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(Non)impact of language coexistence in polyglot areas – Guatemala’s peculiar “vos”

The talk examines Guatemala as a polyglot area as it contains between 23 and 40 languages (depending on classification). This specific language variety in combination with the close relation that vernacular (mostly Maya) languages maintain with Spanish gives rise to theories supporting the idea that the Guatemalan variety of Spanish is largely a result of indigenous influences. To examine this theory, the talk will be divided in two parts. The first part contains an introduction to the linguistic situation in Guatemala, providing information on education and the linguistic atlas of vernacular languages, as well as classification problems etc., which make the theory of linguistic interference so persuasive. The second part of the talk will then examine one of the most distinct phenomena in Guatemala. The peculiar use of “vos”, which in the linguistic consciousness of Guatemalan Spanish speakers and theorists owes a great deal of its particular usage to the indigenous languages. In this analysis it will be possible to demonstrate that Guatemalan “voseo” (like many other typically “Guatemalan” features of Spanish) is in point of fact merely dependant on internal linguistic evolution. This can be demonstrated in historical analysis of medieval and renaissance Spanish (at least on the morphosyntactical level). As a complement, examples of lexicon can underline that the impact is directed from Spanish towards the Mayan languages rather than vice versa.

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