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## PALABRAS PAISAS: 30 WORDS, IDIOMS AND EXPRESSIONS YOU'LL ONLY HEAR IN MEDELLIN DE ANTIOQUIA

by Matt Dancis   June 28, 2016   Uncategorized



*By Matt Dancis.*

Medellin is the second most populous city in Colombia, after the capital Bogota, and is located in the department (like a province) of Antioquia. The people who live there are formally referred to

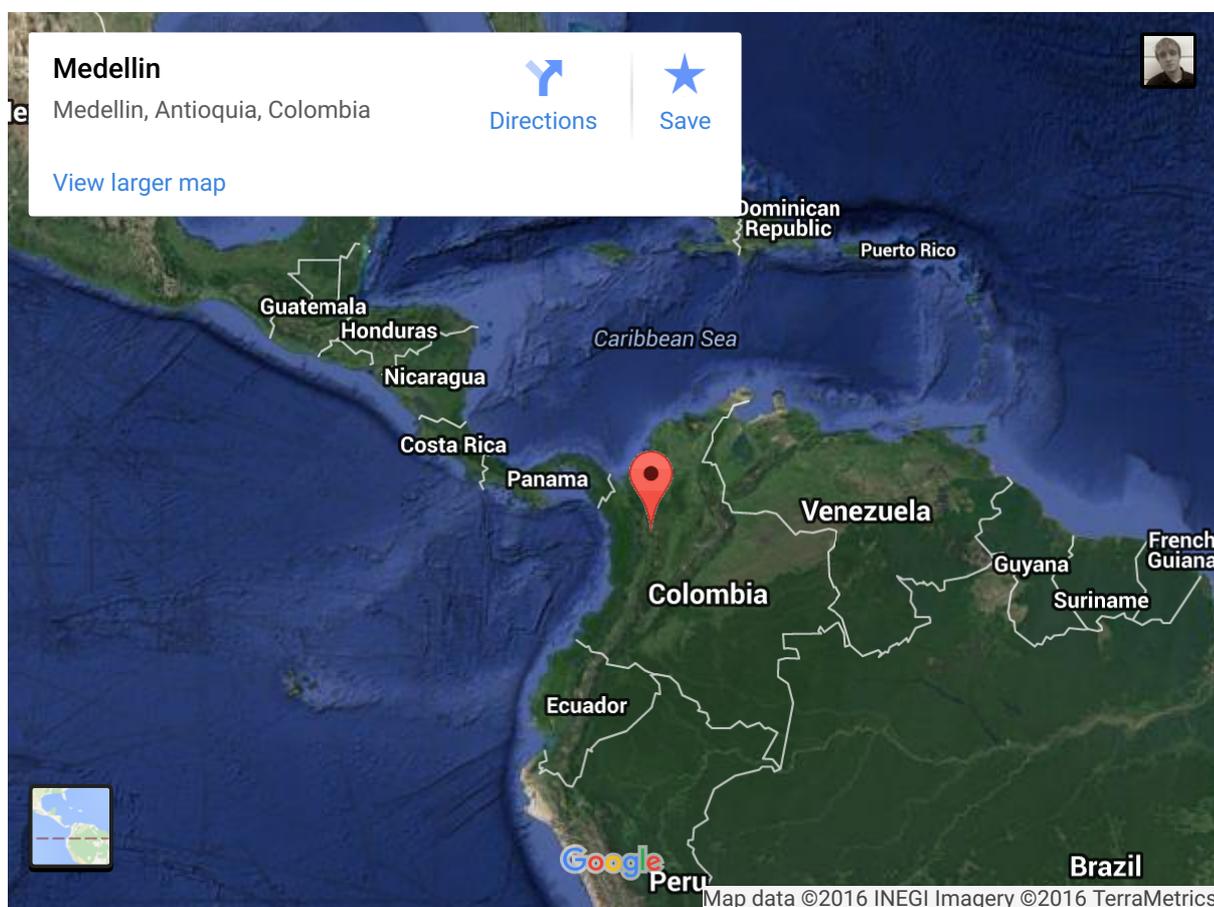
as Antioqueños, but more commonly, people call them Paisas.

The Paisa people have their own style and their own way of speaking.

I've been living in Medellin now for nearly a year and a half, working for [Language Trainers](#), and in my time here, I've picked up quite a bit of the lingo.

So in case you're planning a trip out to the land of the Paisas, here are 30 words, idioms and expressions you won't hear elsewhere.

Note: Some of these are exclusive to Medellin while others are used throughout Colombia.



## Greetings

**Que mas!:** The direct translation is “What else?” You may think such an expression is comparable to “What’s up,” to which the appropriate response would be, “Nothing much.” But you would be incorrect. What “Que mas” really means is, “How are you”, and the correct response is “Bien, y tú?” This is a very formal expression that you can use in a professional setting.

**Bien o no?:** Here is a less formal way of saying the same thing. It translates roughly into saying, “Are you good or not?” In English, that may come off as rather rude, but in Medellin it’s just

common parlance used to say hello to a friend. The best response: “Todo bien!”

**Que hubo mijo/mija:** When you hear it, it’ll be indistinguishable to how it’s written. When spoken, it sounds more like “Cue meeho!” It roughly translates to, “What was there my son?” But what it’s really saying is, “What’s going on?” or “What’s up, man!”

And don’t be put off by the fact that people who may or may not clearly be younger than you are calling you “My son”. They mean no disrespect.

**Amañado acá?:** Amañado, in Antioquia, is another way to say you’re happy or content. Paisas have a lot of pride in their home and they’ll want to know that you agree. This will be the first question every taxi driver in the entire city will ask you, followed by, “Medellin is muy bueno!”

## Customer service idioms

**A la orden!:** This is like saying, “At your service!” You will hear it constantly, whether you like it or not. Walk down any street of any neighborhood in Medellin and you’re sure to hear someone calling this out to you. You’re welcome to respond and if you’re not interested, there’s no shame if you prefer to just continue walking.

**Bien pueda!:** It’s like saying, “Help yourself,” or “Step right up!” This is another expression you’ll hear people yelling out as you pass by businesses and restaurants in commercial districts. Again, feel free to indulge if interested. And if not, you won’t be hurting any feelings if you continue on with your day.

**Con gusto:** Directly translating to “With pleasure”, this is what is said, without fail, following every single transaction, regardless of the setting. Many will say it before you even thank them, followed by a “Felíz día. Que estés bien!” That means “Have a good day. I hope you’re well.”

**Hacer la vaca:** The translation is to “make the cow,” but it’s meaning really has nothing to do with cows. When someone asks you, “Ya hiciste la vaca?” what they’re really saying is, “Did you chip in for the meal, bill, etc.”

**Ay, me tumbaron!:** Tumbare means to rip off. If you paid a pretty peso for an item you bought in the city center, only to find it doesn’t actually work, that’s an appropriate time to use this phrase, along with the obligatory palm to the forehead.



## Words And Idioms In Common Paisa Parlance

**Que pena!:** This one is extremely common, specifically in Colombia and can vary widely in meaning depending on the context. You won't hear this in other parts of the world, but in Antioquia, you'll hear it several times a day. It can mean anything from "how embarrassing", to "how inconvenient", to "sorry to bother you", to just plain "sorry." Anytime you want to say any of these, "Que pena," will suffice.

**Si o que?:** If someone is giving you instructions or directions, their steps will be interspersed with a "Si o que," in order to confirm that you're following. It's kind of like saying okay, or do you understand? In a sense, this phrase resembles "Bien o no" in that it seems rude when translated, since technically it means "Yeah or what!" But I promise there's no malice whatsoever. It's just something they say here.

**Pues:** This is the Paisa filler. If you really want to sound native, get used to filling dead air with this word. It's also used in Spain, but most Colombians will tell you it's not the same. You can also use it for emphasis. For example, if someone seems a bit bashful about waiting for you before they start eating, go ahead and give the green light by saying "Come pues!" which means "Eat already!"

# Terms Of Endearment And One Friendly Insult

**Parce/parcero:** This is the Paisa word for dude or mate. Every country has one. Mexico's is güey, Argentina's boludo. Colombia's is parce. If it's people with whom you have some confidence, you can call them parceros.

**Gordito/gordita:** Most English speakers consider any talk about weight to be 100% taboo unless it's addressed in the form of a compliment. In Colombia, if you're overweight, you're gordito, and that's what people call you. And from my experience, no one really seems all that offended by it.

**Conchudo/conchuda:** This one is a bit tricky to describe because it doesn't directly translate to anything in English. Think of it this way: if you invite a friend over for dinner, and he or she just assumes it's okay to go straight to your refrigerator and go to town on your leftovers, and then not even offer to wash the dishes after, that my friends, is a conchudo/conchuda (depending on if it's a guy or girl).

Offer an inch, they take a mile.



## Ways To Say "You Stink!"

**Cochino:** This one's basically like saying someone or something is nasty or dirty. You can say the opposing team of a soccer match is muy cochino. Or, you could be talking about your dirty boyfriend who never wants to shower. You would say Tu eres muy cochino, amor (You're super dirty my love).

**Grajo:** Forgot to put on deodorant this morning? Notice people covering up their noses on the

train? You've probably got grajo, the Colombian word for smelly armpits!

**Pecueca:** If it's not the pits then it's probably the feet. Smelly feet syndrome in Medellin is referred to as pecueca. But it's also used to describe something that's just plain crumby. For example if you have a phone that broke after a month, you would say "Este celular es una pecueca!"

## Ways To Say That Something's Funny

You wouldn't believe how many words Paisas have to say something's funny. Yet, one word you will almost never hear is gracioso, which is the only word that actually means funny in most other parts of the Spanish speaking world.

But in Medellin, you're more likely to hear the following:

**Tan charro:** This is the most common one. You can use this just as you use the word funny in English in pretty much any context.

**Chistoso:** This word derives from the word chiste, which means joke. You may be more familiar with the word broma, which is also used in Colombia, but not nearly as much as chiste.

**Que caja!:** This one's a bit weird. The English translation is "how box!" What it means is that it's something so funny that it made you laugh out loud. I couldn't tell you how the Paisa people arrived at associating boxes with laughing, but hey, language is weird. Just go with it.

**Pato:** Of the four funnies, pato is the most variable in its meaning. On the one hand it can mean someone who is outgoing in public, to the point that it's entertaining to watch their antics. But it can also mean that someone's a bit annoying at times. You would use it as follows: "Ella es tan pata", or "She's so funny."

## Words For Nightlife

**Estoy prenda:** This is their word for tipsy. But it qualifies well into several drinks. Only once your friends are carrying you home are you borracho – drunk.

**Rumba:** This is the word for party. There's a very slight difference between a fiesta and a rumba. If you like to rumbear, that means you like to go out, dance, drink, etc. A fiesta is an actual scheduled event to which people have been invited.



## Ojo! Words And Phrases To Be Careful With

**Eres buena/estás buena:** I used to teach English at a language institute in Medellín. Before class I used to chat with the students. One day, a female student told me in Spanish how she liked to play basketball, to which I responded by saying “Ah sí? Estás buena?” At that point, the girl turned as red as a tomato and the class burst out laughing. Don’t make this mistake! Eres buena means are you good at something? What I said had a sexual connotation and has *nothing* to do with basketball.

**Ahora / Ahorita / Ahora mismo:** Even native Spanish speakers get tripped up with this one. In most parts of the world, ahora means now. In Medellín, ahora means in a bit. Furthermore, ahorita means in a while, and ahora mismo, or ya, means right now. So if someone tells you ahora voy, and then turns around and walks upstairs, know that she or he has already informed you that she or he is in no rush to get moving.

**Aburrido:** In most countries, aburrido simply means bored. In Colombia, it means bored, upset, annoyed, or angry. It has a lot to do with context. If you can pick up which aburrido the speaker is using in any particular moment, that’s a sign that you’ve attained a pretty solid level of Spanish.

## Words And Phrases For Significant Others, Singles, And

# The Promiscuous

**Mi amor:** Whatever reservations you may have once had over public display of affection or gooey relationshipy ickiness you can leave at the airport. If you have any intention of having a Colombian boyfriend or girlfriend, you will be referring to each other exclusively as *mi amor*, *amorcito/amorcita*, *cariño*, *cielo*, *lindo/linda*, or *mamacita/papacito*. This list goes on, but I'll leave you with those for now.



**Grilla:** For the guys who prefer not to be tied down, there are always the grillas. The direct translation is a female cricket. The actual meaning is a promiscuous female. Presumably, it derives from the concept of hopping from man to man.

**Perro:** A *perro*, or a dog, is a promiscuous male. The *perro* is the male counterpart to the *grilla*. Any ladies looking for no strings attached Latin love will have no trouble finding one.

**Me puso los cachos!:** Directly translating to “He/she put the horns on me!” When said, you’ll typically see the person stick the devil horns to his or her forehead. This is what one says when he or she been cheated on. Here’s to hoping you never have to use this phrase. But it’s always good to be prepared.

## Common Expressions That Are Similar To English

**Matar dos pájaros de un solo tiro:** The direct translation is “To kill two birds with only one shot,” which is nearly identical to the English idiom “kill two birds with one stone.”

**Estoy entre la espada y la pared:** The translation is “I’m between the sword and the wall,” which

is comparable to our “I’m between a rock and a hard place.”

## Conclusion

Learning Spanish is one thing. But learning to speak like a native entails mastering the local words and expressions. I’m sure I’ve missed a gazillion of these.

If you’ve been around this way and know of some *palabras Paisas* that I missed, share them in the comments!

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Matt writes for Language Trainers, an international language tutoring company that teaches any language, anytime, anywhere. It has native speaking instructors throughout the world who give customizable private or small group classes either in person or on Skype. Take one of their free language level tests. Also be sure to check them out on Facebook. Contact Matt by email at [matt@languagetrainers.com](mailto:matt@languagetrainers.com).



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