

“Accented” Latinx Textese

Bilingual Scriptural Economies and Digital Literacies

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- Sara: Que le paso
 Mami: Ya tiene tiempo dice q se durmio con el brazo colgando y le duele
 Mami: Y para q no este llorando le dije q pasaremos para q lo sobaran
- Sara: What happened to him
 Mami: It's been a while [he] says that he slept with his arm hanging off the side of the bed and it hurts
 Mami: And so he won't cry about it I told him that we could stop by for a massage [from a natural healer]¹

The digital exchange above is one of the many text message conversations my Spanish language–dominant Mexican immigrant mother (Mami) has with me. My mother's use of digital abbreviations, hyperbole, and cultural medical preference are the focus of this chapter. Specifically, I engage with how intergenerational Latinx communities represent Spanish, Spanglish, and Spanish Accented English (SAE) when communicating via short message service (SMS), or texting. I argue that their digital exchanges are not only clever, and at times humorous for some Spanish-English bilingual speakers, but, most importantly, that this form of what I call “accented” Latinx textese is an example of a bilingual scriptural economy.² A bilingual scriptural economy fosters a bilingual digital literacy that is diverse, innovative, and multigenerational. The content of the text messages is not central to the analysis of a bilingual scriptural economy; rather, it is about what the “accented” digital language signifies in its *visual* transformation.

I encase the word *accented* in quotation marks because “accents” are relational, live in the imaginary, and are only attached to certain people, thus linking physical speaking bodies to complex power structures.³ I understand that the visual emphasis (“ ”) marks “accents” even more, but, because of the nature of interdisciplinary research, I want to constantly remind readers that “accents” are

situational; we all have them and communicate in “accented” identities. Because Latinx communities are perceived and represented in English-language U.S. media as linguistically deficient, this chapter calls attention to a digital textual space where Latinx media users have agency in how they represent and construct their “accented” identity.⁴ Mainstream media representations tend to depict Latinas and Latinos as sexualized, laboring, or criminalized objects.⁵ When they are not depicted as social burdens, Latinx bodies and cultures are viewed as either sites of pleasure (in the case of women’s sexuality and holidays like Cinco de Mayo) or sites of consumption (as in the buying power of the Latino market) rather than as innovative contributors to the United States’ cultural fabric.⁶ Latinx, and specifically Mexican, communities’ “desires for recognition, to make a political impact, and to embody cultural or economic change encounter opposition from long-standing [English-speaking] citizens.”⁷ Latinx people confront hostility from English-speaking U.S. citizens because, as Shilpa Davé argues, their racialized “accents” exclude them from the American Dream, or, as Rosina Lozano argues, speakers of “nondominant languages[s] challenge citizens’ understanding of their own nationalism.”⁸ Additionally, arguments about “the digital divide” often exclude Latinx participation as nonexistent, but research shows that Latinx communities do engage with media.

My focus on Latinx media practices centers the important creative contributions that Latinx communities make in digital spheres, specifically through the scriptural forms in which they represent their “accented” voices. Theories of language politics and media representations concerning Latinx populations in the United States are relevant in order to understand the social and political impact of texting, the multigenerational “accented” linguistic exchanges between bilingual Latinx people, and the significance of a bilingual scriptural economy. A quantitative approach was utilized to gather one hundred text messages and social media discourses about texting among Latinx communities, for example via the hashtag “Hispanic Parent Texting.” A qualitative analysis of the social media posts revealed three forms of textese communication: shorthand and abbreviations, Spanglish, and Spanish Accented English (SAE). My success in using social media as a research site to find posts about SMS shows that Latinx texters are engaged with not only one form of media communication (texting) but two (social media), and it also shows that Latinx people are not only having private digital conversations but are simultaneously creating public digital discussions and communities about multigenerational language politics. Texting with “accents” and posting about it creates a linguistic capital that circulates digitally and provides stigmatized linguistic communities new spaces of scriptural belonging.⁹ Analyzing the language of texters, otherwise known as textese, provides examples of how people type themselves into being.¹⁰ Accented Latinx textese is a bilingual scriptural economy of everyday tactics of digital place making, solidarity, and multigenerational survival.¹¹

LATINX COMMUNITIES AND THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

A 2014 study found that 87 percent of Hispanic populations use their phones for texting.¹² Texting is a linguistic practice as well as a social action that shares similarities with how linguistic "accents" function. Texting and speaking share similar qualities because both practices are forms of communicating. Linguistic "accents" are personal and attached to social and geographical settings, as is the textese of people who communicate via SMS.

"Accents" are very personal, yet they also link speakers to larger speech, physical, and digital communities.¹³ Initially, research on the digital divide was concerned with making physical resources available to various populations rather than with issues of literacy, community, social resources, or language.¹⁴ Mark Warschauer calls for understanding digital access through such a literacy lens instead of determining the divide in terms of technological possession. Patricia Baquedano-López argues that the power of social institutions to shape what is understood as literacy contributes to misguided interpretations of people's potential.¹⁵ Literacy should not be measured by someone's ability to read and write through formal education; literacy is instead about enacting a social practice by "having mastery over the processes by means of which culturally significant information is coded."¹⁶ Literacy, understood through a wider lens that takes into account the various sociocultural, political, and historical skills of diverse people, is not narrowly about obtaining formal education but rather about attaining social power.¹⁷ The invention of social media and new devices to navigate digital spaces provides all users with new literacies and forms of self-expression.¹⁸ Texting in particular is a semiotic process that requires not only the skill to write, but also the capacity to use a small keyboard and screen.¹⁹ Understanding the digital linguistic practices of Latinx communities as a form of literacy, therefore, values bilingual practices that Latinx communities engage within digital spaces, including, for my purposes here, the text messaging through which Latinx communities communicate.

Bilingual texters and their linguistic practices are relevant in understanding the importance of texting with an "accent." Bilingual texters' abilities to understand various forms of "accents" in texting garner linguistic communities scriptural power and showcase their diverse mediated literacy practices. Texting, in any language, is understood as part of youth culture across all racial and ethnic demographics.²⁰ There are some academic studies on the inventiveness and circulation of teenagers' digital English-language choices.²¹ Existing research on Latinx bilingual texters suggests there is no academic interest so far in the texting practices of these communities. In studies on texting, none of the research centers bilingual multigenerational familial texting practices or analyze the linguistic "accents" used in digital communication. The ability to write down and keep track of one's language showcases not only one's literacy but also one's scriptural power.

BILINGUAL SCRIPTURAL ECONOMY

Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* centers the idea that people are not passive consumers but rather can actively change their environments through everyday actions and choices.²² De Certeau refers to the everyday actions that people engage with to challenge authority as "tactics." Of particular relevance to this chapter are the everyday uses of language that de Certeau calls the "scriptural economy." De Certeau argues that people in power gain control and institutionalize rules for "proper" forms of writing (as well as reading and speaking), thereby granting institutions scriptural power in order to control and maintain fixity. As a central practice of daily life, writing thereby captures and homogenizes voices in print even though these voices are unique in their diversity. There is power in implementing the "proper" forms of writing, and in learning how to write "properly," but there is also power in the ability to change the "proper" forms of writing. Because people in the United States have been colonized to speak English, it does not mean that people cannot symbolically fight back in the same language by reinventing and redefining words. As de Certeau states,

"It is a matter of *exhausting* the meaning of words, of playing with them until one has done violence to their most secret attributes, and pronounced at last the total divorce between the term and the expressive content that we usually give it." Henceforth, the important thing is neither *what is said* (a content), nor the *saying* itself (an act), but rather the *transformation*, and the invention of still unsuspected mechanisms that will allow us to multiply the transformations.²³

This is why de Certeau encourages language play, creativity, and the shift in meanings of words. These everyday tactics of active consumers challenge the status quo. There is value in the written representation of language, which guarantees a scriptural power in making history and can change depending on who has access to the means of recording language or to recorded language itself. The playfulness and creativity of "accented" Latinx textese is made evident in the diversity of digital self-expression. The "accented" language play that circulates privately, in texting, and publicly offers a familial and communal digital record of linguistic creativity once it is posted online.

The circulation of the bilingual scriptural economy provides the ability to symbolically "talk" back to mainstream expectations and linguistic stereotypes of Latinx communities.

For some Latinx people living in the United States, Spanish and English continue to linguistically colonize their voices and structure their daily life.²⁴ Sociolinguistic research reminds us that traditional speakers of Spanish (Latinx communities) in the United States are seen as racialized speakers.²⁵ A bilingual scriptural economy is not only the textese used in digital communication and its visual transformation

of language, but also the permission to express oneself bilingually, to carve out diverse digital spaces, and to text oneself into being.

LATINX LANGUAGE POLITICS

To recognize the importance of a Latinx digital "accent," it is necessary to understand how Latinx communities are represented in media. Spanish- and English-language media outlets contribute to the classed and racialized perceptions of the Spanish language by showing narrow representations of Spanish-English speakers and creating linguistic hierarchies in favor of standardized English. In the United States, Spanish is a colonial, indigenous, and immigrant language that went from a language of governance (1848–1902) to a language of "foreignness."²⁶ Even with the current large number of Spanish speakers in the United States, "Spanish maintains a racialized, classed, and 'second-tier' status within the US imaginary."²⁷ Discourses about making English the official language of the country, immigration, and bilingual education always center the Spanish language and Latinx people, even though there are a diversity of languages and immigrants in the United States.²⁸ Public opinion concerning Spanish has been made obvious by the termination of bilingual education, the removal of teachers because of "heavy accents," and bans on Spanish in workplaces.²⁹ The legislative and institutional regulations to control accented sound is not about the inflected speech but about catering to white listening ears.³⁰

Bilingual Spanish-English speakers in the United States face two standardized linguistic systems (English and Spanish) that claim notions of "correctness, the importance of authority, the relevance of prestige, and the idea of legitimacy."³¹ English established itself as the language of the country (although not legally), and by default Spanish was converted to "foreign." But, even within Spanish media circles, some Spanishes seem more "foreign" and less accepted. As Manuel G. Avilés-Santiago and Jillian M. Báez argue, one of the historically largest Spanish-language television outlets, Univision, is invested in projecting and protecting a standardized "generic" Spanish known as "Walter Cronkite Spanish."³² The circulation of this "standardized" Spanish excludes speech patterns of diverse Spanishes, like those spoken by Caribbean and working-class Latinx people.³³ Because Spanish is racialized and classed, when immigrants arrive in the United States, not only do media outlets in their language isolate them (by producing one type of linguistic variety), but immigrants also work against a larger English-language media market that knows very little of traditional Spanish-speaking communities in the United States. As Zentella argues,

The linguistic (in)security that immigrants bring from Latin America is exacerbated by repeated critiques of what and how they speak in the USA, contributing to the

“chiquita-fication,” i.e., the diminishment and disparagement, of Latina/o languages and identities (Zentella 1993). Damaging stereotypes include (1) a Spanish accent in English is laughable, (2) Latina/o bilinguals are incompetent in both English and Spanish, and (3) English monolinguals are inherently superior to Spanish monolinguals.³⁴

Bilingual Latinx communities thus speak against classed and racialized Spanish- and English-language ideologies. “Accented” Latinx textese is an example of digital self-expression that challenges these two linguistic “authorities” in media.

There are some minor differences when discussing the linguistic representations of multigenerational Latinx people in the United States, yet both first- and second-generation Latinx people ultimately come to represent linguistic threats. First-generation Latinx people (those born outside the United States who migrate as adults) are understood by mainstream English-language media as speaking only Spanish, refusing to learn how to speak English, or speaking English with “heavy” Spanish “accents.”³⁵ This narrow form of thinking about first-generation Latinx immigrants not only erases the fluency of some first-generation immigrants in Indigenous languages but also positions them as linguistic threats because of their perceived status as “forever foreigners” who either refuse to speak English or speak Spanish Accented English (SAE).³⁶ Various legislation encourages immigrants and their children to learn and speak English because the belief that immigrants refuse to learn English is rampant.³⁷ Latinx characters on television are represented more often than not with linguistic “accents,” hinting to viewers that English is their second language; this marks them as foreigners regardless of their legal status and suggests that they are unintelligent.³⁸ Even though some first-generation immigrants come to the United States with professional degrees and know how to speak English, they are not seen as bilingual like their U.S.-born children.

Second-generation Latinx communities are traditionally perceived as bilingual Spanish-English speakers. In media representations their English is heard with a Spanish “accent”—an aural signal to viewers that they have no control of either language.³⁹ Bilingual Latinx speakers are also seen as linguistic threats, but for different reasons than their presumed first-generation immigrant parents. Second-generation Latinx people are heard and seen as linguistic threats because of their knowledge of Spanish and English and their use of Spanglish (a mixture of Spanish and English), yet their knowledge of Spanish and English is perceived as “a-lingual” because they are represented as not knowing either language.⁴⁰ Therefore creating and mixing words (Spanglish) from a standardized perspective is seen not as a creative form of language play but instead as a deficiency in two languages.

There are other popular misunderstandings about what it means to be bilingual. It is commonly assumed that bilingualism means fluency in both languages (speaking, writing, and understanding); in reality, bilingualism is a spectrum of fluency that involves varying proficiencies in speaking, writing, and understanding a second language. In mainstream media representations of Latinx people, bilingualism is not celebrated; instead, viewers are encouraged to laugh at or fear

the way bilingual speakers speak English.⁴¹ Conservative and restrictive definitions of being bilingual make bilingual speakers feel like they cannot speak English or Spanish “correctly” in addition to intra-Latinx policing of Spanish-language fluency. A common skill of bilingual speakers that does not get enough media representation is language brokering. Language brokering, which occurs when bilingual people translate for others (usually their parents), requires complex cognitive, cultural, and linguistic skills.⁴² Bilingual speakers develop a listening ear to comprehend not only their parents’ voices, but also, as some SMS messages show, their parents’ texts.⁴³

Both Latinx generations in the United States are bilingual, yet only second-generation Latinx people are considered bilingual. Both generations work against linguistic stereotypes that do not celebrate their ability to live in two languages and cultures. Living languages are in flux and change over time because every day new speakers are born who continue to use, circulate, and play with different linguistic forms.⁴⁴ The media’s message, however, is obvious: “Latinas/os, especially poor youth or black immigrants, enjoy little linguistic capital whether they speak Spanish or English, and mixing languages is particularly devalued. But this message conflicts with the comfort, trust, solidarity, and affection generated by the sounds and styles of family and community.”⁴⁵ The “styles of family and community” Zentella mentions are evident in digital exchanges between multigenerational bilingual Latinx texters. Such exchanges embrace linguistic “accents” and invoke digital everyday tactics of solidarity, place making, and survival.⁴⁶

APPROACHING ACCENTED TEXTESE

Examples of multigenerational digital communication are found on users’ public social media accounts. A typical social media post consists of a screen grab of a SMS conversation and the social media user commenting on their conversation with a family member, frequently a parent. This research began in 2016, and by 2020 I had collected one hundred posts from social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. All examples are from public accounts, and some were found by searching for certain hashtags, including “Hispanic Parent Texting,” for example. Table 4.1 organizes one hundred social media posts and summarizes the data into six textese trends.

After conducting an open coding qualitative method of analysis, six textese trends were found: shorthand/abbreviations, Spanglish, Spanish Accented English (SAE), sounds, discourse about texting, and multiple trends.⁴⁷ I discuss the first three of these styles of accented textese in detail below. Textese labeled “sounds” are Spanish forms of laughing, “jajaja,” instead of laughing in English that is represented “hahaha.” “Discourse about texting” were posts in which users did not share a screen grab of the text message conversation but instead made comments about texting behaviors. For example, some discourses about accented textese are,

TABLE 4.1 Frequency of the use of accented textese trends in 100 texts posted on social media			
Textese Trend	Frequency	Textese Trend	Frequency
Shorthand/Abbreviations	13	Sounds	2
Code-switching/Spanglish	35	Discourse about texting	11
Spanish Accented English	59	Multiple Trends	18

TABLE 4.2 Examples of common abbreviations and shorthand used in a bilingual scriptural economy between multigenerational Latinx people			
#	Textese	Spanish Meaning	English Translation
1.	q k ke eske	qué	what, that, than
2.	d	de	of, from, by, with, at
3.	x	por	by, for, through, at
4.	alv	a la verga	fuck you/yourself, go to hell
5.	qvo qvo le	qué hubo	hello, what's going on
6.	mc	muy cute	very cute
7.	tqm	te quiero mucho	I love you very much

“I realize I’m horrible at reading #Spanglish texts. I can speak it but don’t text me. LOL #BadMexican,” and “Not only is hispanic parent culture adding an unnecessary amount of emojis in every text message, it’s also adding an excessive amount of hashtags when they post.”⁴⁸ “Multiple trends” refers to SMS conversations that use two or more of the listed communication styles in table 4.1. Research was not conducted to see if parents post or comment on their children’s accented textese or the use of emojis in texting. All of the digital forms of communication in table 4.1 are examples of different forms of digital literacy and bilingual scriptural economies.

Aesthetics of Bilingual Textese: Shorthand and Abbreviations

One common form of digital communication across all languages is the use of abbreviations and shorthand. This form of digital communication used in SMS and online is convenient because it allows users to send messages at a faster pace. It is associated with the digital practices of young people, and it made texting faster when the only option was “multitap.”⁴⁹ Even though most phones have a QWERTY keyboard and users are not multitapping or using T9 practices, some forms of early texting practices are still in use.⁵⁰ Table 4.2 summarizes some common examples of Spanish transformed into textese.

The textese examples provided are a small portion of a diverse bilingual Latinx scriptural economy. The data includes a variety of representations of the word “qué,” as shown in the first example in table 4.2. The letters “q,” “k,” and “ke” are used as shorthand for the Spanish word “qué.” Such scriptural representations of

"qué" function not so much as linguistic "accents" or an inflection while texting but more as aesthetic "accents." The shorthand way of representing "qué" with "q," for example, is a decoration and stands out in the visual flow of texting. The scriptural creation of the word "eske" (which is usually spoken and, if written, it is represented as "es que") is vernacular Spanish that would not appear in formal Spanish-language spaces and is a linguistic "accent" that racializes and classes texters. The verbalization of "es qué" in everyday speech is a signifier that represents working-class speech styles. People are stereotyped as unintelligent when they utter this word, and "es qué" is portrayed as a linguistic trait of Indigenous forms of Spanish usage in Mexico. The creation of "eske" and its use in textese is not only a creative innovation of SMS, but it also provides a scriptural example of how to represent a word only used orally. Without judgment, the circulated "accent" among Latinx parents and their children is a digital tactic of solidarity. The exchange among multigenerational Latinx bilinguals shows that the use of shorthand and abbreviations is not only part of youth texting practices since the trends listed in table 4.2 were used by both Latinx parents and their children.

Another textese word in my data that exists mainly in the realm of the oral comes from a different linguistic tradition: "Qvo" and "qvo le" (example 5 in table 4.2) are examples of Chicano Spanish—"accented" textese and are not considered Spanglish words. The expanded version of the Spanish word is "qué hubo," which means "hello, what's going on," but when used in Chicano Spanish, Mexican working-class speech styles, and U.S. Southwest Calo greetings it is pronounced "quihúbole."⁵¹ The use of Chicano Spanish and English is stigmatized: it often gets confused with Spanish Accented English (SAE, discussed later on) and is not seen as an official ethnic dialect of English.⁵² Popular perceptions categorize Chicano English as "mispronunciations" by Spanish speakers of English words.⁵³ To be able to circulate words that are rarely textually represented and used in verbal communication makes SMS exchanges in Chicano Spanish significant because users can express their accented identities in digital spaces without the surveillance of standardized forms of Spanish and English speech. For bilingual Latinx users who are not formally taught to represent words that exist primarily in oral communication, such textese is a powerful means of cultivating a digital scriptural economy of self-expression and linguistic pride. The various forms of "quihúbole" and "qué" enact digital belonging and demonstrate the boundless rules of texting with an "accent."

Another example of linguistic creativity represented in "accented" textese is example 3 in table 4.2. The "x" used as shorthand for the Spanish word "por" is used in similar ways that "x" is used in English SMS to represent "times." "Por" is verbalized and represents the "x" in multiplication problems. For example, 2×2 in Spanish is verbalized as "dos por dos" (two times two). An example of how to use this shorthand in "accented" textese is "x donde vamos," which in English means "where are we going" or "the way we are going." Similar English-language texting styles for the word "times" represented as "x" are found in the digital linguistic

practices of Latinx bilinguals in Spanish. These shorthand examples change the visual flow of the text message by highlighting small breaks between words and draw the eye to the shortened word. In this case some of the abbreviations work not only as linguistic “accents” but as aesthetic accents as well. Both Latinx children and their parents utilize shorthand and abbreviations in SMS communication, providing textual examples of bilingual familial communication and digital place making.

Mixing Textese Linguistic Codes: Spanglish

There are thirty-five examples of code-switching between Spanish and English in the collected SMS exchanges, and all are diverse in their communication styles. In true bilingual fashion there are a variety of forms of “accented” self-expression. Latinx bilingual texters named this style of digital communication Spanglish when they posted pictures of their SMS conversations online. “Spanglish cannot be reduced to static dictionary entries; it is a creative and rule-governed way of speaking bilingually that is generated by and reflects living in two cultures.”⁵⁴ Because there are different expressions of living in two cultures and because of the many levels of bilingual proficiency of Latinx people, switching between two languages occurred differently in every digital conversation I studied. Code-switching occurs in the same sentence (intrasentential) or in consecutive text messages where sentences were completely in English or Spanish (intersentential).⁵⁵ Also, Spanglish communication was not initiated solely by younger texters, but their parents (presumed to be first generation, depicted in mainstream English media as speaking only Spanish) also engaged in code-switching when they communicated with their children. Table 4.3 lists examples of Spanglish textese.

Example 1 in table 4.3, a text sent from a daughter to her mother, is a common form of speaking and texting in Spanglish. In English the text states, “I am coughing more.” The caption that accompanied the picture of the SMS exchange reads, “I always text my mom in spanglish bc I be forgetting the Spanish word for something,” followed by a pensive emoticon face.⁵⁶ The emoticon suggests a sense of melancholy about the sender’s inability to write text messages to her mother entirely in Spanish. The feeling of being inadequate is common among Latinx bilingual people who have experienced discourses of linguistic standardization. As Ramón Antonio Martínez argues, some bilingual speakers have deficit rationales “to explain their engagement in Spanglish, essentially attributing their code-switching to a lack of proficiency in one of the two languages.”⁵⁷ Far from a lack of linguistic proficiency, the aforementioned example demonstrates the clarity of intergenerational exchange among Latinx texters. The sender is able to communicate with her mother, who in turn understands that her daughter continues to feel ill, as the complete SMS conversation reveals. An interesting quality of intrasentential code-switching in texting is that the sender, the daughter, could have searched for the Spanish word “coughing” in order to complete the message in Spanish, but she did

TABLE 4.3 Examples of code-switching textese with the relationship between the sender and receiver

#	Textese	Sender/Receiver
1.	Estoy coughing mas	Daughter → Mother
2.	Mija Buena suerte tomorrow en tu escuela	Father → Daughter
3.	Haha nomas entre a ver k fregados posteabas lots of beagle pics	Brother → Sister

NOTE: Example 1 was posted by @MobPsychoo on Twitter; example 2 was posted by @Tahhhlia7 on Twitter; and example 3 was posted by @PlasticineStar on Twitter. All representations of the text messages are exact.

not. The use of her Spanglish “accent” to communicate is deliberate, even though she has some concerns about how she texts her mother.

A similar intrasentential code-switching style of communication occurs in example 2 in table 4.3. In this example, viewers are not aware of the sender’s relationship with Spanglish; instead, the receiver’s response is highlighted. In this particular digital exchange, a father sends a text to his daughter. The translated text states, “Good luck at school tomorrow sweetheart.” The reason for the father’s choice of code-switching for the word “tomorrow” is unknown, like the previous example where the texter admits forgetting certain words. The caption that accompanied the picture of the SMS exchange states, “Lol at the text my dad just sent me [. . .] #spanglish #lovemyoldman.” The information in the brackets are two emoticon faces that illustrate the daughter’s sentiments regarding her father’s communication style: a face with tears of joy and a smiling face with smiling eyes.⁵⁸ The humorous textese (lol) and icon (emoticon) does not belittle her father’s texting ability but instead expresses happiness and warmth. The affective qualities of Spanglish elicit positive reactions in the receiver and, in this case, underscores a familial connection. In these and other SMS exchanges, there are intentional choices made in the vocabulary chosen for the text. The father’s use of Spanglish demonstrates a valuable linguistic resource of the bilingual scriptural economy to communicate digitally that brings comfort to his daughter.

Finally, example 3, a digital exchange between brother and sister, shows similar forms of bilingual code-switching as well as the use of a Spanglish word. The translated English text reads, “Haha I logged on to see what the fuck you posted lots of beagle pics.” In the original Spanglish text, the sender uses “k,” which, as discussed earlier, is a shorthand representation of the word “qué”; “fregados” which is a working-class Mexican Spanish word and euphemism for “chingar” (fuck); and “posteabas,” meaning “you posted.” Because “to post” is a new verb, created because of social media, the word “posteabas” is an English word that is conjugated in Spanish, therefore creating a Spanglish word. As Zentella argues, “Latina/o bilinguals often blur the boundaries between Spanish and English in ways that reflect new ethnic and racial identities.” In this case, the new ethnic and racial identities are forms of linguistically representing accented identities via digital tools.⁵⁹ Latinx

bilingual texters create and carve out digital accented spaces by mixing words that combine their cultural and linguistic identity. The caption that accompanied the picture of the SMS exchange stated, “Text I just got from my brother. Can you tell he’s home sick on a Friday night? Also, spanglish is our default.” Spanglish is a common form of communication for these siblings. According to Martínez, one of the six conversational functions of code-switching is to joke or tease. This function is evident in the brother’s word choices to describe his sister’s social media activity (“fucking posting too many beagle pictures”).⁶⁰ The conversational aspects of Spanglish appear in “accented” textese. The combination of textese shorthand, textual representation of a colloquial word, code-switching, and a millennial Spanglish word shows the various ways Latinx bilinguals text in their linguistic “accents.”

All of the examples detailed above are representations of bilingual literacy because the use of the English words “coughing” and “tomorrow” and the phrase “lots of beagle pics” follows the grammatical structures of Spanish. All the texters in these examples know the order of parts of speech for both languages, signifying that code-switching is a reflection not of incompetence in one of the languages, but instead a mastery of both.⁶¹ The “accented” textese also represents different relationships with their identity by the way texters represent their “accent.” It is a complicated relationship that is humorous, sad, loving, and a normal form of communication for some.

Sounds and Re(spellings): Spanish Accented English

The last textese trend of Latinx bilingual texters, the use of Spanish Accented English (SAE), is only evident in the Latinx parents’ texts. More than half of the examples collected for this study contained SAE words. A visual SAE is English written with Spanish style phonetics, “or a visual vocabulary based on sound.”⁶² Some of the accented words in SMS exchanges do confuse some texters. As one person commented on Twitter, “I swear, trying to decipher a Hispanic parents text message is like the damn da Vinci code.”⁶³ According to Alexandra Jaffe, “Becoming literate is not just the acquisition of orthographic decoding skills, but also involves the development of a (culturally conditioned) graphic sensibility.”⁶⁴ At times, understanding the graphic sensibility of Latinx parents’ text might feel like a code, because readers must rely on their eyes to comprehend the messages instead of listening to the visual text. As Dolores Inés Casillas and I argue elsewhere, “Chicana/o readers rely much more on their listening ears than their eyes to understand how these accents are voiced in print. . . . [L]istening to accents operated as a popular form of literacy, one that registers the audible, racialized experiences of Spanish-speaking immigrants.”⁶⁵ SAE is therefore not the same as Spanglish or Chicano Spanish and appears even less scripturally. SAE is associated with English as a Second Language (ESL) and adult Latinx immigrant styles of speaking English. It has been ridiculed in mainstream representations and continues to be used to signal an un-American sound.⁶⁶ In Latinx digital popular culture,

TABLE 4.4 Spanish Accented English (SAE) words sent via text messages with English-language translations

#	Textese	English Translation
1.	aifon	iPhone
2.	barigar	bodyguard
3.	nais	nice
4.	orait	alright
5.	yaketh	jacket
6.	ray nao	right now
7.	plis	please
8.	goodnaig/good 9/ gud naigh	goodnight
9.	guajape	what happened
10.	homaigune	oh my goodness

users circulate humorous memes commenting on the visual transformation of English when their immigrant parents speak.⁶⁷ This style of humor is not meant to ridicule, but instead it expresses an intimate understanding of the struggles and resiliency that accompany those accented sounds. “Effectively ‘reading’ a visual accent does not privilege a bilingual speaker but rather an accented *listener*, one raised or surrounded by immigrant speakers. . . . For those of us with accented speakers in our families and communities, accents function as emotional markers; vocal or vernacular archives that trace an individual or family’s migration, travels and/or histories.”⁶⁸ In the SMS data collected, only Latinx parents used SAE. As in the previous textese examples, the data collected is diverse, and different words appear accented in the SMS. Table 4.4 lists some examples of SAE used in digital communication.

SAE, like Spanglish textese, is as diverse as Latinx bilingual speakers. A unique quality of this style of texting is that only Latinx parents appear to use this type of “accented” speech. SAE is not meant to follow conventional spellings. Instead, the English (re)spellings recognize the bilingual digital literacy involved in creating this bilingual scriptural economy. The visual representation of “accented” speech is innovative and challenges standardized forms of English. Because Spanish is spelled the way it sounds, Spanish-dominant speakers apply those same techniques when writing in English. In research on historical visual “accents,” mainstream media used this style of quoting Mexican film actor Lupe Vélez to exoticify, racialize, and infantilize her and Mexicans in general.⁶⁹ Some techniques journalists used when quoting SAE were using double vowels or consonants and omitting certain letters, for example representing “his” as “hees” and “very” as “ver.” Because it is Latinx people themselves (and not mainstream media sources) who participate in the bilingual scriptural economy, the “accented” text is not exaggerated, and

the purpose is not to ridicule. Interestingly, the (re)spellings of English words in SAE are similar to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) form of writing. Example 3 in IPA is represented as **nais**; example 6 **rait nau**; and example 7 **pliz**. The only word that reappeared and had various representations was “good-night” (example 8 in table 4.4). An innovative use of the number nine to substitute “night” functions as a shorthand example of SAE textese. The reappearance of the word “goodnight” is telling of the caring and intimate relationships Latinx parents have with their adult children. SAE is used as a form of a bilingual scriptural economy and literacy; however, occasionally there are misunderstandings. Figure 4.1, which shows a series of text messages exchanged by a daughter and her father, demonstrates both their misunderstanding and humorous relationship. The bilingual exchange begins with the contact information shown at the top of the image. In the contact information, the daughter has saved a picture of a red truck, the name “Papa” (which means “father”), and two emoticons of a potato and a male’s face. The use of a potato emoticon is an example of digital bilingual Latinx humor. In Spanish, “father” is spelled “Papá,” but without the accent mark over the letter “a” it spells “potato,” hence the inclusion of the emoticon in her father’s contact information. The daughter tells her father in Spanish that she is going to the office tomorrow (“Mañana voy a la oficina”), and her father answers with a series of emoticons (a man shrugging and man face-palming). He follows by asking in SAE, “Ned da maní,” which the daughter shows she does not understand by her use of “?”. Her father answers in Mock Spanish, “No comprende?” The father’s ability to change the conversation to SAE, followed by Mock Spanish, and ending with Spanish demonstrates his ability to code-switch and to make social and political commentary on the language politics of Latinx people.⁷⁰ “No comprende?” is a Mock Spanish phrase used by white monolingual speakers who are attempting to speak Spanish and wish to belittle Spanish-speaking people. The insult is used when monolingual speakers who believe they are speaking “Spanish” are offended by Spanish speakers who do not understand them; in Mock Spanish they ask, “You don’t understand?” thereby burdening the listener instead of learning Spanish themselves and asking “¿Me entiendies?” (Do you understand me?). The father uses Mock Spanish to make fun of his daughter for not understanding him. The use of humor here, however, is not to devalue; instead, he resignifies the meaning of “No comprende” to make fun of the way white monolingual speakers think they are speaking Spanish. The Mock Spanish used by the father is a survival tactic in the face of mainstream mockery.⁷¹ When the phrase “No comprende” is used in spoken communication, it is sometimes prefaced with “como dice el gringo,” meaning “like the white American man says.” It is an example of a working-class sense of humor that is used to laugh at the way some white monolingual speakers demand understanding in “Spanish.” The daughter says she understands (“Ya entendi”) that her father is asking her if she needs money. He ends the conversation



FIGURE 4.1. A text message conversation between a daughter (on the right) and her father (on the left).

with the visual representation of Spanish laughing (“jajaja”) and a saying, “ponte mosca.” The literal translation in English is “get fly” (the insect), but the meaning of the phrase in this context is to stay alert and pay attention. The code-switching and use of linguistic “accents” “are not always deficient engagements with desired (global) languages, nor are they necessarily remnants of local dialects; rather they

can be strategically used claims to particular life trajectories.”⁷² The father’s life trajectories are reflected in the distinct forms of how he communicates with his daughter via various “accents.” The use of his various identities are made evident by his conscious textese choices. The bilingual scriptural economy provides unique, innovative, and diverse forms of expressing a bilingual identity digitally and offers various options for changing the textual representation of words to reflect and cultivate the accented sounds of home and community.

CONCLUSION: PONTE MOSCA

“Accented” Latinx textese, as I have analyzed it, exemplifies just some of the diverse and playful language forms through which Latinx people communicate digitally via language play. Having public scriptural examples of words that have only oral and aural representations in daily communication among family members provides examples of how to belong in a digital age. More specificity in the bilingual scriptural economy is needed to add to the repertoire of forms particular ethnic groups use to communicate digitally, and to showcase the diversity of Latinx linguistic engagement in technology. The use and circulation of accented textese is an example of group identity in the face of the English-language mainstream media continuing to represent Latinx people as linguistically deficient and reducing linguistic varieties of Spanish in ways that isolate some Latinx people in their own language. There is communicative power in the scriptural transformation of the words, a power granted to various digital communities, and which this research claims for Latinx bilingual SMS users.⁷³ The ability to highlight one’s “accent” digitally challenges linguistic and technological hierarchies. The circulation of “accented” Latinx textese is a lively cornerstone of a bilingual scriptural economy that highlights users’ literacy, linguistic pride, and sounds of home.

NOTES

1. The translation is not a direct Spanish-to-English translation. The English-language version is loosely translated so readers can understand the context of the conversation.

2. I use the terms *Latina*, *Latino*, and *Latinx* in this chapter. *Latina* is used to refer to only women, *Latino* to only men, while *Latinx* is an umbrella term that refers to all genders. I have used the term *Hispanic* in some cases and not changed it to *Latinx*, especially if the term was used in the data collected by texts or in my source materials.

3. See Agha, *Language and Social Relations*; Hill, “Language, Race, and White Public Space”; Zentella, “Dime con quién hablas y te diré quién eres”; and Zentella, “Latina/o Languages and Identities.”

4. Zentella argues that Latina/o communities are treated as linguistically deficient; see “Dime con quién hablas y te diré quién eres.”

5. On Latinas and Latinos as sexual objects, see Beltrán, “The Hollywood Latina Body as Site of Social Struggle”; and Monila-Guzmán and Valdivia, “Brain, Brow, and Booty;” as objects of labor, see Chávez, “Ethnic Stereotypes”; and as criminal objects, see Santa Ana et al., “Druggies Drug Dealers Rapists and Killers.”

6. On burdens, see Santa Ana, *Brown Tide Rising*; on sites of pleasure, see Monila-Guzmán, *Dangerous Curves*; and on consumers, see Dávila, *Latinos, Inc.*

7. Lozano, *An American Language*, 11. Mexican people were considered "treaty citizens" because legally they were granted political citizenship via the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848. Their access to social citizenship, however, was not easily accepted by white English-speaking citizens because Mexicans were U.S. citizens who spoke Spanish.

8. See Davé, *Indian Accents*; and Lozano, *An American Language*, 10.

9. Or, as argued by Hillewaert in "Writing with an Accent," "The foregoing analysis of 'writing with accents' and the examples discussed push our thinking about virtual circulation of linguistic resources in several ways. . . . Rather, it argues that the resignification enabled through the digital contexts creates a space for the revaluation of stigmatized varieties" (209).

10. On textese, see Grace and Kemp, "Assessing the Written Language of Text Messages"; Drouin and Driver, "Texting, Textese and Literacy Abilities"; Kemp, "Texting vs. Txtng"; and Verheijen, "The Effects of Text Messaging and Instant Messaging on Literacy." For examples of texters texting themselves into being, see Deumert and Vold Lexander, "Texting Africa."

11. Hinojos and Casillas, "Don't Be Self-Conchas."

12. Mendus, "For Latinos, Cell Phones Are Everything."

13. I added digital communities. On links between "accents" and speech and physical communities, see Deumert and Vold Lexander, "Texting Africa."

14. Warschauer, *Technology and Social Inclusion*, 6.

15. Baqueando-López, "Literacy Practices across Learning Contexts."

16. Baqueando-López, "Literacy Practices across Learning Contexts," 245–68. See also De Castell and Luke, "Models of Literacy in North American Schools"; and Street, "The New Literacy Studies."

17. Gee, *Social Linguistics and Literacies*; Deumert and Vold Lexander, "Texting Africa"; Barton and Hamilton, *Local Literacies*.

18. Crystal, *Language and the Internet*.

19. Deumert and Vold Lexander, "Texting Africa."

20. See Crystal, *Language and the Internet*, for a full discussion of how youth use and change everyday language in an online setting.

21. International research chronicles various visual representations of British English dialects through SMS and differences of oral and written language representation in texting in the Spanish language from Spain, both claim creative forms of expression of youth cultures in monolingual settings. For British English linguistic diversity, see Wood, Plester, and Kemp, *Text Messaging and Literacy*. On texting in the Spanish language in Spain, see Alonso and Perea, "SMS." For teenagers' digital English-language choices, see Grace and Kemp, "Assessing the Written Language of Text Messages." There is some research on multilingual texters from various African countries that provides a relevant framework for understanding some practices of bilingual Latinx texters in the United States, most importantly on the topic of how texting is at times the only form for keeping track of and documenting local languages. For example, Deumert and Masinyana's research found that the visual representation of English and isiXhosa differed, meaning that English-isiXhosa bilingual texters engage in two different languages and two "non-overlapping sets of sociolinguistic norms"; see "Mobile Language Choices," 117–47. See also Deumert and Vold Lexander, "Texting Africa," who also analyze multilingual text messages and argue that there is an emotional commitment by the texter who uses African languages, that the use of African languages is a skillful linguistic performance, and that texting is the only space where local languages are documented.

22. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

23. De Certeau quotes Michel Sanouillet, *Duchamp du signe: écrits* (Flammarion: Paris, 1975), 16, in *The Practices of Everyday Life*, 152.

24. Zentella, "Dime con quién hablas y te diré quién eres."

25. Urciuoli, *Exposing Prejudice*; and for white public space, see Hill, "Language, Race, and White Public Space."

26. Macías, "Minority Languages in the United States, with a Focus on Spanish in California," 333–34; and Lozano, *An American Language*.

27. Scamman, "Spanish Speakers in the United States (Infographic)." Spanish continues to be seen as foreign, even though the United States has the second-highest concentration of Spanish speakers (roughly 53 million people) and is projected to have 138 million by 2050, making the United States the largest Spanish-speaking country. See also Casillas, Ferrada, and Hinojos, "The Accent on *Modern Family*," 65; Hill, "Language, Race, and White Public Space"; Urciuoli, *Exposing Prejudice*; Zentella, "Dime con quién hablas y te diré quién eres"; and Zentella, "Latina/o Languages and Identities."

28. Tse, "Why Don't They Learn English?," vii.

29. Hinojos and Casillas, "Don't Be Self-Conchas."

30. Hinojos and Casillas, "Don't Be Self-Conchas." Because the white listening ear drives the sonic color line (process of racialized sound), it is related to dominant listening practices that suppress and tune out people of color, and how dominant culture exerts pressure on individuals to listen to the sonic color line's norms. For specific information on the white listening ear, see Stoeber, *Sonic Color Line*.

31. Milroy, "The Ideology of Standard Language," 134.

32. "Walter Cronkite Spanish" is a middle-class Mexicanization of the Spanish language that television networks like Univision and market-driven research bases it on because 63 percent of Latinx people in the United States are of Mexican descent. See Avilés-Santiago and Báez, "Targeting Billennials"; Dávila, *Latinos, Inc.*; Rodríguez, *Making Latino News*; or *la norma culta* as stated by Zentella, "Spanish in New York."

33. Avilés-Santiago and Báez, "Targeting Billennials"; and Casillas, Ferrada, and Hinojos, "The Accent on *Modern Family*."

34. Zentella, "Dime con quién hablas y te diré quién eres," 32.

35. Tse, "Why Don't They Learn English?"; Fought, *Chicano English in Context*; and Casillas, Ferrada, and Hinojos, "The Accent on *Modern Family*."

36. Davé, *Indian Accents*; and Hinojos, "Lupe Vélez and Her Spicy Visual 'Accent' in English-Language Print Media."

37. In actuality, immigrants who arrive from non-English-speaking countries learn how to speak English well, especially the longer they live in the United States, debunking notions that adult immigrants refuse to learn how to speak English. See Tse, "Why Don't They Learn English?," 1.

38. Casillas, Ferrada, and Hinojos, "The Accent on *Modern Family*," 66; Bucholtz, *White Kids*; Giles and Marlow, "Theorizing Language Attitudes"; and Gluszek and Hansen, "Language Attitudes in the Americas."

39. Fought, *Chicano English in Context*.

40. Zentella, "Dime con quién hablas y te diré quién eres," 33. According to Tse, "Despite reports to the contrary, immigrant children have been very successful if we look at two important indicators: students' general level of English proficiency and their school achievement" ("Why Don't They Learn English?," 17).

41. Zentella, "Dime con quién hablas y te diré quién eres," 32; and Hinojos, "Lupe Vélez and Her Spicy Visual 'Accent' in English-Language Print Media."

42. On language brokering see, Faulstich Orellana, *Translating Childhoods*. Tse, in "Why Don't They Learn English?," mentions that children "who grow up in homes where a language other than English is spoken actually outperform monolingual English speakers once they themselves are fluent in English" (20).

43. For a discussion of bilinguals' listening practices of their immigrant Latinx parents, see Hinojos and Casillas, "Don't Be Self-Conchas."

44. Lozano, *An American Language*, 12.

45. Zentella, "Dime con quién hablas y te diré quién eres," 26.

46. Hinojos and Casillas, "Don't Be Self-Conchas."

47. Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*.

48. The comment about being a "#BadMexican" is meant to be humorous and shows that texting is about not only writing but also the ability to read and listen to the text in order to decipher its content.

49. Erickson, "A Brief History of Text Messaging." T9, or text on nine keys, is a predictive text technology that uses nine-key keypads to communicate on mobile devices. Users can create words with few keystrokes. For example, pressing the keys 4, 3, 5, 5, and 6 in T9 mode spells out "hello."

50. T9, or text on nine keys, is a predictive text technology that uses nine-key keypads to communicate on mobile devices. Users can create words with few keystrokes. For example, pressing the keys 4, 3, 5, 5, and 6 in T9 mode spells out "hello."

51. Minoves Myers, "Language and Style in 'POCHO.'"

52. Santa Ana and Bayley, "Chicano English: Phonology"; and Fought, *Chicano English*.

53. Santa Ana and Bayley, "Chicano English: Phonology."

54. Zentella, "Dime con quién hablas y te diré quién eres," 33.

55. Montes-Alcalá, "Attitudes towards Oral and Written Codeswitching in Spanish-English Bilingual Youths."

56. The phrase in this example begins and ends in Spanish, but it uses an English verb. This form of code-switching is called crutching. Crutching occurs when a bilingual speaker cannot continue in the first language but "can keep speaking by depending on a translated synonym as a stand-in." Zentella, *Growing Up Bilingual*, 198. For a Twitter example of a pensive face emoticon see, Emojipedia, "Pensive Face."

57. Martínez, "'Spanglish' as Literacy Tool."

58. For a Twitter example of a face with tears of joy emoticon, see Emojipedia, "Face with Tears of Joy"; and for a Twitter smiling face with smiling eyes emoticon, see Emojipedia, "Smiling Face with Smiling Eyes."

59. Zentella, "Dime con quién hablas y te diré quién eres," 25.

60. Martínez, "Spanglish Is Spoken Here."

61. Hernández-Chavez, Cohen, and Beltramo, eds., *El lenguaje de los Chicanos*; MacSwan, *A Minimalist Approach to Intrasentential Code Switching*; and Poplack, "Syntactic Structure and Social Function of Code-Switching."

62. Hinojos and Casillas, "Don't Be Self-Conchas."

63. See @DieselEddy99 on Twitter.

64. Jaffe, "Introduction," 509.

65. Hinojos and Casillas, "Don't Be Self-Conchas."

66. Davé, *Indian Accents*.

67. See Hinojos and Casillas, "Don't Be Self-Conchas" for an analysis of SAE memes.

68. Hinojos and Casillas, "Don't Be Self-Conchas."

69. Hinojos, "Lupe Vélez and Her Spicy Visual 'Accent' in English-Language Print Media."

70. Hill, *Covert Racist Discourse*.

71. Latorre, "Humor and Hemispheric Consciousness."

72. Hillewaert, "Writing with an Accent," 208.

73. Grace and Kemp, "Assessing the Written Language of Text Messages."

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