

**Chapter 6**  
**LANGUAGE ASSIMILATION:**  
**Including The Shared Discourse of Grief**

Throughout various cultures, then, and within the various languages observed in the Texas (and a significant few non-Texas) cemeteries, a core discourse of grief binds together about eighty-percent of the families. On gravemarkers, these families tell us the names of the deceased, their dates of death, their ages at death, family relationships, and perhaps a personal epitaph. This information is presented in a universal, consistent, predictable order of importance—with names having highest priority and personal epitaphs least.

In the gravemarker messages, we may also learn of places of birth and of death, of occupations, of lodge and/or religious affiliations, of means of death. These pieces of information, however, produce no pattern statistically valid enough to be considered part of the universal discourse of grief.

**Mixed Codes as linguistic Entities**

Gravemarker data, however, include one major aberration to the conventional division into recognizable languages. To wit, a significant number of the gravemarkers contain either bilingual or mixed language code messages.

For convenience sake, I am defining bilingual gravemarker bilingual messages as those messages that duplicate (all or parts of) a message in two different languages (Figure 6.1). In this example the Spanish

**Figure 6.1: Bilingual Message**  
(INSERT slide LS.7/97.#3)

DO NOT  
DRINK  
WATER  
-----  
NO TOME  
ESTA  
AQUA

language message duplicates exactly and totally the English language message. In mixed code gravemarker messages NO information is duplicated (Figure 6.2). In this example, the name is written in Spanish, the death

**Figure 6.2: Mixed Code Message**  
(INSERT slide SF2-8.7/97.#21)

Susie Peña  
Sept. 13, 1911  
Sept. 6, 1966  
Our Beloved Mother

and birth dates may be either Spanish or English. The personalized epitaph is clearly written in English. No information is duplicated.

While in most linguistic discussions this distinction has importance, it has no relevance to expressions of the universal discourse of grief.

Before I discuss that non-relevance, however, I wish to account for the presence of both bilingual and mixed-code data. The linguistic concept known as "language continuum" provides a useful explanation for these bilingual and mixed-code gravemarkers.

In 1966 linguist David Decamp published an article on Jamaican Creole in which he argued that a clear distinction between pure "dialect" [Creole] and pure "Standard British English" could not be found:

Nearly all speakers of English in Jamaica could be arranged in a sort of linguistic continuum, ranging from the speech of the most backward peasant or labourer all the way to that of a well educated urban professional. Each speaker represents not a single point but a span of this continuum, for he is usually able to adjust his speech upward or downwards for some distance on it.<sup>i</sup>

This concept of the continuum has become a working hypothesis in "Creole" studies.

During the past several decades the study of bilingual and mixed-codes has become as important to linguists as has the study of monolingual codes. The

justification for that emphasis lies in the previously discussed search for linguistic universals—common structures that unite all languages.

Within the field of sociolinguistics, bilingual codes are isolated for study in the discipline known as creole studies. Creole scholars study the manner(s) in which bilingual codes (Creoles), especially new and temporary bilingual codes, relate to established language codes; how the three language codes change through time; and how, through time, bilingual codes either tend to merge into one of the established codes, or grow into separate and unique “languages.”<sup>ii</sup>

Such research becomes important later, when we discuss the mixed-code of Spanish/English. Applying the continuum concept to gravemarker languages in any bilingual community requires only minor adjustment. Each gravemarker can, for starters, be a definite point on a continuum—not a “span on the continuum.” The same family members (“each speaker”) may be involved in the creation of several gravemarkers and those gravemarkers may differ on a linear scale (one marker may have monolingual Spanish writing conventions, a second marker a mixture of Spanish and English, and a third marker only English) but each gravemarker is a unique

point on the continuum. (See, for example, the various gravemarkers produced by the Fernandez family, in Chapter 2).

**ASSIMILATION THEORY: ELLIS ISLAND (NARROW AND BROAD)**

To understand the social background for the linguistic presence of these bilingual and mixed-code languages, we need to look at ways in which immigrant languages become Anglicized. While the federal government has utilized several immigration processing centers, Ellis Island—and stories emanating from that processing center—have dominated American understanding of the immigration procedure. Most of the Ellis Island stories focus upon surnames, ways in which surnames become Anglicized.

Be warned, however, that more cultural anecdotes exist than do actual analysis of immigration data. As Daniel Levine, Kenneth Hill, and Robert Warren state in the preface to their 1985 seminal collection of essays in Immigration Statistics: A Story of Neglect:

As a nation built by waves of immigrants from colonial times to the present, we know remarkably little about the composition and characteristics of the flow of new arrivals in any given year or about how they settle in to their new lives in the Unites States (Levine, Hill, and Warren 2).<sup>iii</sup>

Most of us have vague ideas about the registration process itself. Most of those ideas jell with reality. Basically, when ships of immigrants arrived in the New York harbor, the immigrants underwent a screening process. In essence smaller boats or barges brought the immigrants and their baggage to Ellis Island, technically a barge itself. At Ellis Island the immigrants underwent an exhaustive three-part (medical, psychological, economic) examination. According to the first major Ellis Island historian, Henry Pratt Fairchild, "If the immigrant appears to be 'clearly and beyond a doubt' entitled to admission, he passes on to the disharboring quarters, where he is turned over to the agents of the appropriate transportation company, or to a 'missionary,' or is set free to take his way to the city by the ferry (Fairchild 188).

Remember, however, that this process took place before national registration of any type. The registration process amounted to little more than verification of a cargo manifest—and of the health of that "cargo." Names that people were given at Ellis Island had little, if any, legal status.

To broaden our understanding of this Ellis Island experience, Jewish scholar Bernard Marinbach reminds us that similar cargo manifest verification took place in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Boston, and Galveston (Texas). For most of us, even the Texans among us, the

importance of the Galveston center appears almost incidental. Marinbach's Jewish community has seldom dominated Texas folklore. Yet "Between the years 1907 and 1914," Marinbach writes, "about ten thousand Jews were admitted as immigrants at Galveston, settling in virtually every state of the West" (Marinbach xiii).

To broaden our understanding geographically (New York, Baltimore, Boston, Philadelphia, Galveston) certainly helps us understand our over-reliance upon the insights warped by Ellis Island cultural mythology. We must, however, understand the same captivating hold that the Ellis Island stories have had upon our understanding of the assimilation of family names. These stories have provided our culture a red herring, which has effectively cut off our understanding of the obvious—the major ways in which second and third generation families change their surnames. Check the gravemarkers. They'll inform you.

### **Surname Changes**

No, I am not belittling the reality of the Ellis Island stories--nor the equivalent Baltimore, Boston, Philadelphia, Galveston ones. Certain individuals did indeed suffer "Foreignphobia" in these processing centers. Historian August Bolino writes quite succinctly: "In the process of inspection, many a future American 'suffered' a name change. Today we can laugh at these instances, but they must have perplexed

the aliens, who found themselves addressed in a fashion [by whom, he does not say] they did not recognize" (Bolino 17).

Bolino duplicates two of Maldwyn Jones' examples. One tells of the frustrated Jew who, when asked his name, said "Ich vergessen" [I forget]—and was named "Ferguson." The second story tells of an Italian man who said that his name was Mastroianni, and he became "Mister Yanni" (Bolino 15). Ellis Island officials, however, did not initiate these changes. In a 1974 article, genealogists Clifford and Anna Smith discuss at length the atrocious name changes that German pre-Ellis Island, eighteenth century immigrants suffered. For example, "Whenever there was an obvious near-equivalent in English to the German surname, American officials [in general, not Ellis Island] were likely to use it with or without permission of the bearer; thus, Schmid-Schmidt-Schmitz usually was recorded as Smith, Müller-Möller became Miller, Braun became Brown" (100).

Leading into our own gravemarker insights Smith and Smith talk about the gradual acquiescence of the family. "Wherever there was a translatable equivalent for a German surname, some family members were likely sooner or later to adopt it, usually in the third generation and thereafter; thus, Zimmermann became Carpenter, Schneider became Taylor, Dürr became Dry,

Gerber became Tanner, Bauer became Farmer" (100).

And thirdly, Smith and Smith discuss spelling difficulties. "Wherever American pronunciation was confounded by German orthography, the German surname was likely to be changed in such manner as to preserve the original German pronunciation of it; thus Ewald became Awalt, Dreier became Dryer, Meier-Maier became Myer, Koch became Cook, Bauer became Bower" (100).

**ASSIMILATION THEORY: AMERICAN LANGUAGE INTOLERANCE**

The following discussion will focus upon gravemarker data. The topic (language intolerance), however, triggers emotional responses among virtually everyone reading books written in English. My only caveat lies upon an appeal to anyone who has participated in the production of a gravemarker—or who intends to do so. Your grief will be written in a human language. Listen to your fellow grievors, and to the articulation of their grief.

In order to follow some of their messages, however, I need to explain the concept of diacritic marks, those funny little marks that people put on top of letters—like our dot on top of the letter "i." In many European, non-English languages, the various Roman alphabets that people utilized contain many more such diacritics. Most of our computers today contain "symbol inserts" that allow the free use of such diacritics. The letter *i* for example may have the

additional diacritics ì, í, î, or ï.

Part of the cultural identity attached to written English is the avoidance of such diacritics. The British scholar Smalley excuses such intolerance with arguments that appears to make fools of all writers and readers of French: "A letter with a diacritic such as an acute accent [é] or a grave accent [è] is easily confused with a letter without a diacritic [e]. An acute accent is more easily confused with a grave accent that either is with no diacritic at all" (43).

Some onomastics scholars, those who study the origin of place and surnames especially, have found that "true American readers" are also reluctant to utilize dictionaries that include diacritics—and that "foreigners" learn that fact quickly. In his first book on American surnames, E. Smith minced no words:

In this book the diacritical marks of the various languages are disregarded because they are not customarily used in American family names. A true "American" name does not have an accent, a tilde, an umlaut, a circumflex, a cedilla or any of the numerous other signs or marks used in the various languages. Americans just refuse to take the time to add such marks, and the foreigner soon ceases to insist upon it and he, himself, ignores the diacritical mark" (1956 xxxi).

In the second edition of this same book, Smith toned

down the rhetoric somewhat, but not his belligerence:

Names are given with the spelling usually employed in America even though slightly different from the form found in the country of origin. Indeed, the spelling commonly employed in America may not be found at all in the country of origin. This book is about American names and not about names current in other countries. . . . Names are spelled as they are commonly used in America influenced by the English language without those diacritical marks so sacred to many from other countries." (E. Smith 1973 xviii).

Hanks and Hodges in their dictionary of American Family Names do attempt some inclusion of diacritics—especially in the index. In their discussion of languages written in non-Roman scripts, however, they do address the overall difficulty of “transmuting” any language into English—including, I argue, the assimilation of family names on gravemarkers.

Reluctantly, it was decided not to attempt to deal with the comparatively recent advent of surnames derived from other naming traditions—in particular, those of India, Pakistan, China, and Japan—even though such names are found with ever-increasing frequency in English-speaking countries. Perhaps in a future edition it will be possible to tackle these names too, and show how

different systems of nomenclature from different cultures have been transmuted into 20th-century surnames (Hanks & Hodges vi).

**ILLUSTRATIONS: MIXED CODES WITH UNIVERSAL DISCOURSE OF GRIEF**

In 1992, Annelise Duncan and I argued that Texas-German gravemarkers ranged from conventional German language codes to conventional English language codes—with a multitude of mixtures of the two codes (Baird & Duncan). We argued that the mixture may be as simple as using a comma instead of a period in the writing of a death date.<sup>iv</sup> German conventions call for a “period”; English conventions call for a “comma.”

We also suggested that the universal discourse of grief pattern exists in the English influence upon the German vocabulary. That emergence, however, appears more noticeably in Chinese-English gravemarkers—more noticeable because of the differences in orthography.

In Figure 6.3, a bilingual marker, the single

**Figure 6.3: Chinese/English name**  
(INSERT slide /90.mission south.#06)

Young  
[Chinese]

English item duplicates the Chinese item—the family name. In Figure 6.4, a gravemarker that is both

**Figure 6.4: Chinese/English name, death date**  
(INSERT slide 2/90.mission south.#29)

Fong Yick Man  
Died Nov. 9, 1948  
[Chinese]

bilingual and mixed-code, the English code repeats (predictably) the name and death date, but does not include the age. In Figure 6.5, the English code

**Figure 6.5: Chinese/English name, death date, age**  
(INSERT slide MPS70.Mar92.#35)

ENG	
Leung Yick Jan.1,1915-Jan.31,1965 Feb.7,1980 [Chinese]	King Chin Oct.20,1914- [Chinese]

includes the predictable names, death dates, and birthdates (age). And in Figure 6.6, the English code

**Figure 6.6: Chinese/English name, death date, age, kin**  
(INSERT slide MPS72.Mar92.#37)

NG	
Father Foon Gim NG May 27, 1898 Oct. 8, 1949 [Chinese]	Mother Mildred Go NG Oct. 14, 1903 Nov. 16, 1980

includes the names, death dates, ages, and kinship.

While the different scripts allow us to see readily the movement from Chinese into English, the movement from one language code into another does not depend upon script. In fact, one may easily argue that no movement really takes place. Gravemarker Grief is

Gravemarker Grief. Whether a family mourns in Chinese or in English or in a mixture of Chinese and English, the family mourns.

Nonetheless, the Texas cemeteries abound in gravemarkers expressing grief in a variety of mixed language codes. In addition to the Chinese/English markers in Mission Park South, for example, the Wetmore cemetery has several mixed-code German/English codes such as in figure 6.7. Note the three predictable

**Figure 6.7: German/English name, death date, age**  
(INSERT slide 3/92 Wetmore 19)

items—name, death date, and birth date—in English and the predictable kinship term (“born Reeh”) still in German. In addition two stylized epitaphs remain in German.

Figure 6.8 shows a picture (sent by a friend) of a

**Figure 6.8: Hebrew/English name, death date**  
(Insert slide Marc Keltner, 6/90)

Hebrew/English marker in Mt. Moriah Cemetery, Deadwood, South Dakota. Most of the marker has Hebrew writing, but the predictable name and death date constitute the two items in English.

Figure 6.9 shows a bilingual Arabic/English

**Figure 6.9: Arabic/English name, Death, Birth, Kin**  
(INSERT SLIDE SF#1, 2/29/02, 1)

marker. The predictable names, death dates, birth dates, and kinship terms all appear in English. The Arabic code repeats the two given names: Joseph and Mary.

Figure 6.10 shows a bilingual Korean/English

**Figure 6.10: Korean/English name, death date, birth date**

(INSERT SLIDE SF2-10, 7/97, #25)

marker. The English code contains the predictable name, death date, and birth date. The Korean repeats the full name.

Figure 6.11 does not show a mixed-code, nor a

**Figure 6.11 Czech and English Family Transmutations**

(INSERT SLIDE Czech, Eckert, 05)

bilingual marker. It does show, however, a monolingual Czech marker in front of a monolingual English marker. The family name on the Czech marker is spelled FAJKUS; on the English marker the name is spelled the way it is pronounced, but in English writing conventions: FAYKUS. The birth dates indicated that Peter, on the Czech marker, was 25 years old when Jerome, on the English marker, was born. We can infer, then, that Peter was Joseph's father and that in one generation, the entire gravemarker information was "transmuted," to use Hanks and Hodges' term, into English.

## APPLYING DIACRITICS TO ASSIMILATION STUDIES

Note, now, in Figure 6.12. The same generational

**Figure 6.12: Diacritic changes on Czech markers**  
(INSERT SLIDE '90.Czech.Eckert.#33)

assimilation takes place on the names, only, on two totally different Czech markers. The use of the háček diacritic over the letter "c" on the right marker indicates palatalization—or pronouncing the "c" as "ch." The Czech pronunciation would be [Meech-ah]. The newer marker (on the left) has no háček—leaving the pronunciation of the name up to the whims of English speakers; either [Meek-uh] or [Maik-uh]<sup>v</sup>.

This loss of diacritic markers occurs in several languages, including German, Czech, Polish, and Spanish. The Spanish data provide a multitude of examples. Figures 6.13 through 6.18, for example, illustrate the movement from monolingual Spanish, through predictable Spanish-into-English mixed code samples, into monolingual English.

In Figure 6.13, Alex Treviño's San Fernando #2

**Figure 6:13: Entire Discourse of Grief in Spanish**  
(INSERT SLIDE Treviño.SF2-7.7/97.#11)

Alex Treviño  
Julio 17, 1908  
Nov. 9, 1944  
Recuerdo de su madre  
Y hermanos

marker includes the entire universal discourse of grief in Spanish: *name* Alex Treviño, *death date* Nov. 9, 1944, *birth date* Julio 17, 1908, *kinship/personalized epitaph* Recuerdo de su madre y hermanos [“erected by your mother and your siblings”].

In Figure 6.14, another monolingual Spanish

**Figure 6.14: Four elements of grief in Spanish**  
(INSERT SLIDE Cantú.SF2-7.7/97.#12)

Cantú	
Madre	Hermana
Petrita F.	Antonia
1864~1940	1895~1947

language marker, also from San Fernando #2, has two *kinship* terms: *madre* and *hermana* [mother and sister]. Predictably the death dates, birth dates, and names are also present.

San Fernando #1 has a mixed-code marker that has three names, three death dates, and three birth dates in English, with the two kinship terms (husband, wife) and a stylized (not personalized) epitaph in Spanish [Departed in Peace] (Figure 6.15).

**Figure 6.15: English name, death date, and birth date; kinship in Spanish**  
(INSERT SLIDE SF#1.2/29/92.#17)

Esposo	Esposa
Edward C.	Maria Moreno
Dec. 28, 1896	Delgado
Mar. 12, 1973	1899~1967

Henry C. Delgado  
1902~1928  
Descansen in Paz

Figure 6.16 shows a San Fernando #2 marker

**Figure 6.16: Two Predictable Spanish/English Mixtures**  
(INSERT SLIDE SF2-9.7/97.#20)

Canales	
Father	Madre
Antonio O.	Adela A.
Jan. 20, 1916	Sept. 30, 1929
Sept. 14, 1980	Abril 28, 1986
Recuerdo de su	Recuerdo de su
Esposa E Hijos	Hija E Hijos

memorializing two people, both of them memorialized within the complete universal discourse of grief. The father, who died in 1980, has name, death date, birth date and a kinship term in English, but a second kinship term is combined with a personalized epitaph in Spanish. The first three items appear (predictably) in English; the last two items still in Spanish.

The mother, on the other hand, who died six years later, has her name either in Spanish or English (they would be spelled identically), but death date, birth date, and combined kinship/personalized epitaph in Spanish.

The father's memorial is in the name of his wife and his children (or maybe his sons). The mother's

memorial is in the name of her daughter and her sons  
(or maybe her children).

Figure 6.17, from the Canary Island Cemetery in

**Figure 6.17: Name, death date, age in English;  
Kinship, personalized & stylized epitaphs in Spanish**  
(INSERT SLIDE Canary.1933.#17)

Refugio Faris  
Mar. 11, 1933  
Age of 59 Years  
Recuerdo de sus Hijos Y Hijas

Floresville, again has the complete universal discourse  
of grief—plus a stylized epitaph. Predictably the  
name, death date, and age are in English while kinship  
terms and personalized epitaph are in Spanish.

[Erected by your sons and daughters]. (The stylized  
acronym is also in Spanish.)

We started this series of Spanish-English markers  
with a monolingual Spanish example of Petrita and  
Antonia Cantú; we will close with a monolingual marker  
for someone else named Cantu (no diacritic), Abelardo  
(Figure 6.18). All five elements of the universal

**Figure 6.18: Cantu monolingual marker**  
(INSERT SLIDE SF2-7.7/97.#14)

Brother  
Abelardo Cantu  
1895~1942  
Sleep, brother, sleep and take thy rest,  
God called you home, he thought it best.

discourse of grief express Abalardo's siblings' feelings.

To summarize the arguments and examples: In all of the bilingual and all of the mixed-code gravemarkers, assimilation into English follows the universal discourse of grief. If only one item appears in English, that item is the name; if two items appear in English, those two items are name and death date; if three items appear in English, those three items are name, death date, and age; if four items appear in English those four items are name, death date, age, and kinship terminology; and if five items appear in English, those five items are name, death date, age, kinship terminology; and personalized epitaph.

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<sup>i</sup> Page 81 of David DeCamp, “Social and geographical factors in Jamaican dialects,” in R.B. LePage, ed., *Creole Language Studies II* (London: 1961) 61-84. DeCamp later clarified his arguments with mathematical concepts in “Implicational scales and sociolinguistic linearity,” *Linguistics* 71 (1971) 30-43.

<sup>ii</sup> An excellent introduction to the linguistic study of Creoles can be found in Sarah Grey Tomason and Terrence Kaufman, *Language Contact, Creolization, and Genetic Linguistics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: 1988). To observe how the field of creole studies has slowly gained prominence, note the scholarship of John E. Reinecke, “Trade jargons and Creole dialects as marginal languages,” *Social Forces* 17 (1938) 107-118; Uriel Weinreich, *Languages in Contact* (New York: 1953); R. Lowie, “A case of bilingualism,” *Word* 1 (1945) 249-259; Einar Haugen, *Bilingualism in the Americas: A Bibliography and Research Guide*, Publication of the American Dialect Society, No. 26 (Tuscaloosa, Ala: 1956); John Gumperz, “On the linguistic markers of bilingual communication,” *Social Issues* 23 (No. 2, April) 48-57; Richard W. Howell and Harold J. Vetter, *Language in Behavior* (New York: 1976); John R. Rickford, *Dimensions of a Creole continuum: History, texts and linguistic analysis of Guyanese Creole* (Stanford: 1987); and finally, Glenn Gilbert, ed., *Pidgin and Creole Languages: Essays in memory of John E. Reinecke* (Honolulu: 1987).

<sup>iii</sup> In addition to the Levine, Hill, & Warren scholarship, I have found useful information in the insights of Barbara Benton (1985), of August Bolino (1985), of Henry Fairchild (1930), of Bernard Marinbach (1983), and of Maldwyn Jones (ND) .

<sup>iv</sup> Baird and Duncan (note 5).

<sup>v</sup> For an in-depth discussion of gravemarker assimilation of Czech into English, see Eva Eckert 1998.