

SAN ANTONIO TALK

Scholars argue that people on the British Isles spoke Old English--a mixture of Celtic, Latin, Scandinavian, and German languages--from the fifth century A.D. until the eleventh. People spoke it, but the "official" language was Latin.

In 1066, when William the Conqueror virtually took over England, French began to replace Latin as the official language. The common folk still spoke Old English, but the French influence was so strong that the Old English changed dramatically. We now say that the common folk spoke Middle English.

Today in San Antonio people speak a mixture of Spanish and English--not unlike the mixture of French and Old English that created Middle English. One linguistic theory that scholars use to explain that mixture is called, cleverly enough, the Mixed Code theory.

Careful now, you sophisticated bilingual readers. The theory of a Mixed Code language should not be confused with the theory of Code Switching. Code switching requires knowledge of two languages. When people code-switch, they move back and forth between the two languages. A mixed code language, however, defines the language--not the speakers. Monolingual speakers use and understand a mixed code language.

A fellow linguist, Fred Fields, who hails from Los Angeles, finally explained the difference to me during a conference held in San Diego last December. Fred claims that Spanglish, Tejano, Calo, Pachuco, TexMex--whatever one wants to call the mixture of Spanish and English that we speak along the Southwestern part of the United

States and Northwestern part of Mexico--is a Mixed Code language.

Spanglish is like Middle English, you see, but with a Spanish and English mix, not a French and English one.

I have before me two examples that illustrate the Mixed Code elements of the Spanglish we use here in San Antonio. Both examples come from an extremely reliable source of acceptable, educated, language usage--our local daily newspaper. Both examples were written in the summer of 1995.

Example one is the headline for an editorial: *New law can halt colonias' spread.* The key word here, of course, is *colonias*. What is a *colonias*? Don't look for an answer in the editorial itself. None exists.

The second example comes from the same issue of the newspaper, but from a different section. See if you can understand this one: *The Amigos del Rio, the Paseo del Rio Association's friend/volunteer support group, will hold its [annual] River Walk mixer at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday in the courtyard area at La Mansion del Rio.*

Colonias? Del rio? Amigos? Paseo? La mansion? This is English? Nah! This is far more beautiful than mere English. This is unadulterated San Antonio Talk--as beautiful and as understandable to the local readership as Chaucer's English was to his middle English readership.

And it most certainly is Spanglish.

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Scott Baird
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