# CURRENT HISPANIC IMMIGRATION IS UNIQUE IN U.S. HISTORY

By Seth Mydans

LOS ANGELES —

Professor David Hayes-Bautista, a third-generation Mexican American who sends his daughter to Mexico for tennis lessons, is part of an immigrant wave that he says is unlike any other in American history. Because of the geographical closeness of the country of his ancestors and because of modern communications and transportation, he and other Mexican Americans are maintaining ties with their ancestral culture to a degree generally not possible for other immigrant groups.

The connections are vivid in interviews with Mexican immigrants in Los Angeles and form a unifying theme in a three-year study of Hispanic cultural attitudes by Hayes-Bautista, head of the Chicano Studies Research Center at the University of California at Los Angeles.

Although his study did not separate those of Mexican descent from other Hispanic people, Hayes-Bautista said he believed that many of the findings about cultural ties could be generalized to include descendants of Puerto Ricans, Cubans or other Hispanic nationalities who predominate in other areas of the country.

He said attitudes expressed by more than 1,000 participants in his study about language, culture and self-identification led him to conclude that Hispanic people are evolving to a bilingual, bicultural culture. "We could come back in 100 years and the Latinos will not have assimilated in the classical sense," Hayes-Bautista said. "I'm pretty sure they will still have a sense of being Latinos."

The nation's Hispanic minority grew by about 2.5 million people during the past decade, to about 22.4 million, or 8.9 percent of the US population in 1990, the census found. In California, about 7.7 million people, or 26 percent of the population, are of Hispanic descent. Mexican Americans make up 80 percent of the Hispanic population in California, as against 60 percent to 65 percent of the Hispanic population nationwide, Hayes-Bautista said.

If Mexican Americans have stronger cultural ties to their ancestral country than many other immigrant groups have had over the years, one explanation is the history of seasonal or temporary migration from Mexico.

Jobs in the north are one part of the national dream in a country that shares 2,000 miles of border with the United States. Continuing this tradition is 22-year-old Petra Gonzalez Rodriguez, who is from a village near Mexico City and sells Popsicles from a pushcart in Los Angeles. "If you work here for a week and you save enough to send $100 home, someone can eat for a month," she said.

In Hayes-Bautista's study, many respondents said that Hispanic history should be taught in schools and that children should maintain their family's His-panic culture. These attitudes, along with a working knowledge of Spanish, were maintained to a significant degree through the third generation and beyond.

In his own family, Hayes-Bautista said, his daughter watches soap operas on the Spanish-language television stations that form an important link for the Hispanic population across the United States. For tennis lessons she travels occasionally to visit a cousin in Guadalajara, Mexico.

"I find that fascinating," Leo Estrada, a demographer at the University of California at Los Angeles who specializes in Hispanic immigration, said of the findings in the study. "He actually finds that the sequence that would be expected, from immigrant to second generation and on to become homogeneous, gets arrested."

Speaking of people who travel frequently to Mexico from their homes in the American Southwest for a birthday party or a weekend, Estrada said: "They never thought of themselves as having left totally. I think one of the most remarkable things I see is the number of people to whom the border has become artificial."

One young Mexican immigrant, Jose Hernandez, a 26-year-old carpenter, described the paradoxical culture shock he experienced on discovering that he had arrived in a Mexican community in East Los Angeles — so self-contained that he could not even find anybody with whom he could practice speaking English. "When I first arrived in Tijuana I saw all these white faces, all these gringos," Hernandez said in Spanish. "I thought, `That's what it must be like in the United States.' Then I came to East Los Angeles and I never see a white face."

Jose Gomez, 46, owner of La Famosa bakery, has lived in East Los Angeles for 30 years but has not learned English and said that in his heart he remains a citizen of Zacatecas, Mexico. Like a majority of those in Hayes-Bautista's study, Gomez places a high

priority on family closeness. He said he was so uncomfortable with the thought that his children might move away, as American children often do, that he had bought four small houses nearby as graduation presents for them. ■

## What Kind of Madness?

By Diana Walsh

SAN FRANCISCO —

When Lucy Lopez registered her son, Michael, for kindergarten two years ago, she pleaded with school administrators not to place him in a Spanish bilingual class. They did it anyway but they didn't keep him there. Within two weeks of his entrance into first grade, Michael, who is fluent in English and whose first language is Spanish, was transferred into yet another bilingual class — this one Chinese.

"When they first told me, I almost had a cow," Lopez said. "I asked them, `Why my son, why not one of the others?'"

Participation in bilingual programs is supposed to be voluntary, and eventually Lopez relented and gave her consent. But she says she felt she had no choice. At Garfield Elementary, Michael's assigned school, every kindergarten class was bilingual. The only alternative would have been to bus him to a school farther from home.

And when administrators wanted to switch him to the Chinese class — a move made to balance the number of students in the school's first grade class-rooms — Lopez said she felt too pressured to say no.

Most of Michael's first grade class is taught in English, but his teacher often switches to Cantonese to instruct youngsters who don't always understand English. If the experts are correct, Michael is probably spending a good deal of his day blocking out much of what he hears.

"You've got to ask yourself what kind of madness this is," said bilingual expert Lily Wong Fillmore of UC-Berkeley. "What purpose does that serve except to confuse the poor child?"

Garfield principal May Huie, who acknowledged that Michael would be better off in a regular or Spanish bilingual class, said such moves are equally frustrating for administrators who face a massive juggling act each year when the district tells them how many bilingual classes they must provide.

Ligaya Avenida, who heads the bilingual department for The City's schools, says that although the district frowns upon schools that switch children back and forth between languages, it is not uncommon. "It's very difficult because of space problems," she said. "We could avoid it if every child came in at the beginning of the year, but with the daily influx of children, it's difficult."

Michael's mother, who graduated from San Francisco schools herself six years ago, remains concerned. "I was placed in a bilingual class and I felt it held me back," she said. "I didn't want that to happen to Michael."