

Several people have recently published comments on the Spanish dialect spoken along the Sabine River in northwestern Louisiana.¹ Samuel Armistead and H. F. Gregory have collected a number of French loan words to Spanish in the area,² and several people have commented on Nahuatl words, but no real vocabulary has been published.³ This lexicon is not exhaustive (see Tables 1 and 2), but results from

Adaesaño:
A Nahuatl Lexicon from Natchitoches
and Sabine Parishes, Louisiana

By
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interviews made between 1962 and 1991, about language and culture in the communities of Ebarb, Grady Hill, Sulphur Springs (Las Hormigas), Zwolle and Spanish Lake. These interviews were made with a broad spectrum of people (45 individuals) ranging from centenarians to teen-agers. They varied from fluent speakers to "part-time" speakers, to people who "only knew words."⁴ Very few of these were formal elicitations, and only in rare cases, did any of the people identify specific words as "Indian" or even "Mexicano", so these Nahualismos are imbedded in this dialect as "Spanish" as much as they are in Texas.⁵

Table 1. Nahualismos for animals and plants.

ANIMALS:		PLANTS:	
1. <i>zopilote</i>	Buzzard	1. <i>cojosote</i>	Sweet gum
2. <i>chusca</i>	Buzzard	2. <i>copal</i>	Sweet gum sap
3. <i>chilizonte</i>	Mockingbird	3. <i>nogal</i>	Hickory/Pecan
4. <i>guajolote</i>	Turkey	4. <i>ocote</i>	Pine
5. <i>zumacaya</i>	Owl	5. <i>ampesote</i>	Weeds
6. <i>tecolote</i>	Owl	6. <i>amolde</i>	Yucca
7. <i>pichicuate</i>	Water Mocassin	7. <i>zacate</i>	Grass
8. <i>tapalcate</i>	Tadpole	8. <i>nixtamal</i>	Hominy – “lyed” corn
9. <i>caouen</i>	Soft-shell turtle (<French)	9. <i>helote</i>	Ear of corn
10. <i>ajolote</i>	Mud puppy	10. <i>olote</i>	Corn cob
11. <i>Tacuache</i>	Opposum	11. <i>chicales</i>	Braided corn
12. <i>tusa</i>	Mole	12. <i>cacahuate</i>	Peanut
13. <i>chichote</i>	Ringworm	13. <i>camotes</i>	Sweet potatoes
14. <i>mayate</i>	Black bug	14. <i>tomates</i>	Tomatos
15. <i>ocotesillo</i>	Ticks	15. <i>ejote</i>	Snap beans, peas
16. <i>chapule</i>	Grasshopper	16. <i>pastli</i>	Spanish moss
17. <i>huilotes</i>	Butterflies/ “slabs”	17. <i>pinole</i>	Parched corn
18. <i>jicote</i>	Wasp		

Table 2. Nahualismos for objects and other words.

OBJECTS:		OTHER:	
1. <i>mecate</i>	Rope	1. <i>chichimeco/meco</i>	Indian
2. <i>cuete</i>	Quirt<Coatl	2. <i>tamales</i>	Tamales
3. <i>molcajete</i>	Pepper grinder	3. <i>pozole</i>	Sweetened
4. <i>metate</i>	Corn grinder	4. <i>chichi</i>	Mother’s milk
5. <i>machete</i>	Froe	5. <i>cuate</i>	Twin
6. <i>chancles</i>	Bad shoes	6. <i>cuali</i>	< cualli to like
7. <i>molote</i>	Hair bun	7. <i>cachete</i>	Slap
8. <i>topanco</i>	Ceiling	8. <i>cuacha</i>	Baby “poop”
9. <i>troje</i>	Corn cob		
10. <i>chimonca</i>	Pine knot		
11. <i>guaje</i>	Gourd		
12. <i>muelvo</i>	Wagon		
13. <i>chichahuiste</i>	Basket		
14. <i>comal</i>	Skillet		
15. <i>petate</i>	A mat		
16. <i>cali</i>	House (at Luna, TX – Clade Medford Jr. notes 1980)		

Contacts with several Native American languages: Apache (Lipan), Caddo and Adais, Tonkawa, Bidai and Wichita are documented from the late 18th and early 19th century census records, not to mention the fact that most of these families originally came from communities in Nueva Leon in the 18th century, where various Coahuiltecan and Tlascaltecan languages were used widely.⁶ The virtual total absence of loan words in a collection of nearly 1200 words and phrases provides an interesting insight into the socio-linguistic pattern on the colonial frontier. Moreover, all the terms used for "Indian" are wholly or partially derogatory, echoing the developing social system of the 18th century frontier. This is especially true of *Meco* or *Chichimeco*, a standard reference to the "untamed" tribes of the northern frontier of Mexico.⁷ All other terms were Spanish with the possible exception of *Chonche*, a widely used pejorative in Sabine Parish for Spanish people. It may be that the word *Chonche*, translated variously but always negatively, comes from the Wichita term for the Lipan Apache, their traditions enemies, and a source of slaves for the Spanish and French in the eighteenth century.⁸ On the other hand, it may have a Muskogkean (Mobilian) source, the Choctaw term for a small migratory bird, the Martin, inferring a recent origin for the Spanish community.

Eight of the 59 Nahuatl terms collected (13.5%) are animal names and echo the widespread use of Nahuatl in Texas and Mexico. Eighteen (30.5%) are also plant names and echo the widespread use of Nahuatl in Texas and Mexico for New World plants not known in Spain. The remaining 34 terms (57.6%) are for material culture of some form or another: *mecate*—a rope, *molote*—a woman's hair-do, *chancles*—"bad" shoes, *cuete*—a whip, *molcajetes*, *metates*, etc.—grinding implements, *cali*—house, *topanco*—for ceiling, building or parts of buildings, and tools like a *machete*—froe, or *muelva*—wagon. Many of these—*metate*, *tojolote*, *molcajete*, *nixtamal*, *chicales*, etc., are clearly derived from the adaptation of the Indian corn food complex across the western Spanish borderlands. Similarly, a number of the plant terms (8) are related to corn and corn food: *helote*, *olote*, *pozole*, *nixtamal*, *tamales*, *chicales* and *pinole*. The term for a corn storage building, a crib, *troje*, is again related to the Nahuatl corn complex. The historical connection with colonial Texas and northern Mexico, so well documented for this population, is only strengthened by this vocabulary.⁹ The paucity of other Indian loans suggests strongly that Spanish from Mexico came to dominate local languages early in the eighteenth century. For the almost total lack of Anglicized forms, comparable to the "Spanglish" of Texas, only thirteen have been clearly identified, e.g., *la dipa*—dipper, *la djoga*—jug, *la djura*—jar, *guaguine*—wagon, *salamandro*—scorpion, *José*—blouse; clearly indicates the social isolation of the Spanish speakers from the Anglo-Americans on the

Louisiana-Texas frontier. French loans are common nearer the early French post at Natchitoches, and are more common, again, than English.

Only one Nahuatl verb form, *cualli*, meaning to like or want, seems to have been accepted in Adaesaño speech—all other Nahuatl terms seem to be nouns. Why that substitution took place is very interesting, but no explanation can be offered here. It was noted in Puebloan Indian Spanish, at least at Zuñi, at the turn of the century.¹⁰

It has been noted that the Spanish colonial practice of establishing populations on the northern Frontier of New Spain to protect the colony from the Indians, led to a new identity based on race and gender. Supported from the south, the Adaesaños seem to have been undergoing a similar transformation. The lower status positions may have been relegated to persons or groups with more Indian connections. To some extent, this is still reflected in local Spanish usage. During one interview, an elderly couple noted that the word *cacahuete*, for peanut, was “Indian”, while *manin*, the wife’s term of preference, was more “Spanish.” Local speakers also identify, somewhat disdainfully, some words as “Mexican”; *muelvo* (wagon) and *el lapí* (hammer) being classic examples. People keep careful genealogical traditions as to who has come recently from Mexico, so the communities do not seem to have developed a “re-order point” for more contemporary Spanish forms. In fact, the Spanish Lake community still seems to have little, if any, contact with Mexican immigrants living on nearby chicken farms. They also point out that there were “Mexicans” buried in the Spanish Lake cemetery, but always note that they were not related.

Indian identity has re-surfaced at Ebarb-Zwolle and at Spanish Lake, and the communities are even more painfully aware that local Anglo-American communities still do not acknowledge their presence or their earlier occupation of the area. By calling them variously “*Meskin*”, “*Chonche*”, or “*Red Bones*”, their Anglophone neighbors have created a great deal of ambivalence about the use and continuation of the Spanish language in the communities. Younger people know little or no Spanish, and increasingly, the bilingual community’s elders are passing away with no replacement. Hopefully, their recent quest for federal acknowledgement as Native Americans will not contribute even more to the declining interest in the language. As late as the 1970s, any elder in the community could proudly speak Spanish if spoken to, but now, even road signs have been purged. Any references to Spanish culture, for example, the name Spanish Lake changed to Adais Village, have been changed. Certainly, the archaic language the people retained for over two centuries needs not be abandoned to establish their identity, Native American or otherwise.

The linguist, Albert Gatschet, noted in his discussion of the Adais language in 1890, that many of the tribes associated with the San Antonio missions had taken up "the Mexican Spanish", and had disappeared into the identity, "Mexican."¹¹ Certainly, this is not the case in northwestern Louisiana where archaic Spanish may be more a marker of classes than races. This is but one more example of building pressure on the local Spanish language: public schools forbade it, the coming of the railroads, logging activities, an oil boom, a major dam-lake project that displaced nearly a whole community, and an influx of retired Anglo-Americans who have recently built on the new lake. To date, Spanish has survived amongst the elders. Predictions that it will disappear totally, that this is the place for linguists to study language "death", seem in order, but hopefully that prediction is still premature.

This brief lexicon will, it is hoped, help the language survive. When the re-order point for the "old Language" comes, this effort will be necessary. As the Adaesaños regain their *orgullo* and really assert their identity, being who they know they are, the Spanish of the eighteenth century, the oldest preserved dialect in North America,¹² deserves all our attention.

End Notes

¹ I went to the Ebarb community in 1962, because my sister, Elizabeth McNew, told me in 1957, that there were Spanish-speakers living there. For the next several years, I talked about the Adaesaños, their history and culture as it pertained to our investigations at the site of the former presidio, Nuestra Señora del Pilar de Los Adaes, then a local park in Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana. I spent approximately four weeks on the Sabine River in the spring and summer of 1967 while doing archaeology at the Robert Bison Site at Toledo Bend Reservoir, and had daily contact with several competent speakers of the local Spanish. See Hiram F. Gregory, "Los Adaes: The Archaeology of an Ethnic Enclave", *Geoscience and Man* (Baton Rouge) Vol. 23, 53-57.

I had begun work on a lexicon, and making notes on various aspects of the dialect, but had not found anyone else really interested in the language situation. In fact, I had been advised by at least one local college administrator to stay away because it was a "closed community". In spite of that, I noted that from 1961 (until the present), I have consistently had students from the Adaesaño communities in my classes, some of whom actually became anthropologists. Most notable is the work left us on local medicine and curing by Dr. Donald Lester Sepulvado, himself an Adaesaño descendant, and a native of the Ebarb community. Folklorists showed more interest in the people, and I gave a paper, "Saving Your Own House", at a statewide conference organized by the

Louisiana State Arts Council. Shortly thereafter, Dr. Nicholas Spitzer and I spent several trips wandering from house to house, hunting language and music. See Nickolas Spitzer, ed., *A Guide to Louisiana Folklife* and Don Lester Sepulvado, "Folk Curing in a Spanish Community", *Louisiana Folklife*, Vol. II, No. 1 (1977).

At Spitzer's suggestion, Dr. Samuel G. Armistead, in 1983-84, contacted me about doing some joint linguistic work in the communities, and we began serious collections. Dr. Armistead has written his early observations in a study of three Spanish dialects in Louisiana (ms. University of California, Davis). However, Dr. Louisa Stark who visited the communities with Emanuel Drechsel, then one of her graduates, and myself, published the first serious work on Adaesaños. Both Drs. Stark and Armistead have made the notes from their fieldwork available to me, and we continue to work as a team. Dr. Armistead and I have published two papers on French loan words in the language. Dr. Stark's "Notes on a Dialect of Spanish Spoken in Northern Louisiana", *Anthropological Linguistics* XXII (1980), 163-76, remains the only phonetic study of the dialect.

² This paper deals with French loan words in the dialect. Most were collected at Ebarb and Spanish Lake. Samuel Armistead and Hiram Gregory, "French Loan Words in the Spanish Dialect of Sabine and Natchitoches Parishes", *Louisiana Folklife* X (1986), 121-30.

³ Lipski (1990) lists a number among his "Mexicanisms" (p 118) as an example of the hybrid nature of the dialect, and uses them to differentiate the Adaesaño dialect from Isleño or Canary Island Spanish.

⁴ Field notes: 1962-1991 Ebarb-Zwolle-Spanish Lake. It seems appropriate to list my major consultants on the language here, both to acknowledge their kind contributions and also to give a gauge of the sample. Unfortunately, eighteen have passed on †, and I dedicate this little paper to them. It is their effort to save their language.

Frank Martínez†
 Mrs. Edna Sepulvado
 Mrs. Agnes Moore†
 Mr. & Mrs. Wesley Martínez††
 Rheet Paddie†
 Mrs. Sention Manshack†
 Lonnie Martínez†
 Ernest Rodriguez
 Josee Morvan†
 Maggie Manshack
 Emmet Ebarb†
 P.J. Magness
 Mr. & Mrs. Tommy Parrie†
 Mr. & Mrs. Martin Ebarb†
 Joe Parrie
 Mr. & Mrs. Blas Moore†
 Mr. & Mrs. Raymond Ebarb

Danny Ebarb
 Mr. & Mrs. Ed Procell†
 Tommy Bolton
 Mrs. Catharina Parrie†
 John Remedies
 Steve Remedies†
 Lester Sepulvado†
 Mrs. Rhonda Remedies Gauthier
 "Pink" Solice†
 Randall Pleasant
 Mr. & Mrs. Joe Foster Paddie†
 Mr. & Mrs. Orel Pleasant
 Daryll Pleasant
 Mr. & Mrs. Jim Toby†
 Mrs. Irma Sanchez
 Kenneth Ebarb
 Mr. & Mrs. Leo Parrie
 Henry Garsee†

⁵ John Lipski in his work (1990) has correctly pointed out that these lexical items clearly separate the eighteenth-century Spanish, as opposed to contemporary Texas and Mexican Spanish, from peninsular varieties from Spain.

⁶ The origins of the original populations along the Sabine River have been documented by Herbert Bolton and James McCorkle, the bulk are, contrary to local and academic legend, clearly from Nueva Leon and Coahuila in northern Mexico. As such, they are the lineal descendants of soldiers and families from Presidio Los Adaes. See James McCorkle, *Los Adaes: Historical and Archaeological Survey*. Natchitoches, La. 1981.

⁷ This term, *Meco*, has been in use since at least the 1760s. It was heard at Presidio Los Adaes by the French traveler, De Pages, with its contemporary meaning, non-Christian Indians. See Francois De Pages. *Travels Around the World in the Years 1767, 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771*. (London: J. Murray, 1791).

⁸ A recent study of Caddo-Wichita by Dr. Dayna Lee produced this discussion of *Chonche*. She suggested it may have implied "slave" as well (Dayna Lee, 1998 Personal Communication).

⁹ Lipski 1990, p 121, concludes the Spanish language brought to the Louisiana-Texas frontier was more Mexican than peninsular, and that the "Mexicanisms", *Nahualismos*, all had penetrated the speech of the Spanish whether influenced by Native Americans or not.

¹⁰ Frank Cushing, *Zuñi Breadstuff* (New York: Heye Foundation, 1920).

¹¹ Gatschet's unpublished notes on the Adaes vocabulary, Smithsonian Anthropological Collections 1889. His notes suggest that Spanish became the language of the Adaes.

¹² Lipski (1990) has stated this situation well, p. 111. "Both the Texas and the Louisiana communities, then, represent the survival of some of the earliest varieties of Spanish still found in the United States."

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