LEARN MEXICAN SPANISH – GREETINGS, PHRASES, SLANG, AND SOME OTHER CULTURAL ASPECTS

With more than 120 million speakers, Mexico is the world's largest Spanish-speaking country (almost three times the population of Spain!). Mexico has an interesting and diverse culture, which can be discovered through its language.

In this blog post, we will discuss some of the most important aspects of Mexican Spanish, and we will list the most common words and phrases to get to understand your Mexican fellows. We will also look at some cultural aspects that are crucial to understanding Mexican culture. So, without further delay, let's jump right in!

How to greet somebody in Mexico?

Mexican people are very friendly, so you don't want to miss your opportunity to make some friends over there! There are many ways to greet a friend in Mexico, the simplest being the good ol' "Hola". However, you definitely want to keep these other phrases in mind, to say hi like a local:

- **¡Qué onda!** This could be considered the Mexican version of 'What's up!'.
- **¡Qué tranza!** Even more colloquial than "¡Qué onda!", also used to ask how somebody is doing.
- **¡Qué pedo!** This is one of the most informal ways to greet somebody. Use it wisely, and only with close friends because it could sound a bit aggressive if you use it with someone you are unfamiliar with. 'Pedo' means fart, so don't try to understand the sense of this phrase! You will see the word 'Pedo' in many other phrases in Mexican Spanish, each one with a very different meaning! So, just try to deal with it gently.
- **¡Ya llovió!** It is used to greet somebody when you haven't seen that person for a long time. It could be the Mexican equivalent of "Long time no see". The literal meaning of this phrase is 'It rained'. It does not make any sense when looking at the literal translation of it; however, you can think of it as someone who sees some rain coming after a long period of drought.
- **¡Qué milanesas que no bisteces!** Similar to "¡Ya llovió!" this phrase is a funny variation of the phrase **"¡Qué milagro, hace tiempo que no te veía!"** meaning

'What a miracle, I haven't seen you for a long time!'.

It is also important to notice that Mexicans tend to whistle as a form to greet a close friend, especially between male friends, followed by a handshake and even a "masculine/manly hug" (hoping that makes sense!) with a little tap on the back.

Between girls, it is common to greet a friend with a kiss on the cheek. Mexicans only kiss once on the cheek, unlike some European countries, where they kiss twice or even three times!

A kiss on the cheek can also be used between a male and a female. It is not very common to see two guys kissing on the cheek as a form of greeting. For many guys in Mexico, this is not considered a "masculine behavior", so just use a handshake when in doubt!

But what happens when you want to greet someone who is not around your age? Let's say a kid or an elderly person. There are no written rules for this, which may vary from person to person, depending on the familiarity between two individuals. Generally speaking, you can greet a child with a simple hand wave or even with a gentle kiss on the cheek (normally between relatives). Older people tend to keep a personal distance, but you can greet a senior male with a handshake and a senior female with a kiss on the cheek.

How to say Goodbye?

Now that we are familiar with saying Hi, let's take a look at some common words and phrases we would use in Mexico to say farewell more colloquially:

- **¡Ahí nos vemos!** Meaning 'See you!'. *"Ahí"* literally means "there", however in this phrase it doesn't carry any particular meaning, since we are not referring to any specific place per se.
- **¡Ahí nos vidrios!** Even more colloquial than the phrase above, *"vidrios"* means glass, but it is just a funny variation of the word *"vemos"*.
- **¡Cuídate!** In Mexico, it is super common to say 'Take care' when saying goodbye to a friend, so don't be surprised to hear this word very often at the end of a conversation.
- **¡Te me cuidas!** Similar to *'¡Cuídate!'*, in Mexico it is common to add the reflexive pronoun 'me' 'te' or 'le' to express more familiarity. You can think of it as if you were saying 'Take care of me'.

- **¡Cámara!** The literal translation of this word is 'Camera'. There is not any logical explanation for why we use this word to say goodbye; however, you will hear it often being used among young people, especially in the capital city.

Grammatical Aspects of Mexican Spanish

Even though all Spanish-speaking countries share the same grammatical foundation, there are some remarkable differences in Mexican Spanish compared to European Spanish or even compared to Spanish spoken in other countries in Latin America.

One of the most important aspects you will notice is second-person pronouns. While in Spain, they would use the word *'vosotros'* (you guys) when talking to a group of people, in Mexico we will always use the word *'ustedes'* regardless of the level of familiarity between people. 'Vosotros' is practically never used in Mexico, and people may not understand exactly what you mean when you use that personal pronoun. So just keep in mind to drop out 'vosotros' while in Mexico!

Unlike many other Latin American countries, the use of *'vos'* is also never used in the Aztec country. Mexican people will only use *'Tú'* when talking to a person around the same age or to a friend, and 'Usted' when talking to someone respectfully.

Another grammatical aspect you will notice is verb tenses. The use of past perfect, or in Spanish *'pretérito perfecto compuesto'* is not used very frequently in Mexican Spanish, compared to European Spanish. In Mexico, we would rather use the preterite (pretérito indefinido) to express actions that have just occurred.

So, phrases like **'Ya he comido'**, in Mexico would rather be said as **'Ya comí'**, **'He hecho ejercicio hoy por la mañana' = 'Hice ejercicio hoy por la mañana', 'Martha ha dicho que iba a llegar antes de las siete' = 'Martha dijo que iba a llegar antes de las siete',** and so on.

Please keep in mind that, despite the fact of being quite uncommon, we do use the 'pretérito perfecto compuesto' in some occasions in Mexican Spanish. The most common is when we want to express experiences that we have had in the past, like **'Ya he venido a este restaurante un par de veces'** (I've already been to this restaurant a couple of times), **'Ya he probado el mezcal'** (I've already tried the mezcal), etc.

Pronunciation and Accents in Mexican Spanish

When comparing the pronunciation of European Spanish vs Mexican Spanish, the most notable difference you will hear is probably the pronunciation of the letter 's'. While in Spain, it is pronounced as a voiceless *'th'* in English, in Mexico the letter *'s'* is pronounced like a voiceless 's'. This also applies to the letter *'z'* and *'c'* (when it appears immediately before an 'i' or an 'e'). Therefore, words like **'casa'** and **'caza'** have the same pronunciation in Mexican Spanish.

If we talk about accents, it is important to remember that they may vary from region to region in Mexico. So, you won't hear the same accent in a place like Yucatán (southeast of Mexico), and in a place like Monterrey (north of Mexico).

Accents are such a vast topic, but if we have to generalize, it is said that people from the coast tend to never pronounce the 's' in almost every word, so you can hear phrases like **'¿Qué vas a hacer?'** being pronounced as *'¿Qué va'jacer?'* (the 'j' being pronounced as a h in English). So, instead of the sound of an 's', they replace it with the sound of the letter 'j' in Spanish.

People from northern Mexico also have their own particular accent and way of speaking. One of the most notable characteristics of their way of speaking is that some people tend to speak in a very high voice volume, sometimes almost as if they were yelling at you. However, it is not a matter of them being mad at you, instead, it is just the regular volume which they tend to speak with, so just get used to it!

Popular Words and Phrases to sound like a Mexican!

We have listed down here the most common and useful words and phrases that are part of Mexican slang. Don't try to do the literal translation of these words and phrases because most of the time they won't make any sense! Just try to get a feel of how these words are used and in which context.

Word list:

- **Güey/Wey**. This is probably one of the most popular words in Mexican Spanish. It is used in a very colloquial way to call your friend or just a simple person. It can be equivalent to the English words 'dude', 'mate', or just 'guy'. It can also be used as

an adjective, to call someone 'dumb' or 'stupid'. Example: **"¡Estás bien güey!"** (How dumb you are!).

- **Fresa**. Literally means 'strawberry'. However, it has nothing to do with the fruit, but rather it is used to describe someone who is very obnoxious and materialistic, and who normally comes from a privileged background.
- **Naco/Naca**. This word is a little bit difficult to explain, since it can be used in multiple ways. It is often used to describe someone who is kind of vulgar, with no class, or that is kind of "ghetto". It can also be used as a way to call someone "disrespectful", or who doesn't have good manners towards people. An example where 'naco' can be used to describe someone, is when someone catcalls a lady on the street, therefore, that lady can say to that person: **¡Eres un naco!**
- **Chingón/Chingona**. Used as an adjective. It is used to describe someone or something as amazing, cool, kick@ss, etc. For example: **"¡Mi hermano es un chingón! Ganó medalla de oro en la competencia."** (My brother is amazing! He won a gold medal in the competition.)
- **Chido/Chida**. Similar to **'Chingón'**. Used more often to describe objects or situations. For example: **"¡Qué chida está tu playera! ¿Dónde la compraste?"** (How cool is your t-shirt! Where did you buy it?)
- **Pedo**. As we mentioned before, the literal translation of this word is 'fart', and it is sometimes used in this way. However, this word can be used either as an adjective or as a noun. As an adjective, it is used to describe someone who is drunk, so we say **"Estar pedo"** meaning 'to be drunk'. As a noun, it functions as a slang term to refer to a problem. For example: **Manuel no se siente muy bien, trae unos pedos con su novia.** (Manuel is not feeling well, he is having some issues with his girlfriend).
- **Neta**. It is used to say 'truly', 'reality', or 'truth'. For example: **"La neta, yo no quiero ir a ese lugar".** (To be honest, I don't want to go to that place). **"La neta es que ando corto de dinero".** (The truth is that I'm short on money).
- **Ahorita**. Used very frequently in Mexico, it can be translated as 'in a moment'. However, you should not take it very literally, since Mexicans often used it as an equivalent of 'later' or 'much later' depending on the context. For instance:

Example #1:

A= **Pásame mi bolsa.** (Pass me my bag).

B= **Sí, ahorita te la paso.** (Yes, I'll pass it to you right away).

Hey there. Welcome.

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Example #2:

A= **Nos vemos en la fiesta.** (See you at the party).

B= **Sí, ahorita nos vemos.** (Yes, see you later).

'Ahorita' doesn't have a unique translation, it always depends on the context of the phrase, so it sometimes can mean 'right away' and sometimes it can mean 'later in two hours'!

Note: Mexican Spanish often uses diminutive (*-ito, -ita*) for many words. We use the diminutive in Mexico as a way of showing kindness when we speak, especially when using adjectives that may not be very positive. For example: **El hermano de Jessica está gordito.** (Jessica's brother is kind of fat).

Diminutives can also be used with nouns, as in **"Se me antojó un cafecito"** (I'm craving coffee), or as in 'Ahorita' which comes from the word 'Ahora'.

Phrases:

- **¡Qué padre!** This phrase is used to express that something is very cool, pleasant or amazing. Example: **¡Qué padre! Hay descuentos en todas las tiendas.** (This is so cool! There are sales in all stores).
- **¡No manches!** Used when something or someone disturbs you in some way or when you feel surprised. Example: **¡No manches! No sabía que Andrea estaba casada.** (Say what? I didn't know Andrea was married).

- **¡Qué hueva!** Used to express that something is awfully boring or annoying. For example: **¡Qué hueva tener que levantarme a las 5 de la mañana en domingo!** (How annoying it is to have to get up at 5 am on a Sunday!).
- **¡Aguas, aguas!** *'Aguas'* means water, but it is also used as an alarm sign to tell somebody 'Careful', 'Watch out!'. Example: **¡Aguas, aguas! Viene coche.** (Watch out! There's a car coming by).
- **¿Mande?** This single word is used when someone couldn't hear what you just said and wants you to repeat it. In Mexico, it is sometimes considered rude to say *'¿Qué?'* (What?) for this kind of situation, so it will often be replaced with **'¿Mande?'.**

Did you know that...?

Many words in Mexican Spanish originated from indigenous languages, principally 'Nahuatl' language. Words like **'tomate', 'chocolate', 'aguacate', 'chicle'** originated from the Nahuatl words 'tomatl', 'xocolatl', 'áwakatl', and 'tzictli'. These words originated from ancient times, and now they are part of daily speech! So don't be surprised to hear that someone is going to buy stuff at a 'tianguis' (street market), or if you hear somebody calling a kid 'escuincle'.

Movies and TV shows to become more familiar with Mexican Spanish

- La Casa de las Flores (TV Show available on Netflix).
- Nosotros los Nobles (2013 movie, directed by Gary Alazraki).
- La hora Pico (Comedy TV show).
- La familia P. Luche (Comedy TV show – Amazon Prime link – but you can find it elsewhere as well).
- El Chavo del 8 (Comedy TV show).

And... If prefer the Drama genre, you can always watch your good ol' 'Telenovela'!

Some last words...

And that's it for now! We hope this blog post will become useful during your time in Mexico or whenever you want to mingle with your Mexican friends or family! Remember that practice makes perfect, so we highly encourage you to put everything you learn into

practice! ***¡Ahí nos vemos!***