1. Introduction: Genesis of the topic.

As a teacher of Hispanic linguistics at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, since the early 1980s, I have observed firsthand the precipitousness with which Hispanic (now Latino) identity and language use have transmogrified in the United States. In the early 1980s, students of Hispanic/Latino origin living in New Jersey and attending Rutgers typically spoke Spanish at home, tended to (im)migrate from the Caribbean, and had generally learned English as a second language during their schooling in the United States. These students mainly identified first with their native country (Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic) and home language (Spanish). Around 1990 I began to notice a change in the dynamics and demographics of these “same” students. Their country of origin more often became somewhere in Central or South America, their language dominance began to vacillate between English and Spanish, and they seemed to be adding the hyphenation -American to their identification label.

Many students over these years have related the frustration with which they have had to cope in explaining their own origins to other “Americans.” They describe their sense of isolation, the overwhelming lack of understanding by those who supposedly have not “migrated” from somewhere else, the self-described “natives” of the land. These same Latinos relate anecdotes that in the United States they are viewed as other, i.e. Hispanic or hispanos, or Latina/os, and in the country of their forebears they are taken for gringos or agringados who speak Spanish como si fueran de po’ allá “as if they came from over there,” that is to say, with a non-native accent, who dress and act “different,” and who generally stand out as “odd” in a society that, in other contexts, they may claim as “home.”

It has been the case that, for me as a researcher, my ideas for further investigation have always sprung from chance occurrences in everyday life, events or situations - and the basis of the present paper does not differ from this pattern. In 1994 John Lipski, the indefatigable researcher of Spanish language and linguistics, gave a presentation, still unpublished, entitled “So in bilingual Spanish: From code-switching to borrowing” at the XV Symposium on Spanish and Portuguese Bilingualism. The paper gave a fascinating turn on the new “Spanish” lexeme so as it has come to be utilized in the U.S. and
how it has replaced other such filler or connector words as Spanish pues ‘thus’ or entonces ‘then’ in many instances.

At about the same time, I was teaching both a seminar on race, language, and ethnicity in Latin America and an undergraduate class on Hispanic bilingualism. In both classes, several students consistently used the particle so, with nativized Spanish pronunciation, as described by Lipski. In both classes, various students proclaimed, in more or less the same manner, no soy de aquí, no soy de allá ‘I’m from neither here nor there.’ One day in another class, a year or so later, a Latina, born to a Mexican father and a Cuban mother, was discussing her attitudes with regard to her identity and recurring feelings of isolation. So, to this young Latina I owe the title of this paper, because in that conversation, she put all the pieces together, stating “so, yo no soy de ninguna parte.”

2. The question of language and identity.

What can one derive from this kind of identity statement? Certainly anomie comes quickly to mind, but often my sense has been that anomie is not the overriding element in this situation. Often, there is a bemused and resigned, even comic, tone to the manner in which young Latinos and Latinas react to being asked their origins - a bemusement derived from years of labeling by the dominant segment of the population and/or out-group; a sense of resignation resulting from their knowledge that any question about identity signifies a questioning of one’s reason for being in the country, of one’s rights, of one’s loyalties, even of one’s racial heritage.

These factors alone, however, would not account for the staggering influence of language. For U.S. Latinos/ hispanos I propose that no sociocultural, ethnogenizing factor resonates more than their variety of Spanish, which, I think, has unwittingly defined and allied Latinos where other determinants have been incapable.

3. Spanglish

Before going further, I need to explain how I understand U.S. Spanish, or Spanglish, also called espanglés, ingleño, Espanglish, and angliparla. First, it is characterized by free Anglicisms and often an exceeding amount of Spanish/English code-switching. But, it is not defined by or as code-switching - code-switching may occur as between any two linguistic systems. It could be claimed, however, that code-switching transpires more often among speakers of Spanglish or other interlanguages, such as Franglais, Indish, or Portunhol. Second, Spanglish is not a variety of poorly spoken English. How do I know? Because my
mother, a native monolingual of English, would have no clue what a speaker of Spanglish was saying.

The best definition for Spanglish, one that leaves aside prejudices, linguicism, and hearsay in its meaning, could be “U.S. Spanish as heard in the streets, at home, or even in more formal circles including in academia.” More specifically, it is the variety of Spanish spoken and often written in the U.S., issuing from continued contact between Anglo and Hispanic cultures – an interlanguage resulting from daily contact between two powerful languages, Spanish and English.\(^2\) Much like any other geolect or sociolect, Spanglish varies based on place of use and socioeconomic factors. And like any other variety of language, it has its own “coterie” of varying lexical items that partially mark it as different from other varieties of the same language.

However, U.S. Latinos who speak U.S. Spanish are deemed “foreigners” in the U.S. and gringos in the lands of their ancestors, twice outsiders. The relationship between Spanish language and identification as “always the other” warrants further scrutiny in order to clarify anecdotal evidence reported by hispanos gringos, the U.S. Latinos of this paper.\(^3\)

As an example of how this language identification works, let us take the Argentine, a porteña, who is known for several distinctive linguistic characteristics. Other Spanish speakers are able to identify her as Argentine, even without seeing her, because her linguistic traits include

- lilting, perhaps Italian-influenced intonation patterns,
- preference for the (stereotypically Argentine) allophone [Š] or [ž] over [y] when pronouncing <ll> or <y>,
- use of vos rather than more standard tú,
- use of the vocative che, and
- a vocabulary rich in borrowings from Italian and other adstrate or substrate languages native to Argentina.

There exist, in fact, examples of macaronic bonairense Spanish from the late nineteenth through the twentieth centuries. [See EXAMPLE A in the handout/appendix]. Porteños have embraced their linguistic identity, even wallow in it, and realize that lo porteño would not be what it is now without Italians or Italian-language influences.

Another example involves fronterizo, that Spanish-Portuguese border lingo of Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina. [See EXAMPLE B in the handout/appendix]. Identity and language in the border areas reek of hybridity, a normal result of languages and cultures in contact. People in those areas are known for and identified by these traits.

So, the question remains: What does Spanglish have to do with Hispanicity, that feeling of being a part of a Latino/Hispanic group, an identity as a U.S. Latino? U.S.
identity markers have historically been constrained along racial and color lines. But, with Latinos, color and racial boundaries are typically not as patent as with African-Americans or Euro-Americans – they come in all colors. So, something else must be at work that distinguishes Latinos from others. That something else has to be language.

Ilan Stavans, the renowned Mexican writer and thinker has stated:

"Who speaks Spanish in the United States? ... Among themselves [Hispanics/Latinos] speak Spanglish – a middle ground, half a part of the past, half a part of the present and future. ... The story of Spanish is the story of its various pasts but also of its intriguing futures. And one of those futures, I think, is being shaped right now around us. The result might be an affront to Quevedo and Borges, a bastardized yet authentic version of the same language of Columbus – who by the way didn't know how to write and spoke a terrible Spanish."

Stavans’s pithy explication intersects with that of any reliable sociolinguist in that he captures the crux of the problem: that Spanglish – not a throw-away, unfortunate variety of Spanish, but rather one that flourishes with the times and serves the needs of its population – has become a distinct linguistic and cultural marker, wittingly or not, for U.S. Latinos. Also apparent in his discussion, certain basic precepts take root:

• that the identity of the “group” relies on elements other than phenotype; and
• that the Spanish language, their own variety of it, somehow evidences a palpable difference
• so, we are not completely they, and we are not completely we, at least not the “we” we once were.

Those who use Spanglish certainly come from de po’ allá “from over there.” Does that mean that Latinos are unified in causes, share attributes regarding self-worth and political strength, and have taken a place in the halls of ethnic grouping? Not necessarily, since their views and politics differ as much as any other “group’s” in this country. But, Latinos do have at least foot up on most English speakers – the vast majority of Latinos speak two languages relatively well.

4. Summary and conclusions.

So, ¿qué se implica en todo esto? What can be made of all this? When I was completing this paper last month, I had the great luck of hearing a presentation by M’Bare N’Gom, the excellent researcher of hispanophone and francophone literature in Africa. N’Gom, whose work in Equatorial Guinea is ground-breaking, quoted several African sources regarding how
hispanophone writers in Africa understand and treat hispanidad. This fortuitous encounter introduced me to new Hispanic writers and gave me a concluding quote for this brief presentation.

As a Spanish speaker coming to grips with the role of Hispanicity in the life of post-colonial Equatorial Guinea, the intellectual Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo, has stated:

La Hispanidad ... es un engranaje a través del cual los países y pueblos de esta estirpe común potenciaremos nuestros valores específicos en el mundo, nos ayudaremos mutuamente a salir de las dificultades particulares y nos sabremos siempre unidos a través de la lengua, de la cultura y de ciertos valores humanísticos, sin que ninguno pueda sertirse desamparado por orfandad.⁵

N’Gom (2000:3) points out that for Ndongo-Bidyogo, “Hispanidad is not an institutional organization, rather it draws upon [the] Spanish language as a linguistic and cultural unifier.”

So, if the porteña or fronterizo, or the ecuato-guineano, can be identified by, and can identify with, his or her variety of Spanish, the hispana gringa can certainly be identified by hers, Spanglish. Stated another way, just as use of porteño implies an element of Argentinity, use of Spanglish implies an element of U.S. Hispanicity - una solidaridad hispana, un engranaje latino, la Hispanidad so elegantly and eloquently particularized and personalized by an Hispano-African writer.
Notes

1 The “inquisition” regarding one’s race, especially in the context of the United States, certainly grounds any interrogation regarding identity, since race permeates every facet of the culture when questions of power politics loom.

2 Selinker (1992) has defined interlanguage generally as a permeable grammar that reveals hypercorrections, errors, omissions, and other forms of internal processing, and that leads to the restructuring of grammatical form and even function.

3 Hispano gringo reflects a play on what the Cuban-American journalist Enrique Fernández understood when he was called a cubano gringo by a Colombian acquaintance of his – after the Colombian deciphered exactly where Fernández was from.

4 A more complete version of Stavans’s statement: “Who speaks Spanish in the United States? Or rather, who speaks what kind of Spanish? ... among themselves [Hispanics/Latinos] speak Spanglish – a middle ground, half a part of the past, half a part of the present and future. ... Spanish is going to survive as a language in this country, although not in its Castilian, orthodox form. ... [Spanglish is] neither ... the language of Cervantes, nor ... of Shakespeare. ... The story of Spanish is the story of its various pasts but also of its intriguing futures. And one of those futures, I think, is being shaped right now around us. The result might be an affront to Quevedo and Borges, a bastardized yet authentic version of the same language of Columbus – who by the way didn't know how to write and spoke a terrible Spanish.”

5 The full text quoted by N’Gom (2000:3) reads: “La Hispanidad de ahora mismo no es una propuesta de vuelta a las brumas de nuestra niñez, tiempo en que fuimos los apéndices de aquel ‘imperio’ otoñal de selvas tropicales y montañas nevadas. La Hispanidad de ahora mismo es un engranaje a través del cual los países y pueblos de esta estirpe común potenciaremos nuestros valores específicos en el mundo, nos ayudaremos mutuamente a salir de las dificultades particulares y nos sabremos siempre unidos a través de la lengua, de la cultura y de ciertos valores humanísticos, sin que ninguno pueda sertirse desamparado por orfandad.”
References
N’Gom, M’Bare. 2000. The missing link: African Hispanism at the dawn of the millennium. Unpublished paper presented in the 10th Distinguished Lecturer Series, Department of Spanish and Portuguese (February), Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ.
Example A: Texts in Cocoliche "Macaronic, Italianized Spanish of Buenos Aires"

Excerpt 1 from Los políticos, a farce by Nemesio Trejo (1907), in Cotton and Sharp, 1988:

Robategli: Perdonate, mio caro: ¿Voi siete de la parroquia?
Prudencio: No, señor, soy Prudencio García.
R: Ma estare de los nostros, corre...corre...
P: Yo no corro.
R: Correligionario.
P: Ah, sí. (Aparte.) Este también es político.

Excerpt 2 from a Buenos Aires newspaper of the late 1970s, in Cotton and Sharp:
"Credo que a la próxima doménica cuesti miyonari ... van a saber coánta son coatro, credo ...
"E ostede, los hinchaforro (entusiastas) que se la dan de vivos y palman (aplauden) todos los domingos, ostede van a saber coántos son once tigres inocaos (enojados) de adeverras..."
Yo estoy trabajando de guachiman de noche y mi bos es muy bueno pero tengo que manejar un güinche y chequearle el agua a un tanque y esto es un trabajo bien tofe. Mi mujer como siempre toqueando todo el tiempo y cuando me fastidia mucho la mando para el cho, pero por lo demás oqué. Yo estoy supuesto a trabajar los domingos pero si vienes nos vamos a la barra un rato. Bueno, viejo, solón."