

Gringo

Gringo: A term used with negative connotation for English-speaking people, mostly in Latin America or Spain.

I didn't go into much more detailing tracing down all the theories of it's emergence in WWII or Vietnam since I could easily find older records of the word.

It was easy to find lots of reasons for the word in the Mexican-America War which started in 1846. There is a claim that the term came from the Mexicans calling the American soldiers by a corrupt form of "Green, go" which is, theoretically, what the American captains yelled to start their troops charging and referred to their green uniforms. However, American's wore blue uniforms, so, that was a simply crushed theory.

The next claim comes from the song, "Green Grow the Lilacs" a popular song during the Mexican-America war (1846). The American's would sing it and the Mexicans called them the "green grows" or "gringos". It seems to be a popular notion until I began to trace the word in Spanish.

The word first appears in writing in 1787. (That's 60 years before the AM War.) It is recorded in the *Diccionario Castellano*, The Castilian Dictionary. The Castilian dialect of central/northern Spain has become the bases for modern day Spanish. The dictionary states that in Malaga, Spain, the term "gringos" was used to define anyone who couldn't really pick up Spanish that well. A foreigner.

The Spanish word "Griego" means, simply, "Greek". The word was slurred and corrupted into "Gringo". But, not all people who it was applied to could be Greek. After all, "gringo" today is not used for Grecians.

Uniquely, Spanish and English share a similar phrase in their native languages, the phrase, "It's Greek to me!" (hablar en griego, in Spanish) which translates into the same thing, "I don't have a f'ing clue what you are freaking talking about". The term probably was not as negative and meant more of an "outsider" or that the Spanish could not understand the gibberish coming from the foreigners.

(Incidentally, the phrase "it's Greek to me" was popularized by Shakespeare and Thomas Dekker during the Elizabethan period but is from the medieval phrase, "it is Greek and cannot be read" or Graecum est; non potest legi. The concept is actually a Greek invention, they had a term for "I don't have a f'ing clue what you are freaking talking about" that was derived from their word meaning "barbarian". But, I digress.)

Now, those who speak Spanish kept this term alive for anyone who could not pick up their language. A person who they could not understand.

Today, that term is still alive and well and has been attached to English-speaking people, foreigners in Latin America, Mexico and Spain where Portuguese and Spanish are spoken. The Mexican-American war and subsequent wars were probably great ways of perpetuating the myth, legend and helping to evolve the meaning of the word. The first time English speaking people heard the word used was probably during conflict and thusly the misunderstanding of the origins began.

Of course, with the internet, easy which everyone can travel and internet, the term is all over the place.