

THE CONCEPT OF A VILLAGER IN THE POLY CULTURAL SPACE OF LATIN AMERICA

Evgeniya A. Popova

Moscow State Linguistic University

Moscow, Russia

e-mail: o-genia@yandex.ru

Abstract. The issue of culturally-bound concepts in multinational languages, their common and specific features and the scope of meaning of the words, which denote such concepts, has lately been put under investigation in a large number of works due to its relevance in the globalized world. We assume that one of crucially important subjects in this area is research of additional semantics of the words denoting a villager in Latin American variations of the Spanish language. Studies on history of Spanish-speaking Latin American countries, extralinguistic factors that influenced the development of certain concepts and language units, and etymology of these units make us point out the gradual increase of the distance between the “urban” and “rural” speech. Having investigated 14 words, whose primary meaning is “an inhabitant of the rural area” in different national variants of Spanish (*campirano, campisto, chagra, charro, gañán, gaucho, guajiro, huaso, huasteco, jarocho, jibaro, llanero, montuno, vale*), we come to a conclusion that more than a half (9 units) has a secondary meaning “a poorly educated person with village manners”. This fact proves the scholars’ opinion that due to the historically developed gap between urban and rural life the villagers were often looked down by people in towns. There are other common language processes, specified with the help of dictionary, corpus and etymological analysis, that took part in the formation of the “villager” concept in Latin America. Firstly, the meaning of 5 words has extended to

ethnonyms denoting a citizen of a certain Latin American country (*charro* for Mexico, *jibaro* for Puerto Rico, etc.). Secondly, 7 of them have narrowed one of their meanings to “a horseman” or “a cattleman”. Thirdly, 5 words have a meaning with a racial component, which forms a more concrete image of a peasant in different regions of the investigated territory. Finally, we have found out that the evaluation components of the studied words and their actualization change over time and are not always recorded in dictionaries. One of these components is a positive association with the musical culture of the respective countries that occurs when the “villager” concept is mentioned.

Keywords: Spanish language, concept, extralinguistic factor, meaning, connotation

Introduction

One of the most important factors which determine the lexical originality of Latin American national variants of Spanish, is their separate formation in the respective countries. The linguistic reality of the New World is considered to have proclaimed the idea of cultural diversity, lack of unity and autochthonous evolution of language features. In these terms one can speak about the mutual influence of the standardized diversity caused by urbanization and mass media, and regional varieties, primarily at the phonological and lexico-phraseological levels.

At the same time, there are a number of general trends in the development of national variants of the Spanish language in Latin America, connected with extralinguistic factors. One of such trends is the gradual increase (in the course of Latin American history) of the distance between city and rural residents due to their speech. Firstly, the everyday speech of the latter was not so much affected by the political influence extended among the urban population through the press, and this explains its archaic deviation from the national standard. Secondly, ineffective educational policy led to the development of diglossic situations.

Despite the fact that by 1900 only about 10% of the population lived in cities, in the second half of the 20th century, Latin America was ahead of all the major regions of the world in terms of urbanization. The lack of land and difficult living conditions historically became a significant reason for the “flow” of peasants into cities in the framework of internal migration. This exacerbated the problems of urban employment, the growth of unskilled labor, the emergence of numerous chaotic settlements without basic sanitary conditions. In this regard, as Spanish-speaking scholars put it, peasants in cities were often looked upon with condescension and contempt (See: Moreno Fernández F., 2018), which could not but be reflected in the language.

Object and Purpose of the Study

The purpose of our study was to analyze the semantics of the “villager” concept in different Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America and to identify their general and specific points. The object of the current research includes lexical units which denote a villager, or a peasant, in Latin American variants of Spanish, and the scope of their meanings.

We chose 14 nouns with a “peasant” component in their primary meaning “a person who proceeds from the rural area, and live and work in the country” (*persona procedente del medio rural que vive y trabaja en el campo*). Our task was to investigate their scope of meaning in various Latin American cultures and to prove the idea that practically all of them, being universal in the first meaning, have additional content and expression and become part of the image of the respective countries. These nouns are as follows (we give them in alphabetical order marking those countries where they are used):

- *campirano* (Mexico, Honduras, Salvador, Nicaragua, Ecuador);
- *campisto/-a* (Honduras, Venezuela, Salvador, Nicaragua, Puerto Rico, Mexico);
- *chagra* (Ecuador);

- *charro* (Mexico, USA, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru, Salvador);
- *gañán* (south of Peru, Colombia);
- *gaucho* (Argentina, Uruguay, south of Chile, Paraguay, Bolivia);
- *guajiro* (Cuba, Puerto Rico);
- *huaso / guaso* (Chile, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay, Argentina, Uruguay);
- *huasteco / guasteco* (Chile, Mexico);
- *jarocho* (Mexico);
- *jíbaro* (Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Peru, Cuba, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Colombia);
- *llanero* (Venezuela, Colombia, Honduras, Chile);
- *montuno* (Panama, Dominican Republic, Honduras, Venezuela, Guatemala, Cuba, Colombia, Peru);
- *vale / bale* (Dominican Republic).

Methodology

In order to reveal the relevant meaning of the words under investigation in Latin American national variants of Spanish which influence their additional semantics, we first of all turned to acknowledged monolingual dictionaries: the one edited by R. Richard (Richard R., et al., 2006), online dictionaries of Royal Spanish Academy (Diccionario de la lengua Española, 2020; Diccionario de americanismo, 2020), and the online dictionary of Latin American colloquial speech (Diccionario Asihablamos, 2020).

We also resorted to dictionaries specialized in certain national variants of the Spanish language, such as, for example, Diccionario mayor de cubanismos (Sánchez-Boudy J., 1999) or Diccionario breve de mexicanismos of Mexican Language Academy (2020). Finally, we used a digital etymological dictionary to find mutually connected historical facts about the language and the countries themselves (Diccionario etimológico de español en línea, 2020).

After looking up the definitions and etymology of the aforementioned vocabulary units, we verified their actualization in Corpus del Español (2020) by Mark Davis (founded by National Endowment for the Humanities).

As an example, let us provide the analysis of the word *guajiro* which represents the concept of a villager in the Cuban culture. According to dictionaries, this lexical unit has three related meanings:

- 1) a person who lives in or comes from the rural area – a neutral meaning also registered for Puerto Rico;
- 2) a poorly educated person with “village” manners – a meaning with strongly negative connotations;
- 3) a shy person – connotations depend on the context.

In addition, we should mention that in the Colombian and Venezuelan national variants of the Spanish language, this lexical unit is a neutral ethnonym denoting either a resident of Guajira – a department of Colombia, or a native of the La Guajira region in Venezuela. In the second case, the dictionaries “add” a racial component to the meaning of the word, which, however, does not have any negative connotations.

As for Cuba, the use of *guajiro* in its second meaning it is always charged with a contemptuous tone (*se carga con el tono despectivo*), as Spanish scholars put it (Moreno Fernández F., 2018: 196), evidenced by the appeal of *¡no seas guajiro!* (“don't be stupid,” “don't be dumb”), registered in dictionaries. If a person is rude in communication, in Cuba he is called *guajiro-macho* or *guajiro-ñongo*. It is necessary to denote one more meaning of *guajiro* – “provincial”, “a person that does not come from the capital” (*provinciano, persona del interior del país*) stated in *Diccionario mayor de cubanismos* (Sánchez Boudy J., 1999), which indicates the extension of the original meaning of “a peasant, a villager”.

We also consider the etymological analysis of the word *guajiro* an indispensable part of our study. José Arrom points to the Arawakian origin of the lexeme with the meaning “master,

powerful man” (*señor, hombre poderoso*), and Sergio Valdes adds that originally *guajiro* indicated a high social status in Cuba (Diccionario etimológico en línea, 2020). In fact, originally, the word had strongly positive connotations.

Besides, there exists a popular folk etymology of the concept of *guajiro*, which appeared due to the principle of phonetic similarity. The American soldiers called so the Cuban peasants who fought against the Spaniards during the Spanish-American War of 1898. The Cubans are said to have heard the English combination of *war hero* as *guajiro*. However, the word *guajiro* meaning “a villager” appears in Cuban texts much earlier, which can be proved with the help of text corpora: *para casarse, como se casó, [...] se había fugado con un joven guajiro del pueblo* – “to get married, and she [as we know] did get married ... she ran away with a young peasant from the village” (Cirilo Valverde, 1840 – Corpus del Español, 2020). Thus, the idea of the English origin of this lexical unit seems to be baseless.

Results

Studies of the other 13 language units concerning the “villager” concept in Latin American national variants of Spanish, according to the aforementioned algorithm, allowed us to find out a number of similar semantic processes and additional meanings in the words belonging to this group. The most evident one is the usage of 8 more words (besides *guajiro*) in the meaning of “a poorly educated person with village manners” (*chagra, gañan, gaucho, huaso* and *huasteco*, in this case pronounced as *guasos* and *guastecos, jarocho, jíbaro* and *montuno*), due to the history factors stated in the introduction.

Secondly, several units have a definition with a “racial component” influenced by the ethnical factor: *chagra* means “mestee” (*mestizo*) in Ecuador, and *gaucho* – in Argentina; *huasteco* is an “indian” (*amerindio*) in several regions of Mexico, and *jíbaro* – in Ecuador and part of Peru. On the other hand, the same word, *jíbaro*, denotes a “white” villager in Puerto Rico and Venezuela.

The third common semantic trait of the investigated words is the extension of their meaning, on the one hand – to “a provincial” with negative connotations (the mentioned *guajiro*, and besides – *chagra*, *huaso/guaso* and *gaucho*), and on the other – to the neutrally or positively connoted “inhabitant of a certain country”:

- *charro* – a Mexican person;
- *gaucho* – an Argentinian;
- *jíbaro* – an inhabitant of Puerto Rico;
- *huaso* – a person coming from Chile;
- *llanero* – a Venezuelan.

Finally, we consider it important to distinguish a vice-versa process when the “villager” meaning is narrowed to one of its characteristic features. For example, such words as *campirano*, *campisto*, *charro*, *gaucho*, *huaso* and *llanero* have a definition of “a horseman”. Some of them are also defined as “cattleman” (*campirano*, *campisto*, *gañan*, *gaucho*, *huaso*, *llanero*, *vale*). As a result, we can see that all the described features of these lexical units add to the image of a typical villager in different Spanish-speaking countries.

Conclusions

To conclude, we would like to emphasize that the found information needs further investigation to be extended and supplemented. The fact is that the actual usage of the analyzed words and the associations they provide do not always coincide with the meanings given in dictionaries. For example, according to native speakers from Cuba and Puerto Rico, such units as *guajiro* and *jíbaro* are directly related to the musical culture of the respective countries and in this case their actualization is always positively marked. This point of view can be illustrated with the Cuban style of *punto guajiro*, the *Guajira guantanamera* song, the Puerto Rican singer Héctor Lavoe known as *jibarito*, the radio wave of Puerto Rican music called *Radio jíbaro*, etc.

Thus, we have found out that the concept of a villager is multifaceted in different countries of Latin America, and its further

investigation is undoubtedly important from the cultural point of view. The suggested approach of complex (semantic, pragmatic and etymological) analysis of the words that represent this concept can provide cultural outlines in Spanish-speaking community.

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