

"EL DIA DE LA HISPANIDAD" IN NEW YORK

AND THE MASS-MEDIA

KRISTEN HENZE
Universität Frankfurt AM Main

(Resumen)

El 12 de octubre es celebrado en Estados Unidos como "el día de la hispanidad" creándose así un vínculo con España al no haberlo con los anglo-americanos; la identidad hispana se crea alrededor de la cultura española y no como propia identidad hispano-americana. La "españolización de la conquista" sirve para crear una conciencia nacional entre los hispanos y, por ello, se glorifican los acontecimientos históricos; esto implica la pertenencia de la posesión del continente exclusivamente a España con la que se identifican. De este modo, en Nueva York, y a través de un análisis de los periódicos más representativos en lengua española (del 12 de octubre de 1989), se demuestra el intento de creación de identidad de grupo de la comunidad hispana. Es cuando surge la pregunta en torno a la realidad o ficción de la identidad de grupo, tal vez creada por los medios de comunicación. Por otra parte, surgen diferencias entre los hispanos de diferentes orígenes con lo que se demuestra que no se identifican plenamente como hispanos. Sin embargo, les une un vínculo muy fuerte: la lengua. Por medio del análisis lingüístico se demuestra el intento de creación, por parte de los medios de comunicación, de un nacionalismo que respondería a razones económicas unidas a un mensaje político-cultural. Los medios de comunicación más que representar o informar sobre la identidad del grupo hispano parecen generarla.

.....

1. Introduction

Taking a closer look at the residents of New York City, we become aware that we cannot simply talk of "the Hispanics": this metropolis has developed into the place of residence of an extremely heterogenous Spanish-speaking community whose members originate from Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Columbia, and many more, mostly Latin-American countries. With its cultural and national variety, New York City might be considered a microcosm of the immigration country that the USA represents. A wide range of Spanish mass-media takes this fact into account, offering numerous daily and weekly newspapers, TV channels and radio stations to the so-called "Hispanos".⁶

It is my intention to analyse newspaper articles which were published around the 12th of October 1989 and which thematically focus on Columbus Day. The main common tenor of these texts is praise of the Hispanic community, of the "Hispanidad" outside the native countries, in New York. The point to be examined is whether and to what extent the group-identity of these Hispanics proves to be a product of

linguistic and media constructions and thus to be a sentiment that in reality only emerges in the very process of being produced by the mass-media.

The material analysed is taken out from the quality newspapers Noticias del Mundo, El Diario-La Prensa (both daily), and El Especial (weekly) and their special supplements on the occasion of Columbus Day. The genres found here are reports on historic and present-day events, commentaries, greetings to the Hispanics, extracts from interviews, and advertisements. The styles used vary - according to the genre - from objective assessment to personal comment, from narrative to direct appeal and pathos. The topics covered in the articles include local festivities, parades, and commemorations of the "Discovery" of America by Christopher Columbus, in 1492, certain historic aspects of the event, the demographic development of the Spanish-speaking US population, the nationality of Columbus and the attitudes of outstanding personalities of the Hispanic community towards the celebration. An exceptional article is found in El Especial, as it is the only one to report on one of the more sinister aspects of the Discovery, namely the ethnocide committed on the Indian autochthonous population by the Spanish conquerors. This text was written in Mexico and not in the USA - a significant fact, as we will see later.⁷

2. The Spanish perspective

While in the Latin-American countries Columbus Day is referred to as "Día de la Raza", thereby connoting the indigenous element of the nations concerned, Spanish-speaking people in the USA celebrate "el Día de la Hispanidad", thereby emphasizing the ethnic ties with the Spaniards (although the expression "raza" is of course not taboo in the US).

In Latin-America, on the soil where the sanguinary European conquest of the New World and the extinction of many Indian tribes took place, the memory of the arrival of Columbus cannot be anything but ambivalent and conflicting. It certainly provides no reason for joyous festivals and cheerful parades. Here, hispanicity stands for domination over the aboriginal Americans in all domains. In the USA, on the other hand, speaking Spanish implies being a member of a suppressed group in Anglo-American society. Therefore, as the North-American Hispanics find themselves in an oppressed position just because of their being Spanish speakers, they tend to defend themselves by enhancing and stylizing the Spanish factor in their origin. Hence the "enfoque hispanocéntrico"⁸ especially in the context of the anniversary of the Discovery, which in Spain and the USA has been celebrated since 1892. It is not only the widespread designation "Día de la Hispanidad" that expresses the "visión de los vencedores", the vocabulary chosen by the journalists in connection with the historical event also underlines this notion, to the detriment of the opposite "visión de los vencidos", to speak in León-Portilla's terms.⁹ The expressions are "Día del Descubrimiento", "aniversario del descubrimiento y evangelización de América", "conmemoración del Glorioso Descubrimiento de América", "este magno evento", superlative adjectives serving for intensification.

But more important than the accentuation of the Spanish perspective itself in

the mass-media is its function of creating a group-identity among the Hispanics living in New York. Whereas the daily experience of the addressees has taught them that being a Spanish native speaker in the USA is a feature of inferiority and segregation in the eyes of the Anglo-Americans, newspaper writers point out exactly the same criterion as a symbol of unity and solidarity. Using the above mentioned vocabulary they appeal to the group-identity of their readers, a group-identity which has to assert itself against the predominant current of panamericanism in North-American society. The melting-pot ideology demands assimilation not only from the Spanish-speaking population, but from all of the many immigration groups.

3. Hispano-Italian rivalry

So, on the one hand a potential Hispanic group-identity is permanently menaced by the equalization effect of Anglo-American pressure, on the other hand the Hispanics find rivals among other minorities for their social position. Beside the anglophonic black Americans, there are other immigrant groups, Koreans, Chinese, and Italians, to name just a few, among whom the Italians are apparently perceived as especially menacing. Actual opposition among immigrants, initially motivated by economic and social competition, is transferred to historiographical questions in the newspaper articles. Above all, it is the misappropriation by many countries of the honour of discovering the New World, that causes irritation among Hispanic journalists, who pass on this irritation to their readers.

Under the provoking headline "Hacia un 12 de Octubre sin Hispanismo?" several offensives from different sides are taken up and replied to in the following ways: a. The argument that speaking of "Discovery" is inadequate as the continent had already been populated for several thousand years when Columbus set foot on it, is said to be irrelevant, for the only one to feel the urge to look for land across the ocean was Columbus, a European. b. The regularly asserted Italian claim to Columbus, a native Genoese, does not take into consideration that the navigator, after being rejected in Genoa and other places, undertook his enterprise as a Spaniard, in the name of Spain, with Spanish money and ships. c. Finally, the claims by a total of eleven countries to have reached America first are repulsed by the argument that only the achievements of Columbus and the Spanish conquerors ensured that a new continent was added to the European maps.

It becomes evident that one of the main anxieties is that on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Discovery in 1992 the Hispanic group might be of no more than secondary importance. US-American considerations of how to avoid speaking of "Discovery", of "Columbus", and of "Spain" in this context confirm Hispanic writers in this concern. The daily confrontation with inter-ethnic conflicts determines the perspective of history.

As a counterbalance they propose to re-establish the Spanish and consequently the Hispanic role in the center of interest with the help of the above-mentioned arguments and by using certain linguistic means. They underline the importance of Spain, and they underline the fact that the Spanish-speaking population of the USA and Spain share their language and a considerable part of

their culture. Thus, the Hispanic identity is constituted on the basis of the Spanish culture, not as a property American-Hispanic identity. Little hidden remarks, though, reveal that these reminiscences of the Spanish roots and the glorious deeds of their ancestors are, at least in part, provoked by rather current, profane and pedantic jealousy: the New York State Governor and other important politicians declined to assist in the "Desfile de la Hispanidad", although they had been present at the Italian parade a few days before.

The most commonly used designations for the Hispanics not only mark the connection with Spain, as in "los/las hispanos/as" and "los/las latinos/as", but they also have morphemes expressing unity as in "Hispanidad" and stand for an undividable community as does "la comunidad hispana" or simply, but highly suggestively, "la comunidad".¹⁰

In addition to lexical means the notion of community is stressed by a morpho-syntactic procedure, namely the use of the first person plural. "Nosotros" and its grammatical variations refer to all the Hispanics (e.g. in "No hay quien detenga nuestro idioma en Estados Unidos", "Es el día de nuestra raza", "nosotros, los llamados hispanos"). But at the same time, it also fulfills the function of opening the dialogue between the writer and the reader, of establishing a relationship.

According to Benedict Anderson, access to the printed media and broadcasting is apt to overcome the inferior status of a national minority.¹¹ The simple fact that a language or a dialect is printed and published within the framework of another, dominant culture and another, dominant language, provides the language in question with objective strength and prestige. In addition, the journalist may raise the native speaker's subjective impression of the status of his culture by evoking the conception of one strong unity. This is the result - among other factors - of using the first person plural.

4. The Hispanics - an invented community?

For all that, discrepancies, disagreements, and clichés, which undoubtedly exist between Hispanics of different origins, have no place in this kind of media. In a situation of such diverse nation multiplicity as we find within the Hispanic population in New York City, it is inevitable that intergroup prejudices and rivalries express themselves in national stereotypes. Negative opinions about the others' national characters are frequently heard. Furthermore, the quality of the Spanish spoken by representatives of different Latin-American countries is judged quite decidedly; I remember having heard, for example, that Columbians talk the best Spanish, Cubans the worst and so on. Even though all of them belong to the largest single non-English speaking minority in the USA as well as in New York City, stereotypes - positive and negative ones - prevail in the relationship between different Hispanic groups just as between descendants of different ethnic groups. The fact that Anglo-Americans and other immigrants do not differentiate among the totality of Spanish speakers and that these have collective names for themselves, does not necessarily imply either absolute identification as an Hispanic, or an imperturbable feeling of solidarity for all other Hispanics. Above all they think of themselves as

Cubans, Mexicans, etc.

We also have to take into consideration the fact that in New York there is by no means such a large number of long-established Hispanics as there are Mexican-Americans in the Southwest, who have been living there for several generations or who can trace back their roots to the first European settlers of North-America. Hispanics in New York City are mostly immigrants of the first or second generation, have strong contact with their homecountries (especially Puerto Rico) and have not yet been assimilated into the predominating culture, thus keeping up their national ties and characteristics. Therefore, is it not a legitimate question to ask whether Hispanic solidarity and community, held together by the strong bonds of a common language and common ethnic roots, is really a self-evident reality, and not rather an invention and fabrication of the mass-media? In asking this, I do not wish to exclude other possible factors with a similar effect. Certainly, a Guatemalan American will feel more related to a Peruvian American than to an Italian or an "Anglo". But he will still feel the most for another Guatemalan.

5. Hispanic national identity

As has been mentioned before, the central focus of the community, which is to be evoked, is the common motherland Spain, where the Conquista was launched and whence language, culture and religion were transplanted into the new continent. So what is described as the "'españolización' de la conquista"¹² serves to create a national consciousness among all Hispanics. For this purpose, the decisive historic events are greatly glorified (remember Columbus' "magno evento" and his "gran proeza humana") and regularly associated with "nosotros". This implies that although the continent as a whole was colonized by English, French, Portuguese AND Spanish settlers (not to mention others), the distinction of having taken possession of the continent belongs to the Spanish. And the "Hispanos (comparten) con España su lenguaje y tanto de su cultura aun cuando nuestro nombre pueda tener sus raíces en otros orígenes étnicos."¹³ That this "other ethnic origin" could be indigenous is not even mentioned, the importance of names being in any case denied. The process of national identification is proposed by stressing one component (Spanish) of the mestizification process to the detriment of the other (Indian).

Naturally, when national consciousness is mentioned, we do not mean patriotism with regard to a nation state, which in fact does not exist. In the present case, national identity refers to a cultural nation without governmental structures or state institutions. Normally, a language is conceived as a symbol of a national community within the framework of a state. Here, in contrast, we are dealing with a linguistic community embracing descendants from many different states with different histories. Thus, as the unifying features are culture and language, the Spanish language has become the symbol of a linguistic community, a symbol of itself.

The creation and intensification of this national identity, is achieved by an emotional and persuasive style in the articles examined, especially in the headlines. Expressions such as "saludo lleno de calor y respeto" or "nuestros hermanos y hermanas hispanos" are supposed to stir the readers' hearts and to convince them

that they are being approached as individual human beings, as members of a sentimental association.

In other parts of the texts, it is a more solemn vocabulary that conveys the whole pathos typical of an occasion of national significance: quite often the writers express the "honor" they feel and the fact that they are "llenos de orgullo", just as the readers are expected to be. In one of the very few remarks on the role of the Hispanics in US-American society, the importance of the Spanish factor for the discovery and colonization of the continent is almost equalled by the eminent role it is attributed in present-day North-American society: "que la comunidad hispana es un pilar importante para la sociedad norteamericana".

6. Phatic speech in the press

But the most significant linguistic function to be observed is the phatic function as defined by Roman Jakobson in 1960 in his famous essay "Linguistics and Poetics": "There are messages primarily serving to establish, to prolong, or to discontinue communication, to check whether the channel works..., to attract the attention of the interlocutor or to confirm his continued attention."¹⁴

The phatic function is over-represented in certain genres and in certain parts of the texts: firstly, greetings to the Hispanics, e.g. by the president of Noticias del Mundo, and advertisements exclusively styled for the occasion hardly have any other justification. Sometimes both of these genres overlap: a public relations agency ("Saludan a la Comunidad Hispana por el 'Día de la Hispanidad'") and a brewery ("Es el día de nuestra raza. Malta India se enorgullece en compartir la celebración de esta inolvidable fecha") put their confidence in the persuasive power of a sort of intimate atmosphere created by a seemingly two-way communication. The phrase "El día de nuestra raza" includes both the sender and the addressee and places them on one and the same level, thereby invoking a relationship of confidence.

Secondly, headlines, whose function is to seduce the reader into starting to read the whole article, are especially receptive to phatic speech - that is in their nature. This part of the text is full of markers of Hispanicity: in 23 headlines, we read "Hispanidad" or "Hispanismo" eleven times, "Hispanos/-as" three times, "Comunidad Hispana" or "Comunidad Latina" three times. In this combination of phatic speech and appeal to nationalism, they mutually reinforce each other and develop the most notable characteristics.

The printed media are forced to fulfill the phatic function in relation to the whole Hispanic population instead of the individual state nationalities. They are mass-media, and their concept must be to reach the Hispanic masses. The reasons that constrain them to do so are simply economic: the only realistic method of launching a profitable product is to create a product conceived for all Spanish-speaking potential consumers on the market. An exception here is the newspaper El Vocero de Puerto Rico, which is hardly astounding, considering the extremely large number of Puerto Ricans living in New York City and the metropolitan area, who form a market for themselves.

Thus, the use of the phatic function described above and the appeals to

nationalism in the mass-media are consequences of the efforts to acquire new customers and to keep existing regular ones. Economic constraints link up with a cultural-political message.

The intra-Hispanic multiplicity only becomes visible in a few texts where the preparations for and the realization of the parades and the elections of the queen and the marshal of the year are depicted: the queen is Cuban, the marshal Chilean with German ancestors, the president of the parade committee is Ecuadorian. A list of all the former queens, marshals and presidents reveals not only that all hispanophonic countries (including Spain and the Philippines) are represented, but also Brazil and immigrants whose names indicate that their forefathers migrated to Latin-America relatively recently (e.g. Yma Sumac and Erika Haverbeck).¹⁵

Returning to the headlines, we may observe that not infrequently the relationship between headline and text is not coherent. Instead of announcing the main theme and contents that are to be enlarged on and treated in greater detail in the text, headlines tend to be short texts of their own, relatively independent of the article that follows. For example the headline "El Progreso de los Hispanos" promises more than just a portrait of a Hispanic regional representative in the Ministry of Education.

Thoroughly misleading is the headline "No Hay Quien Detenga Nuestro Idioma en Estados Unidos", which is bursting with drive and self-confidence. Who would expect that a wealth of statistical information about the demographic and socio-economic development of the Hispanics would follow this aggressive and ambitious title? Not a single word is said about language maintenance and language shift. This discrepancy arises from the need to catch the reader's attention, counting on the effects of national pride intensified by the printed medium itself.

To sum up, here is a medium that awakens and fortifies the Hispanic group identity, which in return makes the reader more willing to consume the medium, thereby exposing himself to further appeals to nationalism - a spiral effect. Apparently, emotions like group or national identity not only grow from within, but can also be evoked by very material factors, which I have described. And mass-media, rather than representing or informing about identity, seem to generate it.

NOTES

6. Ambitiously, they call themselves "Campeona de los Hispanos", "La superpotencia hispana", etc.

7. Mario Cautin: "90 Millones de Indios Asesinados desde el Descubrimiento" in: El Especial, Oct. 17th, 1989, p. 15.

8. Josep M. Colomer: "Bordado de Retórica. Análisis de la invención de la hispanidad" in: El País, Oct. 12th, 1989. Temas de nuestra época, p. 8.

9. León-Portilla, Miguel, 1959: La Visión de los vencidos.

10. "los latinos" three times, "los hispanos" sixteen times, "Hispanidad" six times; "comunidad hispana" nine times; "la comunidad" five times.

11. Anderson, Benedict, 1988: Die Erfindung der Nation. Sur Karriere eines erfolgreichen Konzepts. Frankfurt/New York.

12. "América y las Raíces de la Hispanidad" in: El Especial. Suplemento de la Hispanidad, Oct. 11th-17th, 1989.

13. "Hacia un 12 de Octubre sin Hispanismo?" in: Noticias del Mundo, Oct. 12th, 1989.

14. Jakobson, Roman, 1960: "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics" in: Thomas A. Sebeok (ed.): Style in Language. New York/London. 355.

15. Curiously enough, in 1971, the marshal was a man named Cristóbal Colón!