linguistics and literary criticism should be seen as inextricably linked. His own work is an example of this, as is that of Amado Alonso, Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Tomás Navarro Tomás and other well-known Spanish scholars.

I would like to devote a couple of paragraphs to the issue of the most adequate departmental housing of a program in Spanish linguistics. Is such a program more appropriately housed in the Spanish department, as it usually is, or in the Linguistics Department, so far the minority option? Of course, the question only applies to institutions where these are separate departments, since there are indeed institutions where undergraduate and graduate programs in both Spanish and Linguistics are included in the same department; for instance, Modern Languages.

In my opinion, it is very important for linguists working on Spanish to see themselves as members of the larger community of linguists and to interact closely with linguists working on other languages (as well as with psychologists and others). This is crucial for graduate students. At my institution, we try to provide graduate students in Hispanic Linguistics with a solid background both in all main areas of Hispanic linguistics (Phonetics and Phonology, Morphology, Syntax, Sociolinguistics and Dialectology, History of the language, Applied Linguistics) and in one or two areas of general linguistics. I think this is the correct approach. We should aim at producing graduate students who can teach a variety of courses related to the structure of Spanish, its history and its variation and who, at the same time, will be at the forefront of research in a specific area of general linguistics. The emphasis on empiricism that I mentioned above requires that we also provide training in experimental methodology and statistics for graduate students in Hispanic Linguistics. Some basic training in programming is also becoming a must. There are several ways to accomplish these goals at the institutional level, but all of them require flexible graduate programs with much collaboration between students and faculty in Spanish Linguistics, in general linguistics, and in the other fields mentioned above. In my view, there is no point in trying to cover all



areas of Linguistics within a Spanish Department. We have to avoid making the field of Hispanic Linguistics an island within an island.

I mentioned above that, in my opinion, Spanish linguists should also have adequate philological training and that, therefore, there is a natural link between research in Spanish linguistics and scholarship in Spanish literature. The fact is, however, that, in spite of Jakobson's admonition, in many Spanish departments in the U.S.A. there is presently very little intellectual interaction between faculty and students in the two fields of Linguistics and Literature. If blame is to be assigned, I would say that perhaps initially linguists were mostly to blame. Following the Chomskyan 'revolution', many linguists in Spanish departments thought that their research interests had little in common with those of literary scholars in the same department. These linguists typically were generally dismissive of the work of earlier philologists, who saw both the language and its literature as their field of study. More recently, however, I would say that literary scholars have become primarily responsible for creating what now is starting to look like an unbridgeable gap between the two disciplines. A current fashion among former literary critics is to disregard the study of literature per se, in favor of the study of 'culture', where culture can be any societal institution or practice that strikes the scholar's fancy, including, for instance, cooking recipes in colonial Guatemala or contemporary flamenco dancing, but generally focusing on some element of power relations in a given society. In many cases, these ex-literary critics seem to purposefully avoid anything that directly has to do with close analysis and interpretation of written texts. Clearly I am not at all qualified to express an informed opinion on trends in literary/cultural studies. The point that I want to make is simply that as scholars who used to study Spanish literature shift their interest to other objects of criticism, their common ground with Spanish linguists becomes harder to see.

In my own Department, again, we have completely separate programs in Spanish Linguistics and Spanish Literature/Culture. Graduate students in Spanish linguistics take much of their coursework outside of the Department, mostly in the Linguistics Department, but also some classes in Psychology, Speech and Hearing and other language departments. On the other hand, I don't know of a single graduate student in Spanish Linguistics who has taken a single class in Spanish Literature in the 17 years or so that I have been here. This may be unfortunate, but it is hard to make an argument for students of Spanish Linguistics to take courses in literature, given the focus away from detailed analysis of texts in most of the graduate literature courses



currently available in my department. I believe this is probably also true elsewhere.

There is, however, a course that all or almost all graduate students in both Spanish Linguistics and Spanish Literature/Culture take: the teaching methodology course that they are required to take in order to teach in our basic Spanish language program. That is the remaining link. If Spanish Departments still make sense as academic units, the rationale is to be found in the undergraduate program. At the end, we are all involved in teaching Spanish. Regarding advanced undergraduate instruction as well, both linguistics (including grammar and pronunciation courses) and literature are essential parts of any serious Spanish major. It is, then, undergraduate instruction that keeps Spanish Departments united in a common set of goals.

Although my record as a futurologist is rather spotty, I would venture the prediction that in a few years linguistics and literature will start to converge again within Spanish Departments. On the one hand, postmodernist cultural studies may very well be followed by a neo-stylistic reaction. On the linguistic side, it is unlikely that the quantitative, experimental, approach that I mentioned above as a major trend will suit everyone. Linguistics scholars with a preference for critical discourse analysis and other forms of interpretive, qualitative analysis should see a natural kinship with literary critics.

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