

Introduction

¿Cómo se dice? This is a query heard hundreds, perhaps thousands of times over the career of a Spanish instructor. If the word being sought is a universally employed one, like ‘house’ or ‘dog’ or ‘bread,’ the task of replying is straightforward. What should the answer be, however, if it varies according to regional dialect and thus can have more than one, often several, iterations? This can occur particularly when the topic is food. If a student wants to know *cómo se dice* ‘popcorn,’ do we respond with the default term *palomitas*, which is used throughout most of Spain, Mexico, and Central America, though not to the absolute exclusion of other words? Or, do we offer up *cotufas*, the most common version in Venezuela, or Cuba’s *rositas*, or Colombia’s *crispetas*, or Ecuador’s *canguil*? What about a variant based on an indigenous tongue, such as Paraguay’s Guaraní-derived *pororó*? In Argentina, the most common form is *pochoclo*, which combines the Guaraní term with *choclo*, the Quechuan name for ‘corn.’ The choice of which word to use may well depend on the background of the instructor, or perhaps on any textbooks or dictionaries utilized in the class. For example, among a list of food items in *Nexos* (Long et al. 2016), an introductory Spanish grammar text, the only word given for ‘pea’ is *guisante*, the most common term in Spain. This modest green legume, however, goes by a variety of names, including *chicharo* in Mexico, *arveja* in Argentina, and, in many Central American and Caribbean countries, a Hispanicized version of the French *petit pois*: *petipúa* or *petipoa*. Some words have so many variations that textbooks may understandably avoid an attempt to list them all, opting instead to feature items with only one or two universally accepted equivalents, such as ‘carrot’ *zanahoria*, ‘lettuce’ *lechuga*, ‘apple’ *manzana*, ‘orange’ *naranja*, ‘grape’ *uva*, or peach *durazno/melocotón*.

It is important to note here that the words considered in this book, like the examples in the previous paragraph, are not variants of other words due to a difference of register. They are not the result of subgroup jargon. They are not informal. They are not colloquial. They are not slang. The class of words explored, rather, are those akin to the multiplicity of formal names described above for ‘popcorn,’ an item not denoted in Spanish by one, universal term. It is for this reason that a study of this type of lexical variation depends much more

2 Introduction

on geography than social factors. If one is studying phonological traits, such as intervocalic /d/ elision, or morphosyntactic characteristics such as *voseo* vs. *tuteo* usage in regions where both exist, or even the type of slang vocabulary already mentioned, the consideration of social variables such as age, gender, educational attainment, and class are crucial, as they can lead to significant levels of variation. If, however, we consider formal terms to denote the ‘drinking straw,’ one can observe that Mexicans use *popote* almost universally, from lower-class young men to well-to-do older women, as is the case with Guatemalans’ *pajilla*, Panamanians’ *carrizo*, and Puerto Ricans’ *sorbeto*. It is for this reason that the social factors mentioned have not largely been considered in terms of either the makeup of the survey participants in each country or in the analysis of the resulting data.¹ In the few cases when informants explained, of their own volition, that a certain word is now only used mostly by older speakers, or among the lower classes, or as a low-register alternative to a more formal word, these exceptions have been noted but are merely peripheral to the larger question of dialectal variation based on geography.

However, even when one accounts only for geographical considerations, there exists no one agreed-upon way to divide the Spanish-speaking world for dialectal analysis. On the eastern side of the Atlantic, Pharies (2007) proposes three general dialects: north-central Spain, Andalusia, and the Canary Islands (190–202). In the Americas, he suggests four such areas: the River Plate region, the Andean countries, the greater Caribbean, and Mexico and the southeastern United States (211). While some linguists for certain traits incorporate Paraguay into a greater River Plate region, Pharies does not, leaving this country unaccounted for altogether. His delineation also excludes El Salvador, a Central American nation without a Caribbean coastline. Hualde et al. (2010), while treating the Spanish of mainland Spain and the Canary Islands essentially the same as does Pharies, apportion the American domains into a more comprehensive and representative set of seven dialect zones: a *porteño* region, including not only Argentina but also Uruguay; Paraguay; Chile; the remainder of the Andean nations; Central America; the Caribbean; and Mexico (407). In his book *Latin American Spanish* (1994), Lipski affords each of the American nations where the language is dominant its own chapter, a treatment akin to classifying each country as its own variety, though he does not fail to account for common traits across borders suggestive of larger

¹ In order to obtain survey responses, the author contacted acquaintances in several countries to request their collaboration, as well as that of any interested friends or family, via an online tool. He also invited peers and their students in academic institutions to participate. These factors – as well as the technical ability needed to complete the survey, which is indicative of certain levels of literacy and cultural sophistication – point to a general academic level among the informants that ranges from having finished high school to completing graduate work, all of which would tend to correlate to at least a middle-class average.

dialectal areas. Such a country-by-country assessment can be particularly advantageous in the lexical realm, as vocabulary is often more apt to be confined within the borders of a single country than phonological or morpho-syntactic characteristics. For instance, while Argentina and Uruguay are nearly invariably discussed together regarding the use of *zeísmo/feísmo* and the predominance of *voseo* over *tuteo*, there are several lexemes, often for common objects, which constitute cases of virtual mutual exclusivity between the two countries, as can be seen in many of the entries in this book. This situation, however, in no way precludes a more comprehensive treatment of terms in the narrative section, which, whenever appropriate, takes into account obvious larger dialectal regions of lexical similarity.

Transitioning from the dialectal zones by which the use of Spanish vocabulary may be evaluated to the manner in which these words came to form part of the language in the first place, Pharies (2007) notes that the lexical inventory in question is broadly comprised of three categories of words: (1) popular words (*palabras patrimoniales*) inherited in uninterrupted fashion from Vulgar Latin, (2) new words created within the language itself through processes such as derivation, and (3) loanwords from other languages (not excluding learned words, or *cultismos*, taken from Classical Latin), some which of themselves can in time undergo the processes of new-word creation inherent in the second category (167). Borrowings in Spanish are accounted for in different ways depending on the publication. A common practice has been to list these loanwords based on the language of provenance, the individual terms often then being arranged in alphabetical order. This method is employed by Penny (2002) in discussing the history of the Spanish language. Dworkin (2012), stressing the importance of contact in borrowing, refined this method by ordering the discussion of these source languages according to the general chronological order in which they exercised their influence on the Spanish lexicon. While these approaches are valid and have served the purposes of their authors, a different system is required for the current book, which is not only chiefly dialectal in nature but which – as per the first and second of Pharies' points – also includes both popular words and internally produced neologisms. Although source languages and periods of entry into Spanish are addressed for each word when available, this information plays a supporting role to the main thrust of each entry, which is based on geographical considerations in ways both diachronic and, in the final analysis, synchronic.

To facilitate discussion of the words in this book, each item to which they relate is divided into one of four themes, each of which constitutes a chapter. As food-related vocabulary arguably shows the greatest variation in Spanish, it makes up Chapter 1. However, the variability displayed in connection with food items also occurs to a significant extent in words used for articles of clothing (Chapter 2), for motor vehicles (Chapter 3), and, finally, for a wide

4 Introduction

array of miscellaneous items (Chapter 4). While the vocabulary explored in the latter chapter represents but a minuscule tip of the enormous iceberg that is the totality of the Spanish lexicon, the words addressed in the previous three chapters represent a non-negligible percentage of the possibilities in each respective category. There are, after all, only so many things one can eat, wear, or drive.

Although it must be acknowledged that there exist various word atlas projects that seek to identify dialectal terms in the Spanish-speaking world, and which in some instances contain information similar to that found in this book, by definition these studies are limited to a single country or region, and most fail to gauge the relative frequency of competing synonyms within these areas. Others are so ambitious, covering objects and concepts both common and obscure, that many remain long-running efforts that are either yet to be published or whose results are disseminated piecemeal and often narrowly. Also, as the current work has been assembled as a language-wide lexical reference, more broadly based dictionaries must also form a part of the discussion on what might yet be lacking in works of this type. While the Real Academia Española has long maintained and updated its *Diccionario de la Lengua Española* (DLE) – also known as the DRAE – it has only relatively recently begun to make progress on a new dictionary whose goal, when completed, is to rival, or at least resemble, what is widely considered the greatest lexicographical work in history, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED). The DLE lacks some of the most salient features of the OED, principal among them copious amounts of original examples and first known years of usage for each word. While the *Nuevo diccionario histórico del español* (NDHE) aims to replicate these features, the number of finished entries is still most easily counted in the hundreds or perhaps thousands, not tens of thousands, or hundreds of thousands.

Some fifty years were required to finish the first A–Z edition of the OED, published nearly a century ago, and while the tools made available by modern computer science will surely facilitate much of the work that will go into the NDHE, its completion, even barring the types of setbacks that have plagued this and other efforts toward a new dictionary in the past, is still surely decades away. Furthermore, even compared to a dictionary the likes of an OED or future NDHE, the present volume contains elements that make it unique. In short, it offers both less and more than other works of reference. One of its strengths, somewhat paradoxically, is precisely the relatively modest number of Spanish words – just over 500 – that it analyzes due to its targeted focus, allowing each lexeme to be richly explored and explained. It is rare for a person to set out to read a dictionary cover to cover, whereas this book has been crafted for precisely that purpose, an element both appealing and necessary in a work whose original and main intent is as a textbook. Additionally, while the OED

and DLE often note the geographical uses and limitations of words, the current tome places these considerations in much greater context, tracing the extension of a term in relation to competing terms across countries and regions, and, when known, revealing how such conditions have changed over time.² Particularly noteworthy cases have been illustrated with maps denoting the relevant isoglosses of such words.

A final note regards the overall composition of this book, one that again relates to its distinctive nature as a work of reference. While each Spanish term, as well as its English equivalents, may be looked up in alphabetical order in the corresponding indices, the main text of this volume does not read like a dictionary, glossary, or atlas. Not only are the items organized by category and according to the relative quantity of corresponding Spanish terms, but many entries feature brief historio-linguistic treatises designed to be informative as well as inviting, crafted to offer relief from the tedium related to works comprised principally of word lists. In numerous cases these narratives are indispensable in chronicling the emergence and distribution of the lexemes themselves; the story of an object and the words created to denote it can be so intricately linked as to be essentially inseparable. Furthermore, as this book is written in English, advantage is taken of this fact to provide the etymologies of the English terms for the items addressed in much the same way that they are given for their considerably more numerous Spanish counterparts.

² The Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española, which includes both the Real Academia Española and the language academies of more than twenty other nations in the Spanish-speaking world, publishes the *Diccionario de americanismos* (DAMER). This work often includes dialectal terms in Spanish that are not found in the DLE and has also been consulted in the writing of this book.