



Oaxaca Times

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TERMS OF ENDEARMENT MEXICAN STYLE



Ray Horl, U. S. resident of Mazatlán, has fallen into the habit of calling his Mexican acquaintances gringo. The term was certainly a derogatory one in the past, indicating a nasty, no-good foreigner from the north. But times are a-changing and most Mexicans use the term in a more-or-less affectionate way these days. The response Ray gets from Mexicans definitely shows that don't think of this reverse name-calling as some kind of revenge, but rather as an attempt to elevate their status or, more likely, to show endearment or some kind of brotherhood. They generally will call Ray Mexicano in return. Although most Mexicans have a string of first and last names, nicknames are much preferred. And clever ones, like Ray's reversal always please Mexicans.

Mexico's naming system in the same as all other Spanish-speaking countries and is considered by many to be more convenient and less confusing than in English-speaking countries. Knowing the two-last-name system is as essential to functioning inside the country as learning people's last names in the States or Canada. Middle names are often used in English to distinguish two people with like names.

In the Spanish-speaking world, a person's second last name distinguishes him from others with similar names. Sometimes his middle name is also used for this purpose - especially among friends and family. The Garcias and Gonzalezes are the Joneses and Davises in Spanish. Especially in México, there is less of a variety of last names than in the U. S. Common last names found all over the country include Ramos, Medina, Alvarez, Bernal, Díaz, Rodriguez, Pérez, Gómez, López and Moreno.

While the United States was settled by peoples from many countries of the world with a great variety of last names, México

was settled almost exclusively by Spaniards. The total number of last names they brought with them was small. In the provinces it often happened that a handful of settlers arrived, established themselves and then sent back to Spain for other family members. Eventually the last names of this small group of first settlers became prominent in their area. For example, in Mazatlán, the last names Lizarraga, Osuna, Tirado and Tostado are found in abundance while a handful of different last names predominate in other provincial cities. After a few generations, there were so many people with like last names, the two-last-name system became even more important to society.

The system works like this: When a son is born to José Lizarraga Osuna and his wife María García de Lizarraga his name, if he is named after his father, will be José Lizarraga García. His first last name is his father's family name and his second last name is his mother's maiden name. This is José Jr's name for life, however women suffer name changes upon being married and widowed.

If the same parents had a daughter originally named María Lizarraga García, upon marrying Tomás Osuna Beltrán her name would change to María Lizarraga de Osuna. (She keeps her father's original family name for life and adds "de" and her husband's family name.) If her husband should die, she will be known officially as María Lizarraga Viuda (widow, often abbreviated as "Vda.") de Osuna. Her children's original last names will be Osuna Lizarraga which the boys will keep for life and the girls will change to Osuna "de" something or other upon marriage.

Anyone who has visited small Texas towns has found that the small number of first and last names available (due, as in Mexico, to a small number of original settlers) has caused men to be identified as Billy Joe or even Billy Bob. And while Billy Bob's name is quite appropriate and serviceable for distinguishing him from a lot of other Billies in his hometown, he would probably be the laughing-stock if he used it in the big city, where naming isn't such a problem.

Likewise in Mexico, even though the two-last-name system helps avoid confusion, middle names are also sometimes essential. Paternal last names are listed first in Mexican phone books and directories. Then, maternal last names and then first and middle names. The Mazatlán phone directory has around 600 Lizarragas listed and about 100 of them are Lizarraga-Lizarragas. There are also many Osuna - Osunas listed.

Mexican mothers particularly like to name their sons after relatives and José and Juan are among the most popular names. Because of so many double last names plus similar first names, people must use their middle names to help identify them. So in the provinces there are many men called José Luis, José Angel, José Francisco, José Antonio, José Ignacio, Juan José, Juan Pablo, Juan Diego, and Juan Carlos. These people ordinarily use their middle names to distinguish themselves from their tcoyacos, or namesakes. Nicknames are also commonly used, and, as in Texas, two are sometimes used, so José Ignacio is called Pepé Nacho by his family and friends.

In the Mexican provinces almost everyone precedes people's first name with la or el. So, Juana is referred to as la Juana and Juan as el Juan. This habit is considered extremely offensive and gauche in the big cities and in other Spanish-speaking countries, where Juana and Juan are referred to simply by using their names.

Nicknames are popular in the city and country alike. Men's nicknames include Pancho or Paco for Francisco, Fito for Adolfo, Memo for Guillermo, Neto for Ernesto, Beto for Alberto or Roberto, Chuy for Jesús, Manolo for Manuel, Toño for Antonio and Tino for Florentino. There are so many Marias in Mexico that almost all of them have to use middle names to distinguish themselves. María de la Luz, María Esther, María del Carmen, María Teresa and María Luisa are all popular versions. Mayté is the common nickname for María Teresa and Malu for María Luisa. Luz is the nickname for María de la Luz, Bety for Beatriz or Elizabeth, Chela for Graciela, Chole for Soledad, Concha

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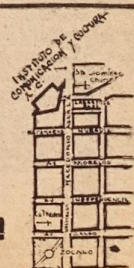
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for Concepción, Lola for Dolores, Lupe or Lupita for Guadalupe, Lety for Leticia and Tere for Teresa.

Diminutive endings are often added to names as well as nicknames to show affection. Pepé, the child, may be called Pepito, Chepito or Pepitín by almost anyone. When he becomes a man, only very close friends or relatives will use these names as an honorary title, a nickname conveying endearment and esteem. But, coming from the mouth of others the diminutive could convey an open display of disrespect - an alias designed to demean and ridicule poor José. Likewise Jesús is called Jesusito or Chuyito; Antonio is Toñito; Luis is Luicito; Juana is Juanita and Guadalupe is Lupita.

Nicknames indicating family relationships are popular all over México. Sons are commonly called hijo or hijito; daughters, hija. Abuelito or abuelita are used for "gramps" or "granny" or shortened to abue for either of them. Children, like their parents are often called papito, papi, mami or mamita. Cousins are addressed as primo or prima when they are adults and primito or primita when adults speak to children. A sister-in-law can be addressed affectionately as cuñada and a brother-in-law is called cuñado.

Aunts are often called tía and uncles addressed as tío. Compadre is the name people call the godfather of their children and comadre, the godmother. These are often shortened to compa' and comae' in rural areas and widened to include everyone in a circle of middle-aged friend. Brothers are called mano or hermanito by siblings. Mano is also a street term used among men to indicate a soul-mate. An older man may be addressed as tío by a younger man in the same way. Godchildren are often addressed as ahijado or ahijada.

In Mexico people are readily tagged by family, friends and strangers with nicknames having to do with their appearance and these are always affectionate. They are never demeaning although they might seem to be by English-speaking people. Calling someone "fatty" (gordo or gorda) is never an insult, but always a compliment. Even fairly thin people are affectionately called by these names.

When the emphasis is on the affection, they're called gordito or gordita. Mi gordo, mi gorda, mi viejo or mi vieja are commonly used among spouses. And in Spanish the connotation is much more endearing than "my old lady" in English.

Calling someone fat, old or even ugly, simply describes them and is never considered insulting. The Mexican list of real insults is plenty long enough without these and usually has to do with a person's lack of parentage rather than his appearance.

One friend's original apodo or nickname was el pulpo (the octopus, a common one a long the coast). He got stuck with this moniker at an early age because his head was large, his arms and legs long and gangly and he habitually grabbed up the toys from his brothers and sisters. He's thirty-five today and still known as el pulpo in his hometown, but is called gordo by everyone in the city where he lives today. Many nicknames used by family and old-time friends like gordo or flaco (skinny) describe physical attributes which can no longer be discerned.

Strangers will often call people nicknames having to do with their most outstanding physical characteristic which might be considered an insult in another culture, but is simply a quick way to identify someone whose name is not known in Mexico. So short people are called enano (dwarf, also used by adults talking to children) or chaparro (shorty). Children are often called esquinques, the Aztec word which meant small dog and today means a kid or brat. The fair-skinned are called güero and güera; the dark-skinned, prieto and prieta. Flat-nosed people are called chato or chata; the curly-haired are immediately identified as chino or china which also indicates persons with oriental features.

Any pale-skinned or foreign-seeming person is tagged gachupín. People are called chiva, pollo or tigre if they resemble a goat, chicken or tiger. If a girl is pretty she may be called linda, muñeca, mona or chula. Bald men are called pelón; gimpy ones, cojo. If you behave in a strange way, people will probably call you el loquito or la loquita. People that chatter a lot are called perrico.

More formally, birthday cards addressed to young children have the title Niño or Niña written before the name of the child. After age sixteen, this changes to Joven or Señorita. Mr. and Mrs. García (Juan and María) are addressed as Los Señores García together.

They're known as el Sr. Juan García and la Señora de García separately. When calling to someone in the street, the titles joven, señor, señorita and señora are used. While it's fairly easy to decide whether to

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call a man joven or señor, it's more tricky deciding whether to call a woman señorita or señora. A woman of marriageable age who is not married would probably prefer to be called señora by a stranger - the assumption being that she is attractive enough to have married by now. This will certainly be acceptable for strangers to use on a street corner, but in other situations you need to be more careful. The term señorita still denotes virginity to modern Mexicans. And although the term señora describes someone worthy of respect and honor when the speaker knows the woman is in fact married, it is otherwise an undignified insult (describing a woman who has been deflowered by a man who was not her legal husband). And even though it's a well-known fact that many of Mexico's modern señoritas are not virgins, the señora insult can still give place to a fistfight and even, in extreme circumstances, a duel. A widow until very recently was always addressed as yuuda. Today she's most likely called señora informally, but her official name will be her Christian name plus her paternal last name followed by "Viuda de" and her husband's surname.

Piropos are special remarks made by men to women in the street and some nicknames

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- 15-22-29 Lectures-Santo Domingo ex-convent-10:30 a.m.
- 22 Cultural Activities-Ethnic groups from the Sierra Juarez-Alameda Park-Noon
- 28 Photo-Exhibition-10 a.m. -Santo Domingo ex-convent Concert-Primavera Orchestra-Cathedral court yard-7 p.m.



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are used exclusively for these. While the term *mamacita* indicates approval of the looks of a normal-sized woman, *mamasota* is reserved for large, good-looking women and large blondes are called *güerotas*. In Mexican culture *piropos* are always considered as compliments and the appropriate role of the woman is to pretend she has not heard the remark. But some of them are so witty and outrageously funny, it's hard to pretend they weren't heard.

More formally, people are always referred to and addressed with their professional titles much more than in the United States. Doctor and doctora are used for medical doctors, dentists and most definitely for people with post-graduate degrees. Professor and profesora are used for teachers.

Juan González, the architect is referred to as *el Arquitecto González* and addressed as *Arquitecto González*. Engineers are addressed as *Ingeniero*; judges as *Juez*; and biologists as *Biólogo*.

The term *licenciado* is used for people who have a five-year university degree in law, political science, economy, etc. Although *abogado* is the specific term for lawyer or attorney, the Mexican barristers are addressed as *Licenciado* or *Licenciada*.

The title *Maestro* is used to confer respect and honor on an older man who is very good at his trade. It is used to flatter the master mechanic, plumber or electrician. Waiters are usually called by saying *joven* or *maestro*, depending upon their age. (In some parts of the country *joven* is acceptable for a waiter of any age.) Waitresses are addressed as *señorita* or *señora*. The terms *mesero* and *mesera* are

acceptable, but not generally used by Mexicans.

City mayors are called *Presidente (Municipal)* and sometimes *Alcalde*; councilmen are called *Regidor*. All correspondence to and from government officials has the letters "H.C." before a person's name or title, which indicates "Honorable Citizen".

Many Mexican people and places have Aztec names. Although 56 other native languages are still spoken today by peoples whose cultures out-lived the now defunct Aztec culture, Aztec names outlived the same names in the other indigenous languages. Today many of the names used are the same ones the Spanish Conquistadors recorded. They invariably recorded Aztec names for things instead of the names in other local native languages because they had more contact with the Aztecs, the most important and powerful natives, and also because the Aztec language, Nahuatl, was more manageable and easier to record in Spanish.

So many places in México still have their Aztec names rather than the names given them by local inhabitants. Cancún in Aztec language meant "nest of vipers"; Mazatlán, "place of the deer"; Huatulco, "place where wood is revered" and Xochimilco "floating flower gardens". Acapulco meant "place where the reeds were destroyed" and Guanajuato "hill of frogs".

Christian names used by people today they were originally Aztec include Xochilt (flower) for girls and Cuitlahuac and Cuauhtémoc (both names of Aztec rulers) for men. Malinche was the name of the Aztec woman who became the translator of the Spanish Conquistadores and any Mexican who is more interested in foreign cultures than his own is still known as a *malinchista* today.

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Our office is 4 blocks north of the Zocalo at the Institute of Communication and Culture, A.C. Come by and get acquainted.

But, above all, enjoy our beautiful Oaxaca.

Yolanda García C.

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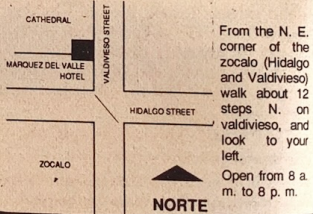


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