

PHONETICS CAUSE PROBLEMS WHEN IDING XE CALLS - by Ing. Carl Huffaker
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It's just over 50 years since I sat in class and practiced the phonetic script that every student in anthropology class had to learn, back in those days before tape recorders. That script - which I don't remember at all - is beyond the capability of this typewriter, so I'll use appropriate English sounds, and underline them when they're used as a phonetic symbol.

Although "The Hour of Mexico" has been on the air for half a century there have been few network broadcasts in Mexico. This, along with the characteristic Latin-American suspicion by the country people of those in the Capitol, has prevented development of a standardized language such as the "Radio English" of the States. Each local Mexican station tries to establish a unique identity in program, personality, & language. The characteristic Latin mixture of high formality & extreme individuality results in a wide variety of ID formats, sometimes confusing to those new to DXing XEs. Here are some generalizations based on the IDs I've copied and taped the past year.

Mexico does not use the Spanish letters "Ch", "Ll", and Ñ in its call letter assignments. They never appear on formal ID tapes, but occasionally an ad lib announcer will ID XECH as XE-"che" or XELL as XE-"elya." When Y (the Spanish conjunction) stands alone, it's pronounced somewhat like "yes." In radio, the initial sound is exaggerated, and it becomes "Yee" in most IDs. In a word, the Spanish Y is exactly like I; and to differentiate it, the Mexicans invariably refer to the letter as "ee-griga" (Greek I). I have heard this form in IDs only twice during the past year.

Occasionally, a station will pronounce repetitive letters in its call. XE-R-R-R and XE-B-B are examples, but forms like XE-doble-L and XE-triple-A are far more common. W is pronounced both as "dobloo" and "doble-U," sometimes both in the same ID.

Pronouncing the call as a single word is a custom from the States. It was slow to arrive, as there are no three or four letter words that start with XE, and perhaps because X stands for a half dozen Indian phonemes that didn't exist in Spanish. However with the advent of prefix plus three letter calls, the custom of pronouncing the last three letters took hold; now, IDs like X-E-TOL (XETOL), and X-E-PHEY (XEPUE) are common.

The old stations, those with the prefix-plus-one-letter calls, consider it a mark of prestige to omit the prefix (X, Q, W, etc.) in all but very formal IDs. Some prefix-plus-two-letter stations omit all but the last letter, as in "La Zeta Zacateca" (XEXZ), and "La Y Grande" (XEYY)

Radio propagation is not kind to Mexican IDs. In English, we've become accustomed to one syllable names for our letters (with the exception of "W".) In Spanish, there's a dozen letters with two syllable names, and when a crash of static pulls the AGC to cut one syllable, what's left sounds like another letter, no matter how many times you play the tape.

Perhaps it is a bit more difficult to ID the XEs, especially when you're unfamiliar with the language; but isn't that what DXing is all about?

(Carl, while reading this, I was struck by the difference in attitude between the XEs and American stations. High formality? extreme individuality? unique identity? pride in having a 3 letter call? Maybe we need look only south of the border for a clue to the problems facing American AM stations. -ed.)