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ETHNIC SLURS AND SEMANTIC DEROGATION IN AMERICAN ENGLISH

Целью статьи является выявление особенностей вербализации этнических предрассудков в английском языке, в частности, особое внимание уделяется испаноязычному компоненту. Автор выделяет особую группу испанизмов в английском языке, которые являются индикаторами существующих предрассудков о носителях испанского языка.

Ключевые слова: *этнофобизмы, ассимиляция, семантическая дерогація, заимствования из испанского языка, «псевдоиспанизмы».*

Метою статті є виявлення особливостей вербалізації етнічних забобонів в англійській мові, зокрема, особлива увага приділяється іспанському мовному компоненту. Автор зосереджується на специфічній групі іспанізмів в англійській мові, які є індикаторами існуючих забобонів щодо носіїв іспанської мови.

Ключові слова: *етнофобізми, асиміляція, семантична дерогація, запозичення з іспанської мови, «псевдо-іспанізми».*

*The purpose of the article is to study how social attitudes are reflected in English through the language contacts. The special focus is on the Spanish linguistic component in American English. It is **concluded** that there is a special group of stereotypically bound Spanish borrowings in American English which prove to be indicators of existing social attitudes about Latino people in the U.S.*

Key words: *ethnic slurs, assimilation, semantic derogation, Spanish borrowings, «pseudo Spanish».*

It is common knowledge that social attitudes and ethnic prejudices are vividly imprinted in English. In this research the author differentiates between the explicitly verbalized stereotypes which have xenophobic character and are qualified as *ethnic slurs*, and the implicit stereotypical units, which can be defined as *false borrowings* or *pseudo borrowings* from Spanish. The first group of words is pejorative by nature; the second group of vocabulary becomes derogatory in the process of assimilation and is not less xenophobic than ethnic slurs.

The **purpose** of the present paper is to provide an insight into the explicitly and implicitly verbalized social attitudes in American English.

At present about 38 million Latino/as live in the U.S. either legally or illegally and immigration from Latin America remains continuous [1; 6, c. 133]. Since most undocumented immigrants enter the country for (low-wage) work purposes these communities have been viewed as disadvantaged by English speakers of Anglo ethnic affiliation. Derogatory ethnic stereotypes about Hispanic people remain one of the most urgent problems for the U.S. society. Stereotyping has brought about the use of the pejorative vocabulary under consideration.

Beyond any doubt existing ethnic slurs are directly consequent from particular prejudices, hence there are so-called ‘unofficial names’ for Latino people that directly correspond to their illegal immigrant and seasonal or/and temporary worker/foreigner status: *border bunny* (*border hopper*, *border jumper*, *border nigger*) is a highly offensive term which implies that illegal immigrants hop the border to get into America. The derogatory slur *berry-picker* (*fruit-picker*, *orange-picker*, *tomato-picker*) refers to Hispanics who would work berry fields in California, specifically illegal immigrants; Hispanics that work in the agriculture industry in California [3].

The idea of the seasonal farm work which illegal immigrants do for low wages is stressed by such pejorative nick-names as *cheap labor*, *drywaller* (an immigrant worker from Mexico; Hispanics do a lot of construction work and are usually paid very little or nothing) [3], a taboo word *dumbwet* (an illegal immigrant from Mexico), *fence hopper* – illegal Mexicans sometimes have to hop fences to get into the US, slurs *gardener*, *gravebelly* mean an illegal immigrant from Mexico who would crawl across the border on their bellies (Racial Slur Database), *wetback* (*wet*, *wab*) is an illegal immigrant from Mexico to the U.S. The term refers to those swimming across the Rio Grande, the river that forms the Mexican-US border. It dates from the 1940s [5, c. 557], *river-crosser* = *wetback*, *scratchback* and *hot-footer* are offensive names for an illegal immigrant from Mexico to the U.S. [3]. All the mentioned slurs imply the procedure of crossing the border.

The slur *sexican* refers to how fast the Mexican-American population is increasing, perhaps also stressing that Mexicans usually have big families/many children or probably also implies the great number of illegal immigrants from Mexico. A derogatory name *spic* (*spec*, *spik*, *spick*, *spig*, *spiggoty*) also stresses the prejudice about Mexicans as foreigners. Sometimes the word and its variations mean the Spanish language. Anyway the term is highly offensive and racist; it parodies the speech of such people in the catchphrase ‘no spick da English’ [4, c. 197].

Referring to those Mexican Americans, who have lost the language, culture, etc. of Mexico and who have accepted the establishment policy white Americans together with unassimilated Latino/as use such offensive names as *fake Mexicans*, *pochos*, and *coconuts*. The latest term is mainly used to describe dark-skinned people who are perceived as trying to be «white» – brown on the outside, white on the inside (an analogous slur is *oreo* which refers to an African American who has adjusted to the white establishment). Thus, the ethnic slur *fake Mexican* means a completely assimilated Mexican American [3].

There are slurs which just reflect *prejudiced attitudes*, are illogical and exceptionally racist like a xenophobic abbreviation *ban* and *can*. These offensive *acronyms/slurs* offensively refer to Latino/as: *ban/can* (MexiCans, Puerto RiCans, CuBans). The shortening *ChAm* is especially rude and refers specifically to Mexicans (Chicano American). Apart from the acronymic slurs there are taboo words which demonstrate pure prejudice and unreasonable hostility to Latino/as, such as *coat* meaning a Puerto Ricans. The prejudice it is based on is that instead of showering, they supposedly put on a new coat of cologne); *greaser* (*greasebag*, *greaseball*, *greasegut*) pejoratively means a person of Hispanic or Mediterranean origin or appearance. An offensive term which has been in use since World War II [4, c. 46]; *mexican dish* is the U.S. offensive slur for a Mexican, *oiler* is a slangy U.S. derogatory word for a Mexican [3].

There is a strong prejudice against Latino/a people as *drugs-abusers* which can be observed through such offensive terms referring to Spanish-speaking communities as: *speed demon* which also means 'amphetamine' [3]. It is a drug that stimulates the central nervous system, used in treatment of depressive states; the stereotype is that it is popular among Hispanics, *speedy-gonzales* (can be partly treated as «pejorative Spanish», because of the second component *gonzales*) is an American rude slur denoting Mexicans. *Speedy Gonzales* is a proper name for a caricature cartoon mouse portrayed as the fastest mouse in Mexico, which speaks with an exaggerated Mexican accent and wears an oversized Mexican sombrero.

«False Spanish»

The second group of racist vocabulary considered in this paper is entitled false Spanish or «pseudo Spanish». These words are not Spanish and are not used by Spanish speakers at all, although they sound Spanish. «Pseudo Spanish» in English is formed by means of Spanish definite article *el* and/or the Spanish suffix *-o*. These morphological elements of the Spanish language are combined with English nouns, adjectives or other parts of speech to produce «pseudo Spanish». Sometimes there is a cruel and derogatory play of words showing disrespect to Latino/a people, like in the «pseudo Spanish» slur *latrino* (combination of *latrine* and *latino*).

«Pejorative and pseudo Spanish» exemplify a special strategy of dominant groups (WASPs, Euro-Americans) in which «whiteness» is «elevated». Some scholars as well as some dictionaries use the term «Mock Spanish» to refer to Spanish-origin or Spanish-emulating linguistic forms as used by English speakers. In other sources for example, such expressions/puns and Spanish words used by English speakers as *hasta banana* (distorted *hasta mañana*), *amigo*, *adios*, and *el fish* are, of course, correctly defined as «Mock Spanish» [2], while I view them as different phenomena from the linguistic perspective. Unfortunately, the phenomenon of «pseudo Spanish» is not only prevalent but is considered harmless and even flattering by many of its users. However, native speakers of Spanish are likely to find it insulting.

Thus a stereotype about Hispanic brutality, and Latino involvement with criminal world can be traced down through such «pseudo Spanish» as: *apeo* – a primitive, brutal person, invariably male, *desperado* – pejorative Spanish version of *desperate* (extremely anxious, fearful or despairing): reckless criminal, a bold or violent gangster; an outlaw, gunman; a bandit of the Western United States in the 19th century; *wrongo* is a criminal or other undesirable person that should be avoided, a nuisance [6, c. 570] *stoppo* is a *criminals*' jargon for an escape, a getaway, especially with reference to a quick getaway by car from the scene of a crime [4, c. 200].

Latino/as are prejudiced against as drunkards and drug-addicts which can be traced down through such «pseudo Spanish» words as: *blotto* and *stinko* meaning «drunk», *zonko*, which means «intoxicated, overwhelmed or stunned», *wino* (cheap domestic wine). In the USA this is the standard means of intoxication for tramps and poor alcoholics.

«Pseudo Spanish» especially mocking, sarcastic, and contemptuous of Latino/as and their language can be exemplified by such Spanish-English language hybrids as: *el cheapo* (*cheapo*) – a cheap (bad quality) product; bad service; this tendency (an imitation of Hispanic 'low life' speech) has been in evidence since early 1970s, *disgusto* – a repellent thing or person, *el creepo* – a disgusting creature or person, *el dorko* – a fool, *el fish* – a fake fish, *el Building* – a building located in the barrio (an area in the city occupied by Latin Americans), *el ropo* – a cigar or «joint», especially a large and noxious one [6, c. 166]. The idea is that Mexican people smoke low-grade tobacco, the only thing they can afford.

Exceptional stupidity and obnoxiousness is stressed in *el stupido*, *gonzo*, *jerko*, *fucko* (exceptionally rude), *nutso*, *wacko*, *waldo*. All these «pseudo Spanish» words denote a fool. *Latrino* is an exceptionally racist term for Hispanics due to the meaning of its first component *latrine* (communal toilet facility). These indirect slurs show the cruelest xenophobia and racism.

The attitude to the Latin American notion of *hora latina* according to which punctuality is disregarded is shown through the «pseudo Spanish» word *tardivo* meaning a person who is always late or just a fool and simpleton. Lack of hunger for education is stressed in the xenophobic word *maleducato* meaning poorly educated. Negative attitudes to Spanish-speakers is emphasized through these suffix *-o* nouns: *fatso* – a fat person (an unfriendly term), *lardo* – a fat person, *nerdo* – a gormless, vacuous, tedious and/or ineffectual person, *sleazo* – a sleazy person; a disreputable, immoral or otherwise repellent individual, *zippo* – nothing [6, c. 581].

The conclusion is that ethnic slurs and «false Spanish» are used to express negative emotions in a sarcastic way, to demonstrate negative attitude to an interlocutor, to reach a humorous effect. However, «false Spanish» in many respects hides its xenophobic side behind the ironic effect. Anyway all purposes for its use are stipulated by xenophobia and racism.

In future a detailed analysis of code-switching specificity of English-Spanish bilinguals would be appropriate.

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