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Stressed o in American English Borrowings from Spanish
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Casual contact with words borrowed by English from Spanish in the American Southwest makes one aware of words like calaboose and vamoose, in which Spanish /o/ has been rendered by English /u:/. Perusal of all the entries in a dictionary of American English borrowings from Spanish suggests that such words do not constitute an isolated or aberrant phenomenon but that they are part of a larger, fairly regular pattern of phonetic adaptation.

The eighteen words that will be discussed shortly are taken from Bentley's Dictionary of Spanish Terms in English. It is tempting to classify them as (a) borrowed from Spanish in the American Southwest, or (b) along the Gulf coast and in the Caribbean area, or (c) from other Romance sources as well as Spanish in Europe. Then one might wish to subclassify the list according to whether the affected vowel occurs in (1) the final stressed syllable of the source (quadroon < cuarterón), or (2) a final syllable that became stressed in English (vamoose < vamos), or (3) a stressed syllable that became final in English (calaboose < calabosa). Even such a simple system of classification yields nine possible subclasses, which hardly seem necessary for a list of only eighteen items. Several of the words, moreover, require glosses or special comment that renders the procedure of classification even less practicable. Accordingly I have resisted the taxonomic temptation and will present the words in alphabetical order with appropriate comment on each, in line with the principle that each word in a language has its own history.

Alamosa (Colorado) does not, at first glance, appear to belong on the list. Its historic pronunciation, however, is /ælə'mu:se/. The /u:/ has been corrected to /o:/ over the years as a result of continued contact with speakers of Spanish or awareness of the spelling or both. This phenomenon of reapproximation to the source of a borrowed word is by no means uncommon. For example, Old English borrowed the name Rome from Italian with /o:/, which became /u:/ as part of the Great Vowel Shift of the fifteenth century. Within a short time, however, the vowel was corrected back to /o:/. A final observation about Alamosa is that its affected vowel does not occur in precisely the range of phonetic environments outlined above, since the syllable has never been final.

Barbecue, with a first citation in the OED dated 1697, is from Spanish barbacoa, which is ultimately

from the Haitian Indian language. It is unusual that the affected vowel is rendered /yu:/ rather than /u:/. Foreign /u:/ after /k/ often becomes /yu:/ in English (e.g. Cuba), but barbecue is the only example I am aware of in which foreign /o:/ is given this treatment.

Barracoön, 'large barrack for temporary confinement of slaves', is from Spanish barracón, augmentative of barraca, 'barrack', with an earliest English citation dated 1851 (OED). It is thought to be the source of coon, a derogatory term for 'black person'. The popularity of this appellation was presumably supported by homophony with the shortened form of rac-coon, a word of Algonquian origin.

Buckaroo or buckeroo derives from Spanish vaquero, and is first cited in English as recently as 1928 (Bentley). Several observations appear to be in order: First, the word may have been reshaped by folk etymology, combining the verb buck with the suffix -aroo, which is difficult to define but appears to mean something like 'prototype' or 'prime example of'. Second, although the affected vowel was presumably stressed in the earliest English version, stress in contemporary speech is often shifted to the first syllable by the countertonic principle (cf. Danielsson).

Calaboose is from Spanish calabozo, with a first English citation from 1792 (DAE). The OED suggests an intermediate source in 'Negro French of Louisiana calabouse'. If this suggestion is correct, the word does not belong in our list, since the immediate foreign source already had /u:/ rather than /o:/.

Canoe is cited in English before 1555 (OED). Its immediate source is Spanish canóa from Carib kanoa. (Cf. barbecue above for different treatment of Spanish final -oa.)

Chilcoot, 'California place name', from Spanish chilicote (Bentley). No indication is given as to the precise application of the name or its earliest appearance in English.

Doublon derives from Spanish doblón, augmentative of doble. Its first English citation is dated 1622 (OED). The English form may be a spelling pronunciation of a Dutch intermediate form spelled -oo- to represent /o:/, but such derivation is not clearly attested.

Hondoo, 'small loop in one end of a lariat through which the other end of the rope is threaded', is from Spanish honda, which has the same meaning. Although there are earlier English citations with the Spanish spelling, the first instance in -oo is dated 1922 (Bentley). The word is interesting in that Spanish

unstressed /a/ is the source of English /u:/ when the stress is shifted to the final syllable. Here is a possible explanation: In the English of the Southwestern United States, the distinction between unstressed /e/ and /o:/ in final syllables is often neutralized so that window and similar words end in /e/. If such a /e/ is restressed it might become /o:/ for a semiliterate speaker who is not guided by spelling. The transition from /o:/ to /u:/ is then parallel to the vowel change in other words in the list.

Lasso, from Spanish lazo, is first cited in English in 1834 (Bentley). None of the dictionaries consulted indicates that the vowel of the second syllable is ever /u:/. Yet a tabulation of responses in field records of the Linguistic Atlas of the Pacific Coast reveals that 68 percent of interviewees who volunteered this lexical form in California and Nevada gave the vowel as /u:/ rather than /o:/. When responses are analyzed in terms of three major areas, that dominated by San Francisco shows an 87 percent preference for /u:/, that by Portland, Oregon, 67 percent (only 4 of six responses, however), and that by Los Angeles only 40 percent—that is, 60 percent of informants in the area dominated by Los Angeles gave forms with /o:/ rather than /u:/. Responses have not been tabulated in terms of which syllable was stressed, since several interviewers failed to record stress in this item. Where stress is recorded, however, it is clear that there is not a perfect correlation between stress on the second syllable and occurrence of the vowel /u:/. Informants seemed to be concerned about the correctness of their responses, since some changed their answer from /u:/ to /o:/, others from /o:/ to /u:/. A few indicated that the noun is /'læso:/, the verb, /læ'su:/.

Maroon, the color, is from French marron, 'chestnut', and was first recorded in English in 1594. Of more interest to this study is the noun meaning 'fugitive slave', derived from Spanish cimarrón, formed in turn from cimarra, 'bushes', and first cited in English in 1626. The English verb maroon, 'abandon in the wilds', appears to be derived from the latter noun.

Octoroon, 'person who is one-eighth black and seven-eighths white', is a non-etymological formation of Latin octo + -roon from quadroon (q.v. below). The earliest English citation is dated 1860 (Matthews).

Pantaloon derives from French pantalon, whose ultimate source is Italian. The earliest English citation is dated about 1590 (OED).

Patroon is from French patron or possibly Spanish patrón, by way of Dutch in the New York State area. As

with doubloon (q.v. above), the English form may be a spelling pronunciation of the Dutch form spelled -oo- to represent the vowel /o:/. The first English citation is dated 1662 (OED).

Picaroon, 'rogue, knave, thief, brigand,' derives from Spanish picarón, augmentative of picaro (cf. picaresque). Its earliest English citation is 1629 (OED).

Quadroon is from Spanish cuarterón, and its first English citation is dated 1707. (OED). Its meaning is ambiguous—either one-fourth black or fourth generation from pure black, which is to say one-eighth black.

Saloon is probably from French salon, reinforced in its American meaning by Spanish salón. Its earliest English citation is 1747 (OED).

Vamoose is obviously from Spanish vamos and has a first English citation dated 1844 (Matthews).

Can any significant generalizations be culled from the welter of detail that has been presented about these eighteen words? Three points struck my attention: (1) Although the words cited above were taken from or suggested by a dictionary of Spanish terms in English with special reference to the American Southwest, not all of them are from Spanish. Three are ultimately from French—one of those by way of Dutch—and one of the words that is ultimately from Spanish may have had a Dutch intermediary. (2) Not all of the borrowings are associated with the United States. A full third of the list, or six items, are words borrowed by British English, generally in the sixteenth or seventeenth century. (3) An unusually large number of items (nine, or half of the entire list) are words that end in -oon.

All of these observations suggest that words borrowed from Spanish in the American Southwest, in which Spanish /o/ becomes English /u:/, may be only part of a more general phenomenon affecting all varieties of English over a period of several centuries. To test this hypothesis, I went through an unabridged dictionary of English rhymes (Wood), seeking plurisyllabic words with stressed /u:/ in the final syllable. These were then checked in Webster's Third New International Dictionary, and many of them were eliminated in accordance with one of the following criteria:

- (1) The only words retained were those that derive from a word that contained /o/ in the source language.
- (2) Only words with earliest English citations after 1500 were retained. The reason for this requirement is that Middle English borrowings with foreign /o/ passed through the Great Vowel Shift, which transformed /o:/ to /u:/. The most comprehensive and authoritative study of Early Modern English pronuncia-

tion states categorically (Dobson, 681) that the change from /o:/ to /u:/ was completed by 1500. Therefore, words with /o/ in the source language, borrowed after 1500, should not be affected by the Great Vowel Shift. (3) Obsolete words (as determined by nonlisting in Webster) were eliminated. This may seem to be an arbitrary criterion, since the fact that a word has fallen out of use is irrelevant to the phonological information it may provide about the period in which it was actively used. There is a problem, however, in the use of historical dictionaries, and the principle of disregarding obsolete words was designed to deal with it, at least in part. A certain proportion of the words that gain entry to historical dictionaries are nonce forms that were never in active use in the language. By definition these words were obsolete almost from their date of citation. The principle of disregarding obsolete words is, of course, a very rough screen. It may lead to eliminating some real data, that would have been useful to consider. On the other hand, it provides some assurance that fictitious and misleading data will not be considered.

The result of this procedure was a list of twenty-eight additional words—twenty-four of them, rather remarkably—ending in -oon. Of those that do not end in -oon, only one, shampoo, has any appreciable current frequency. These words will not be dealt with in the same depth as the original eighteen. For our purposes it will be sufficient to list the words alphabetically with the date of earliest English citation in parentheses (OED unless otherwise indicated), source language if other than French (which is the source for a vast majority of these words), and finally a gloss for words judged to be unfamiliar.

- balloon (1598) Italian
- bandicoot (1789) Telugu, 'very large rat of India and Ceylon'
- bassoon (1727-51)
- batoon (1562) 'archaic variant of baton'
- bridoon (1753) 'snaffle and rein of military bridle'
- buffoon (1549)
- cardoos (1611) 'type of thistle related to the artichoke'
- cartoon (1671) Italian
- cocoon (1699)
- dragoon (1622)
- festoon (1676)
- galloon (1604) 'braid, ribbon' [Note relation to gallon in ten gallon hat.]
- Gentoo (1638) Portuguese, obs. exc. hist. 'Hindu'

gossoon (1684) from garçon, chiefly Anglo Irish
karoo, karroo (1789) Hottentot, 'dry, elevated
 plateau in SW Africa'
macaroon (1611)
monsoon (1584) Dutch from Portuguese from Arabic
 [Dutch rendered Portuguese ao as oe /u:/.]
platoon (1637)
pontoon (1676)
quintroon (1797) Non-etymological formation in
 English, 'fifth generation from pure black, therefore
 one-sixteenth black'
ratoon (1631, DAE) Spanish retoño, 'new shoot
 from a root of sugarcane'
rigadoon (1691) 'dance, formerly in vogue'
seroon (1833) 'bale of exotic produce in an animal
 hide'
shampoo (1762) Hindi
shalloon (1678) 'closely woven woolen material'
spittoon (1823, DAE) English spit + -oon
spontoon (1746) 'half-pike or halberd'
walloon (1567)

The preponderance of words in -oon led me to one
 final bit of data. In an entry labeled -oon, which
 I suspect is rarely noticed, the OED comments, 'the
 form usually taken in English by Fr. final -on [It.
-one, Sp. -on] in words stressed on the final syllable,
 esp. those adopted during the 16th-18th c...Eng. repre-
 sentatives of Fr. or Romanic words in -on, when not
 stressed on the last syllable, and modern borrowings
 generally have regularly -on. [I.e. not -oon.]'

From the data assembled for this study, it seems
 clear that English borrowings from Spanish in the
 American Southwest, in which Spanish /o/ becomes Eng-
 lish /u:/, are merely an extension into the nineteenth
 and twentieth centuries of a tendency that goes back,
 in the case especially of French to the early six-
 teenth century. What was responsible for first estab-
 lishing this tendency is not entirely clear. Perhaps
 speakers of English were aware of the fairly regular
 correspondence between English words with /u:/ that
 had been modified by the Great Vowel Shift and their
 French sources in /o/. It might have seemed the most
 natural thing in the world to Anglicize later borrow-
 ings from French, then from other Romance languages,
 and finally from such diverse sources as Telugu and
 Hottentot by changing foreign /o/ to English /u:/.
 It might even be hypothesized that the average mono-
 lingual has a mental dichotomy between what is native
 and what is foreign, so that all foreign languages
 are viewed as being like the language with which he
 is most familiar—which would have been French in the
 case of speakers of English in the sixteenth century.

Other factors may have played a minor role. It has been suggested, for example, that words coming to English through Dutch may have developed an /u:/ vowel as a spelling pronunciation of Dutch forms written oo, but pronounced /o:/. It has also been suggested that calaboose may already have had /u:/ in the Black French of Louisiana, just as monsoon had /u:/ in the now obsolete Dutch form from which it was taken. Finally, English spellings from the sixteenth into the eighteenth century show fluctuation between o, ou, and oo for many of the words on the second list above.

After all is said and done, however, we are left with several puzzling questions: First, why was the tendency to change foreign /o/ to English /u:/ confined so largely to stressed final syllables and especially to words in -on? It is as if English -oon took on the status of a quasi-suffix—quasi because it would prove impossible to assign one or several consistent meanings to it. Second, why did the tendency to change foreign /o/ to English /u:/ disappear in most varieties of English during the eighteenth century, but remain active in the American Southwest into the twentieth century? Although this is the kind of question that linguistics generally cannot address, it might be suggested some phonetic characteristics of English in the American Southwest favored the tendency. English back vowels are, as a general rule, longer, more lax, and more subject to diphthongization than the corresponding back vowels of Spanish. In addition, /o:/ and /u:/ in many American dialects of English, including those of the Southwest are subject to considerable centralization, making them even less like the Spanish back vowels. In other words, since there were no very close phonetic equivalents among English and Spanish back vowels, speakers of English may have reverted to a subconscious habit that was by now firmly fixed in the speech community and as a result they transformed foreign /o/ into English /u:/.

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