

SAN ANTONIO TALK

Frank Jennings wants to know why I did not respond to his query (Recorder-Times, December 22, 1994) about San Antonio folk, including our mayor, who say *bidness* for the word **business**.

OK, Frank. Major dictionaries agree that acceptable rapid pronunciations of the word **business**, throughout the United States, include *bidnuhs*, *binuhs*, or *bizuhnuhs*.

Those of you out there who teach spelling by phonics know that this word **business**, like the word **busy**, has two problems. The letter -u- has an [I] sound; the letter -s- has a [z] sound. So even in slow, careful, pronunciation **busy** really sounds like [bIzi] and **business** sounds like [bIznuhs]. In rapid pronunciation, the [n] sound in [bIznuhs] has a strong effect on the [z] sound. That effect gives us the various *bidnuhs*, *binuhs*, or *bizuhnuhs* pronunciations.

You'll find similar strong effects of the nasals (**m** and **n**) when we say, in natural speech, phrases like **let me** [lemme] and **give me** [gimme].

In a totally unrelated linguistic matter, Arturo Madrid, the Distinguished Professor of the Humanities at Trinity University, found some collaboration for Fred Tarpley's (Recorder-Times December 29, 1994) suggestion that the English phrase *Ten Gallon Hat* resulted from a misunderstanding of the Spanish word *gallones*. Fred argues that the original phrase *Ten Gallones Hat*, referred to a hat so big that it could hold 10 *gallones*, or festoons.

Arturo has found in a monograph titled Spanish Folk Poetry in New Mexico (1946) the following entry: "*su sombrero galoneado*: a

festooned or *gallooned* hat." So we do know that *gallooned* did indeed mean *festooned*. That still leaves unproven, however, that English speakers substituted *gallon* for *gallooned*.

Another unrelated comment; this one from my Trinity colleague Saber Elaydi, professor of mathematics and native speaker of Arabic.

Saber also reacted to the Tarpley discussion of December 1994.

In that column, Fred agrees with me that the term *Guadalupe* is a Mexican Spanish adaptation of the Mesoamerican word *Coatlicue* (the earth goddess/god). Fred however, thinks that the adaptation was simplified because of the Old Spanish word *guadal*, meaning river, which was borrowed from the Arabic word meaning **river**.

Saber claims that both Fred and I miss the real connection: that the Spanish word *aqua* was originally the same word: *guadal*. Both Spanish words for **river**, in effect, were originally Arabic.

Sorry, Saber. You have convinced me that the Arabic language has influenced modern European languages in ways more significant than linguists earlier thought. Linguists do agree, now, that the Spanish word *guadal* indeed came from Arabic. The Spanish word *aqua*, however, came from Latin, not Arabic. And the Latins share *aqua* with Old Germanic *aha*, which means **river**. The word *aqua*, fortunately or unfortunately, still has strong Indo-European lineage.

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Scott Baird
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