

*S p a n i s h* —————  
————— *pronunciation*

*theory and practice*

**THIRD EDITION**



# Language and Dialects

## Geographical Varieties of Language

We all know that a Bostonian does not speak like a Mississippian and that someone from Denver or Baltimore thinks that both of them have a very definite accent. The average individual's ear (apparently among speakers of all languages) is remarkably attuned to dialectal differences in speech—regardless of how little linguistic knowledge he or she may have. These differences and this ability to perceive them provide a great source of humor, fun, arguments, and, unfortunately, even prejudice. However, even though most speakers of a given language can immediately pick out a speaker from a different geographical region solely on the basis of his or her speech, few really understand the nature of these regional pronunciation features. Their knowledge of the production of speech sounds does not come anywhere near to matching their ability to perceive the corresponding auditory differences. They might even be able to imitate the dialect, but they rarely can explain exactly what they are doing and how they are doing it.

Not only is the average person perceptive of regional dialect differences, he or she often has subjective, impressionistic, and even erroneous opinions about not only the dialects but their speakers. Fact and fancy are mingled in such a way that widespread popular misconceptions abound in our thinking. Although there is no such thing as a typical New York accent or one typical Southern accent, hearing what we identify as such an accent may quickly conjure up stereotypical images with social, ethnic, racial, and educational implications that are no longer true or important and perhaps never were. For example, a recent survey taken for an automobile manufacturer revealed that the American public polled thought that a Boston accent sounded the most “intelligent,” a New York accent the most “untrustworthy,” and a Southern accent the “sexiest.”<sup>1</sup> These unfounded feelings have long been exploited in movies and on television, and the use of regional dialect has probably created as much controversy and perhaps ill will as it has provided humor and entertainment.

<sup>1</sup>As reported in the *Centre Daily Times* (State College, PA), Mar. 23, 1995, p. 2A.

Spanish speakers naturally have similar notions about speakers from other dialect regions of the Hispanic world. But it is interesting to note that speakers of one language do not always hold these opinions about speakers of another language that they have learned. The Spanish speaker new to the U.S. is at first not aware of the images associated with the different dialects of American English. Likewise, the English speaker—even though he or she may also speak Spanish as a formally learned language—does not always share the same linguistic impressions about speakers from Madrid or Havana or Buenos Aires that a Mexican, for example, might have.

## Dialect or Language?

Dialect or language variation is one of the areas of linguistics of greatest interest and fascination to the non-professional or lay person, but it is, at the same time, a concept extremely difficult to define and explain with precision. Sometimes it is even impossible for language professionals to decide whether a given speech mode is really another language or just a different dialect of the same language. Several factors are used to determine this. The main one is mutual intelligibility or comprehensibility. If speakers of two different speech “modes” can understand each other, even though with some difficulty at first and after some practice (assuming, of course, that neither has formally studied whatever it is that the other speaker is speaking), these modes are usually considered to be different dialects of the same language. An individual from Minneapolis or Winnipeg may have some difficulty in communicating easily at first with an individual from Johannesburg, South Africa, or New Delhi, India, but this difficulty won’t last long or really impede communication in any serious way because they are all speaking dialects of the same language, English. The same is true when an individual from Las Palmas on the CANARY ISLANDS confronts someone from Arequipa, Peru, since they are both speaking varieties of Spanish.

Fortunately, for us this issue is clear-cut and relatively simple in both Spanish and English. But it is a major problem in other languages, such as Italian, German, or Chinese. Sometimes the solution is conventional, convenient, even political, and not based solely on linguistic reality. We speak of the various dialects of Italian (Neapolitan, Piedmontese, Tuscan, Calabrese, Sicilian, Venetian, and so on), yet some of these modes are really mutually incomprehensible (Neapolitan and Venetian, for example). But rarely do we speak of the different “languages” of Italy. On the other hand, this is exactly what most linguists say about Mandarin and Cantonese, which are likewise mutually incomprehensible; thus, linguists refer to them as languages. Most people really mean Mandarin when they say “Chinese” since it is the official language of China and the one with the most speakers.

Another case, closer to home for us, is that of Spanish and CATALAN, two of the main languages of the Iberian peninsula. Both are spoken by many of the same speakers in northeastern and eastern Spain and the BALEARIC ISLANDS in the Mediterranean off the eastern coast of Spain. These people are politically, ethnically, and culturally united with

the rest of Spain, yet Spanish and Catalan are unquestionably two different languages. Many North Americans who knew Spanish were surprised to find that they could not read the signs shown or understand many of the words spoken by Spaniards during the televising of the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona. This is because these words were not Spanish but Catalan, the official language in this part of Spain, Catalonia, although the vast majority of its citizens are bilingual. These two languages started centuries ago as dialects of Latin but have diverged to the point where they now have such significant grammatical and phonological differences that they are now separate. In this case political, ethnic, and cultural unity has not been as significant as linguistic reality.

It is a historical accident or at least a series of historical events that has made Castilian and not Catalan the official language of all of Spain, and, therefore, the official language of the countries of Spanish America as well. Castilian was the language of the people who led the reconquest of Spain from the MOORS in the Middle Ages and became the dominant force on the Iberian peninsula. It has been said facetiously that “a language is just a dialect that had a strong army and navy at one time in the past.”

But almost all languages in turn have different geographical varieties or dialects of their own. A speaker from Boston and a speaker from Minneapolis both write the word *here* the same way, and it means exactly the same thing to both. Yet the first speaker says /híh/ *heeh* without any final *r* consonant, and the second speaker says /hír/, with his tongue curled back for a very prominent and definite final *r*. Each understands the other's pronunciation of the word despite never saying it that way. Both the uniform meaning and the written form of thousands of words just like *here*, combined with the crucial fact of mutual intelligibility, lead us to the obvious fact that the New England and Midwestern speech modes are two dialects of the same language, English. But, in contrast, the Spanish word **buzón** and the Catalan word **bustia** mean exactly the same thing, and the speaker of each language can even easily pronounce the word in the other language correctly when he or she sees it written. Yet neither speaker—unless he or she already knows the other language—realizes that the unknown word means exactly the same thing—*mailbox*. In this case, mutual incomprehensibility (plus other differences, of course) shows clearly that Spanish and Catalan are two distinct languages.

Mutual comprehensibility, of course, depends on more than sound and meaning. The grammatical structures of different dialects of the same language differ only slightly, but those of different languages, even though related—like Spanish and French—usually differ radically. It is difficult to think of significant grammatical differences between the various dialects of English or between the various dialects of Spanish. But the grammatical differences between *any* dialect of English and *any* dialect of Spanish are so numerous and difficult that, as you should well know by now, it may take years of study to master them.

When all is said and done, the definitive solution (if there is one) to the problem of language versus dialect is perhaps more one of quantity than quality. Catalan, peninsular or Castilian Spanish, and Argentinian Spanish all originally came from Latin, but Catalan is considered a separate language. The latter two are just different varieties of the same

language; the differences between Catalan and Castilian Spanish or Catalan and Argentinian Spanish, for example, are far greater than those between Castilian and Argentinian Spanish. In some languages like German or Italian, the determination of language versus dialect is quite arbitrary and open to question, but in the cases of the two languages we are concerned with here, Spanish and English, linguists agree quite readily on whether a given speech mode is a different language or just a different dialect of the same language.

### **Social and Educational Varieties of Language**

In addition, dialectal differences can be analyzed not only on a geographical or regional basis but also along social and educational parameters. There are noticeable and important differences in the speech of people of different socio-economic backgrounds, different ages, and different educational levels. This is a complicated question, and these speech variations are changing and diminishing relatively rapidly in the developed countries because of increased travel, more higher education, a transient population, upward social mobility of more people, and particularly the influence of the mass media—television, films, and popular music. English in the United States and Canada is moving toward greater uniformity, especially with the younger generations. The same thing is true of Spanish, particularly in highly industrialized countries like Spain and Argentina, although this dialect leveling is not proceeding as fast in American Spanish because of the difference between the role of social, economic, and educational factors in the Hispanic world and in the U.S. and Canada.

There is also a difference in the way the two parameters of regional and social factors intersect in English and Spanish. In English, although there is more leveling among younger speakers, more mature speakers still show marked regional variation in their speech with socio-economic factors being largely irrelevant. For example, a lawyer from Boston, with regard to pronunciation, sounds more like a dockworker from Boston than he does a lawyer from Los Angeles or New Orleans. Bill Clinton, from Arkansas, and Ted Kennedy, from Massachusetts, even with the similarity of their educational backgrounds and their professions, clearly have different accents—both regional from the point of view of General American. One accent is Southern Midlands and the other, New England. And, more importantly, as is typical with older speakers, neither has shown any interest in changing his speech for any reason—political or otherwise.

But in Spanish the situation is somewhat different. Regional differences with more highly educated people, who are normally also in a higher socio-economic class, are not as prominent. Thus, a doctor from Mexico City, for example—in his pronunciation at least—sounds somewhat more like a doctor from Bogotá or Buenos Aires than he does like a laborer from the outskirts of his own city or a peasant from a nearby village. The reasons for this are complex and based on the social and educational differences in Hispanic and North American culture and society.

In addition, certain regional or geographical varieties or dialects in every linguistic community have greater prestige, or, better said, greater acceptability. "Acceptability"

means that the dialect in question does not particularly attract attention or is certainly not annoying to the majority of individuals who do not speak it. They are able to attend more to what the speaker is saying rather than to the way in which he or she is saying it. The prestige or standard dialect for both Spanish and English—that is, the one with the greatest acceptability—is the one currently dominant on national television and radio in both linguistic communities. (We are referring, of course, mainly to announcers and newspeople rather than to dramatic and musical performers.)

### **Varieties of North American English**

An oversimplified but convenient division for the United States shows four general regional speech areas (although each, of course, can be subdivided): Eastern, Midlands, Southern, and Midwestern or General. “Eastern” is coastal New England and the immediate New York city area (including nearby New Jersey but not eastern Long Island, for example). “Midlands” starts in southern Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois (what might be termed the northern sector of the Ohio River valley) and proceeds southward through the Appalachians, down through the Ohio valley and the Mississippi valley, starting around St. Louis and extending considerably to the west of the Mississippi, veering above Louisiana westward into Texas. “Southern” starts around Washington, DC, and moves south fairly close to the Atlantic coast and then westward south of the Appalachians through what is known as the “Deep South” until it melds with Midlands in eastern Texas. Florida does not fit neatly into this area because of the influx of speakers from other areas of the eastern United States, plus, of course, the Hispanics since the early sixties. “General American” is basically everything else, including the Mid-Atlantic area (excluding the regions already mentioned), the Great Lakes area, the Midwest, the Great Plains, the Rocky Mountains, the extreme Southwest, and the Far West (from the Pacific coast to the Rockies and from the Mexican border actually all the way to Alaska). The speech of most English-speaking Canadians, at least west of Quebec, is very similar, and in most cases almost identical, to the speech of the neighboring areas of the U.S.

Unquestionably, General, or Midwestern English, with all its subdivisions and varieties, is the default dialect in the United States, the one with the greatest acceptability throughout the country and the one spoken by the greatest number of people in North America. The truth of this is shown by the curious fact that an individual born and raised in Manhattan will not get a job as a television announcer or perhaps even an on-camera news person on a national network, whose headquarters, of course, are in Manhattan unless he or she speaks more like someone from Detroit or Los Angeles than with the so-called typical New York accent. An individual born and raised in Georgia will not get an announcer’s job on an Atlanta radio or television station with a wide reception area unless he uses General American rather than Southern speech. Yet an individual with an Eastern accent (Franklin Roosevelt, from near New York City) and an individual with a Southern accent (Jimmy Carter, from southwest Georgia) both got to be president of the United States. Despite this, individuals with regional accents will most certainly never get to be

anchor persons on nightly network news broadcasts. The most popular television personalities have been speakers of General American (Johnny Carson, Oprah Winfrey, and David Letterman, for example), although there are exceptions (like Jay Leno and Regis Philbin, both speakers of Eastern).

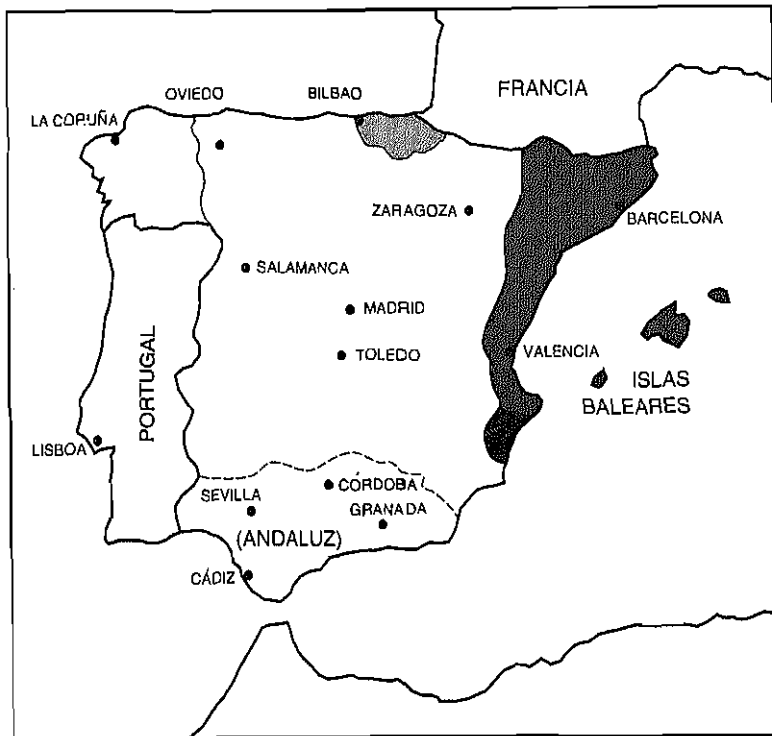
## The Language Situation on the Iberian Peninsula

The Hispanic world is also divided into various dialect areas, but the situation here is even more diverse. Education is still not as widespread as it is in the United States and Canada, yet it is much more uniform because of the educational systems in Hispanic countries. In Spain and Spanish America there are greater regional dialectal differences among the middle and lower socio-economic classes than among educated speakers because of this uniformity of education and closer agreement on linguistic standards which dictate how an educated speaker should speak his or her own language.

There are four languages on the Iberian peninsula: SPANISH (CASTILIAN), CATALAN, GALICIAN-PORTUGUESE, and BASQUE (see Map 1 on p. 18). The first three are Romance languages and the fourth, **vasco** or **vascuence**, is unrelated to any other language spoken in the world today. Some linguists believe it to be a descendant of the language spoken on the Iberian peninsula when the Greeks, Phoenicians, and Romans arrived before the Common Era. Basque is now spoken in a small area in northern Spain. Catalan (**catalán**) and its dialects are spoken by virtually everyone in northeastern Spain and in the Balearic Islands and is an officially recognized language. Galician (**gallego**), spoken in northwestern Spain, can be lumped with Portuguese to form a larger language unit known as Galician-Portuguese (**gallego-portugués**). Portuguese, of course, is the national language of Portugal, but Galician, now in essence a dialect of Portuguese, is a regional language of Spain heard more in rural than urban areas and lacking the prestige and status that Catalan, for example, enjoys in the other corner of Spain. Spanish (**español**), that is, Castilian (**castellano**), is the official national language of Spain and is spoken all over the country, including the Canary Islands (not shown on the map). Spanish is spoken by virtually all the inhabitants of the other language areas (except the very young who have not yet gone to school and some of the very old who perhaps never went). These individuals are true bilinguals since they speak the national language in addition to their native regional language, in most cases equally well.

Naturally there are also dialects within **castellano** itself. The main one, the official national standard dialect, has no particular name other than **castellano**. It is spoken all over Spain (whether natively or not), is used in schools, is heard on radio and television and in the movies, and is used for business and social intercourse throughout the nation. One of its principal regional dialects is ANDALUSIAN (**andaluz**), spoken in southern Spain and in the Canary Islands. Most of the relatively few sound differences that characterize it are also heard in American Spanish. The reasons for this are mainly historical and are presented later in this chapter.

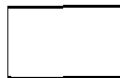
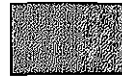
Map 1 Languages of the Iberian Peninsula



GALLEGO-PORTUGUÉS



CATALÁN

ESPAÑOL (CASTELLANO)  
(with the dialect *andaluz*)

VASCUENCE

There are very few important sound differences between standard **castellano** and **andaluz** or between **castellano** and American Spanish (all of which will be taken up in subsequent chapters). The principal one is the distinction or contrast in **castellano** between /s/ (as in **ca**sa house) and /θ/ ("th") (as in **ca**za hunt), the former always being spelled with s (**po**so sediment, **se**so brain, **si**erra mountain range) and the latter with z (**po**zo well) and c + e (**ce**so I stop) or c + i (**ci**erra s/he closes). From now on in this book the term **castellano** will be used only to refer to the national standard language of Spain, spoken natively by people from central and northern Spain and characterized mainly (but not solely) by **DISTINCTION** or **distinción**, the contrast between /s/ and /θ/, as illustrated above.

Most Spaniards in the areas where **vasco** (**vascuence**), **gallego**, and **catalán** are spoken are, as we said, bilingual. Some speak their native language mainly at home and in other informal situations, but others, such as the **catalanes** in northeastern Spain, speak it virtually all the time until, of course, they encounter those who speak only **español**. During the autocratic regime of the dictator Francisco Franco (1936–1975), these three languages became symbols of political separatism and defiance of the central government, which thus attempted to suppress them in all forms. But these languages have recently experienced a vigorous revival and perhaps even glorification under the subsequent democratic regime of the constitutional monarch, Juan Carlos, who, himself, has delivered speeches in **catalán**, for example. Some Spaniards, however, are still not in total agreement with a policy that permits and fosters other recognized languages, as evidenced by their displeasure at the fact, for example, that King Juan Carlos opened the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona by speaking Catalan first, then Spanish. **Vasco** has also become an important symbol and tool for the Basque separatists. Regardless of all this linguistic disagreement and even conflict, the visitor to Spain today can depend on being able to use Spanish with virtually everyone of school age or older anywhere in the country.

## Judeo-Spanish

One other dialect of Spanish, **JUDEO-SPANISH** (**judeo-español** or **ladino**), should be mentioned before passing to America. In 1492, along with the Moors (those of North African descent), most Jews were expelled from Spain and fled to Portugal, North Africa, and the eastern Mediterranean, particularly Greece and Turkey. These Sephardic Jews (so-named from *sepharad*, the Hebrew word for Spain) lived close together, usually in segregated districts, and maintained along with their religion and social customs the language they had brought from Spain. Although many foreign words have since entered this dialect of medieval Spanish, it is considered to be phonologically quite similar to what it was in the days of Columbus. This is particularly interesting and valuable to linguists because it gives them a good idea of how all Spanish was pronounced at that time. Such a situation is a very fortuitous and practically unique one for scholars. This dialect of Spanish is different from modern Spanish for several reasons, the principal one being that it did not participate in the sound changes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For example, it does not have the sound **jota** [x] as in **jardín** or **hijo** since this sound developed years after the Spanish or Sephardic Jews were forced to leave their homeland. In the twentieth century many of them emigrated to other countries, and early in this century there were significant groups in the large Eastern cities of the United States, although these groups have grown much smaller over the years since the younger members are abandoning the use of Spanish. But there are now vital Sephardic communities throughout Europe and in Israel, where newspapers, magazines, and other writings in **ladino** (often written with Hebrew rather than Roman characters) are regularly published.

## The Indian Languages of Spanish America

Unlike the situation in the U.S. and Canada where the number of speakers of native Indian languages is small and even diminishing, there are still many areas of Latin America where Indian languages are the main means of communication. In Mexico and Central and South America there are millions of speakers of the principal indigenous languages, many of whom are bilingual with Spanish, but many of whom do not know Spanish very well or at all.

In Mexico among the Uto-Aztecan languages still spoken, Náhuatl is the most important with nearly a million speakers. This was the language of the Aztecs of central Mexico. In Meso-America, which includes southern Mexico, the Yucatan peninsula, and nearby areas of Central America, Mayan and Mayan-related languages are spoken by several million. Quechua, the language of the Indian peoples ruled by the Incas when the Spaniards first reached Peru, is spoken by over seven million in Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. Over a million Bolivians and Peruvians speak Aymará, and Guaraní is spoken and preferred for daily use by Paraguayans, most of whom are bilingual with Spanish. The governments of these countries have at various times made concerted efforts to teach all their citizens Spanish with varying degrees of success. The influence of these indigenous languages on Spanish vocabulary is noticeable at first but really minor in the overall picture. It consists mainly of specialized words having to do with animals, plants, food, implements, and other things that were unknown by the Spaniards when they arrived in the New World—words such as **barbacoa** (*barbecue*), **batata** (*sweet potato*), **canoa**, **cóndor**, **coyote**, **chocolate**, **gaucho**, **bamaca** (*hammock*), **huracán**, **jaguar**, **llama**, **poncho**, **tamal**, **tomate**. Many of these words, of course, are quite familiar to North Americans since they have been taken into English in almost the original Indian form. The influence of the grammar of the Indian languages on Spanish, though, is virtually nil.

## Varieties of American Spanish

American Spanish today is much closer in pronunciation to **andaluz** than to standard **castellano**, and there are two principal theories to explain this. One holds that the majority of the Spanish **conquistadores** and settlers were from southern Spain or had lived there for a period of time and naturally carried their speech to America. Also a very high percentage of the women, deemed more influential than men in child language acquisition, were from southern Spain. And even many of the men and women not from this area of the country spent considerable time—sometimes a year or more—in southern cities such as Seville awaiting passage to the New World.

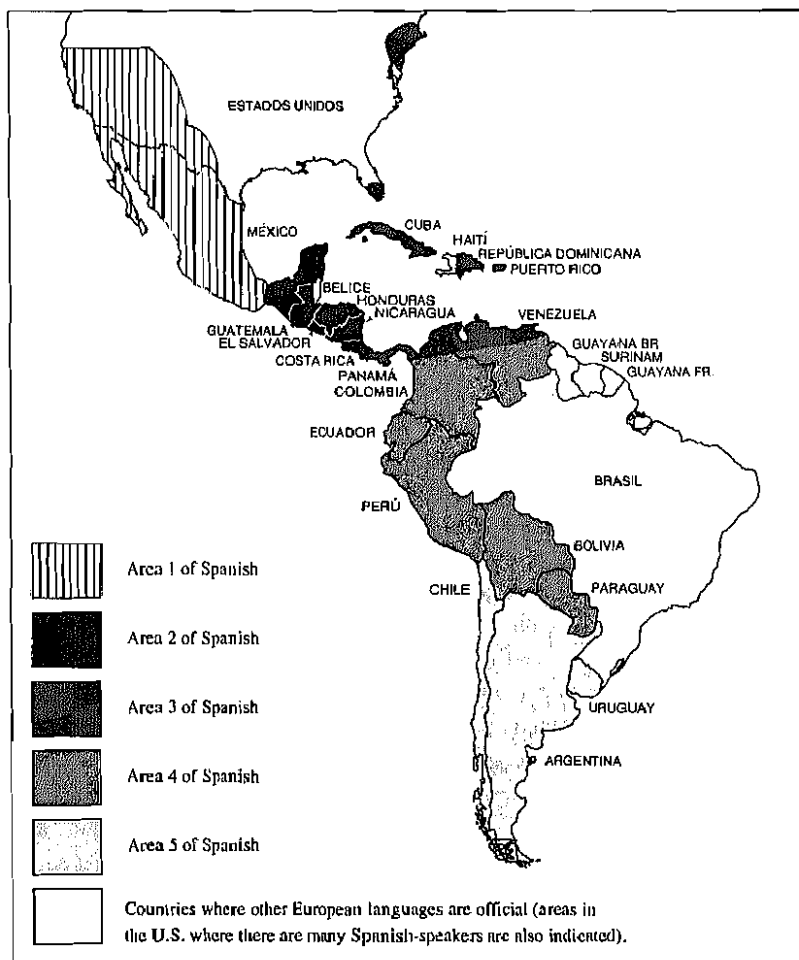
The explanation, however, is not quite so simple. Although a majority of these immigrants to America were from southern Spain or had spent time there, a sizeable number were not. In addition, although most features of the **andaluz** dialect are found in American Spanish today, some are not. Another theory holds that both the Spanish of southern Spain

and that of America underwent certain similar sound changes at about the same time in history and consequently are quite close today. Thus the Spanish of America evolved in the same direction as the Spanish of southern Spain, but independently, according to this theory.

In addition, American Spanish, as might be expected, now shows many regional variations of its own. Some linguists feel that these differences can be attributed to the influence of the SUBSTRATUM INDIGENOUS American languages that the Spanish settlers came in contact with. In other words, the native Americans, who had to learn Spanish in most areas of Spanish America, put the peculiar stamp of their Indian languages on their Spanish, thus making American Spanish what it is today.

Other linguists feel that it is not logical that the language of the conquered peoples should have such a strong influence on the language of the conquerors, and there must be another explanation for the regional varieties of American Spanish. These differences are mainly due to the migration and settlement patterns of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They feel that all American Spanish can really be divided into two broad groupings, sometimes referred to as highland Spanish and lowland Spanish, or inland Spanish and coastal Spanish, or administrative and government Spanish and trade and maritime Spanish. These distinctions refer, respectively, to the Spanish spoken in the mountainous inland regions (the Andean region of South America and the valley of Mexico), both regions that were the sites of two of the most important administrative and cultural centers of the colonial period—Bogotá and Mexico City. These were regions relatively removed from the waves of immigration coming in from Spain, as opposed to the low-lying, coastal regions (the Caribbean islands and Gulf Coast areas of Mexico, Central and South America, the Pacific coast of South America, and the River Plate area on the lower Atlantic coast of South America). These were regions of maritime trade and commerce, where all the new immigrants from Spain first arrived and mixed with each other. Many, of course, settled here permanently. This first type of region (highland/inland), coincidentally perhaps, also encompasses the two most influential Indian languages, Náhuatl and Quechua, lending some credence to the first substratum theory.

For purposes of study and analysis, in this book we will present American Spanish in five main areas, each of which has also been subdivided by specialists, just as linguists for American English can find several regions in each of the broad areas we have already indicated for the United States. Such divisions are somewhat arbitrary and difficult to delimit with great precision, yet they are defensible. For example, everyone who has lived in the two cities knows that New Yorkers do not speak exactly like Bostonians, yet these two dialects are undeniably much closer to each other than either is to the variety of English spoken in Nashville, Tennessee. Thus New Yorkers and Bostonians are both considered to be speakers of "Eastern." The same arbitrariness is true of Spanish. Cubans and Puerto Ricans can easily be shown to speak somewhat different forms of Spanish, yet the typical speaker from each of these islands sounds much more like his counterpart than either do to a speaker from La Paz, Bolivia, for example. Thus, they are both considered to be speakers of "Caribbean Spanish."

**Map 2** Dialect Areas of American Spanish

The following are the geographical divisions of American Spanish (see Map 2, above).

1. *Mexico* (most parts) and *Southwestern United States*, including California.
2. *Central America*: southern Mexico and the Yucatan peninsula, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica.
3. *Caribbean*: Panama, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, the northern coast of Colombia and Venezuela, the northeastern United States containing Puerto Rican populations, Florida and the Gulf Coast areas of the United States having Cuban populations.

4. *Highland and Inland South America*: interior of Venezuela; most of Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru; Bolivia and Paraguay.
5. *Southern South America*: Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile. (This area is also called the Southern Cone.)

## General American Spanish

This is necessarily an oversimplification, and exceptions can easily be found, but this rough division will be satisfactory for our purposes. The variety of Spanish that will serve as the basis for the examples transcribed phonetically and heard on the tapes can be called General American Spanish. Many of the same criteria used above in the discussion of General American English have been used to establish this division. American Spanish is quite uniform in its grammar, that is, its MORPHOLOGY (form of words) and SYNTAX (order of words). The regional dialectal distinctions are in vocabulary—interesting, but not the province of our study in this book—and in pronunciation, the main theme of this book. General American Spanish is spoken by *educated* speakers all over Spanish America and is heard as the principal form on radio and television. It enjoys, if not necessarily the greatest prestige, certainly the greatest acceptability. We have already defined this concept as the quality of a dialect which calls the least attention to itself, thus permitting listeners to concentrate more on the message than the method of delivering it—the aim of verbal communication in any language.

However, General American Spanish characterizes not only the Spanish of educated speakers in most parts of Spanish America, but also the Spanish of the majority of urban speakers, whether educated or not, in areas 1, 2, and 4. A TV news announcer in any Spanish American city is more likely to have the features that characterize the accent of an educated speaker from Mexico City, San José (Costa Rica), or Bogotá than one from Havana, Santiago (Chile), or Buenos Aires, provided, of course, that the latter speaker is using his or her normal pronunciation. These pronunciation features will be examined in detail in subsequent chapters.

It is also interesting to note that Spanish speakers who record language instruction tapes prepared by publishers for purchase and use by North American students of Spanish virtually always use General American Spanish (whether it is their normal dialect or not). This is almost exactly like the situation already described for General American English. Since most of you are learning Spanish as a foreign or second language, it is most practical for you to start with the dialect enjoying the greatest acceptability throughout the Spanish-speaking world. Later, if you visit and live in another dialect area of the Hispanic world, you can decide if you want to try to modify your Spanish accordingly. This is advisable and rarely difficult to do; in fact, for young students it is usually difficult to avoid.

In the last analysis, the matter of regional dialects should not represent a problem for the student of Spanish. It should be asserted once more that any educated speaker of Spanish can be easily understood by any other educated Spanish speaker anywhere in the world. Your problems in learning to speak with a good Spanish accent will always stem

much more from the interference of your native language than to any Spanish dialectal variations that you may encounter along the way.

## **Review and Discussion**

*Remember that suggested answers are found in Appendix C.*

1. Does everyone have an “accent,” that is, speak a dialect of his or her language?
2. What are some features that enable one to decide whether a given speech mode is just a different dialect from another one or really another language?
3. Explain the truth underlying the quip, “A language is just a dialect that had a strong army and navy.”
4. Is the matter of dialect solely a question of where a given speaker grew up? Explain.
5. What general dialect of English or Spanish (if you are a native speaker of Spanish or a bilingual) do you speak?
6. What languages are spoken on the Iberian peninsula?
7. Why do some citizens of Israel speak Spanish natively today?
8. What is one explanation for the fact that most Latin Americans speak a form of Spanish today that is closer to the Spanish spoken in Seville (southern Spain) than in Bilbao (northern Spain), for example?
9. Is Spanish the only important language spoken in Spanish America?
10. If you had to delineate some broad geographical dialect divisions for American Spanish, what are a couple of strategies for trying to do this?
11. Is your own dialect of English or Spanish (if you are a native speaker of Spanish or a bilingual) the same as most others in your home town or city? If not, how do you explain it?