

## Plain Spanglish

### Comedian Bill Santiago turns author, and takes on *The Habla*

By C. Rodriguez

**Growing up in the Bronx**, “native Spanglish speaker” Bill Santiago didn’t know there was a name for the hybrid parlance he used with his Puerto Rican family and friends.

“One day I started calling it ‘Spanglish,’ and then I noticed everyone is calling it Spanglish,” says comedian and author Santiago. “I thought was the first one!”

It was only natural, then, that he would write “Pardon My Spanglish ¡Porque Because! - One Man’s Guide to the Habla” (Quirk Books, \$14.95 - also available on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)).

It was long overdue says Santiago, 34, of the book to be released Monday. “I’ve never read a book like that, so I wrote it - *y además, me ofrecieron* the chance to write *el booko*.”

The book steps in to defend Spanglish, which, he argues, is being attacked from both English and Spanish hardliners. “I think Spanish fundamentalists are the worst,” says Santiago. “They’re more defensive, more offended by it, scandalized by the very notion that it would be validated as the topic of a book, even a humor book. Because they have no sense of humor. And they don’t recognize that all languages are products of an evolution and are evolving as we speak, because we speak them. Spanglish is a reflection of our reality. And if it wasn’t for that same linguistic evolutionary process, which Spanglish is a prime example of, there would be no English or Spanish in the first place.”

And English fundamentalists? “Well, in this country, they are just offended by another language being spoken at all. Plus they want to keep Latinos out. Or make them give up who they are once they get here. What’s not understood is that Spanish was here in the United States first! Way before *inglés*,” he says.

Santiago argues that Spanglish is not merely a jargon or a dialect, but a full-scale language (however new) - to which he offers alternative names: *Inglesñol*, *Bodega-bonics*, *Chipotlechat*, *La Raza 2.0*, *Casteyanqui*, *Illegalease*, *Spic-Speak*.

“To say that it’s a dialect I don’t think does it justice,” he says. “When you listen to people in a bilingual environment going back and forth, they’re not just speaking with an accent, not just throwing in an alternate language word or two, they’re combining syntaxes and the



grammars of two entirely different systems in way that fits together like a puzzle. And they're doing it in an improvised way!"

The book offers a series of quick-witted rules for the *habla*. But here's the first rule of Spanglish: "All the rules are subject to change."

"That's the best thing about Spanglish," he says. "It's so new and so unofficial that all the rules are unofficial."

## Ñ on Montana

As a child, Bill Santiago thought White Castle was a traditional Puerto Rican food joint.

As a grownup, he thinks mixing up cultures may not be so bad after all, as in these one-liners from his book "Pardon My Spanglish."

\* Spanglish sexes up your gender-neutral English: "*Una* friend *con* benefits, *la* Walmart, *los* munchies"

\*Redundant is good, *te lo juro*, I swear.

\*You can refer to turning 30 as your *doble quinceañera*

\*You don't have to speak good English or good Spanish to be completely fluent in Spanglish

\*Spanish has been a part of the U.S for ever. Let's put the ñ back in Montana.

\*Spanglish is the new Yiddish - in fact, the Latino newspaper called "*Hoy*" used to be called "Oy."

However, "there is a right and wrong way to do it," says Santiago, who berates clunky Spanglish construction - "*una* very clunky *grande problema*" - as aberrations. Although, he does have a love-hate fondness for Spanglish idiomatic expressions such as: "*Cójelo* con take it easy."

A seasoned Stand-up who draws a lot of his Latino material from the streets on the "*Oprima el dos* corridor," as he describes Washington Heights - Santiago will be at The Comic Strip Live Comedy Club, 1568 Second Ave., tomorrow at 8:30 p.m. ([www.comicstriplive.com](http://www.comicstriplive.com))

Having extensively toured the U.S. with his dual-culture routines - which feature a hysterical rendition of "I Will Survive" that is included in the book - he's sure of one thing: Spanglish is here to stay.

"There's no turning *pa trás*."