

Black Hair Vocabulary in Spanish (An Incomplete List)

Spanish	English	Connotation	Country/Countries of Use	Translation Provided By
crespo	kinky (non-specific), “like crisped”	often pejorative	Cuba, Latin America in general, excluding México	3 Afrolatina Twitter users
encaracolado	curly (non-specific, including kinky)	neutral	Cuba	1 Afrocubana Twitter user ⁱ
torzal	twist (noun)	neutral	Cuba	1 Afrocubana Twitter user
trenzas cocidas, trenzas pegadas ⁱⁱ	cornrows	neutral	Cuba	1 Afrocubana Twitter user
chino ⁱⁱⁱ	kinky or curly	usually pejorative	México	2 Afrolatina Twitter users, including myself
encaracolado	curly, “in the shape of a snail”	neutral	Brazil	1 Afrobrasileña Twitter user
colocho	kinky or curly	usually neutral, can be pejorative	El Salvador	1 Afrosalvadoreña Twitter user & 2 mestizo Twitter users
ondulado	wavy	neutral	Latin America in general	1 Afrolatina Twitter user
grueso	thick	neutral, can be pejorative	Latin America in general	1 Afrolatina Twitter user
colocho	kinky or curly	unknown	Guatemala	1 nonblack Guatemalteco Twitter user
hacer colochos	twist (verb), literally <i>to make twists</i>	unknown	Guatemala	1 nonblack Guatemalteco Twitter user
chino, achinado	cornrows	unknown	Guatemala	1 nonblack Guatemalteco Twitter user
tejidos	braids	neutral	La República Dominicana	1 Afrodominicana Twitter user
pelo malo	kinky (specific)	derogatory, literally <i>bad hair</i>	Latin America in general	4 Afrolatina Twitter users, including myself
ondas	waves	neutral	Cuba, Latin America in general	1 Afrocubana Twitter user
trenzas pegas	cornrows	unknown	Cuba	1 Afrocubana Twitter user
sereta	kinky	unknown	Cuba	1 Afrocubana Twitter user

peine caliente	hot comb	neutral	Latin America in general	1 Garífuna-Hondureña Twitter user
rulo	kinky (type 4a, 4b) or curly in general	neutral	Latin America in general	1 Afrolatina Twitter user
raratonga	afro	neutral	coast of Oaxaca, México	1 Afromexicano Twitter user
puchunco	kinky/coily (specific)	neutral	coast of Oaxaca, México	1 Afromexicano Twitter user
pelo cuco ^{iv}	kinky-coily (specific)	neutral, joking/affectionate	coast of Oaxaca, México	1 Afromexicano Twitter user
hinchado	kinky/"puffy"	pejorative	not widely used	1 Afrolatina Twitter user
grifo	kinky (specific)	derogatory	Puerto Rico	1 Afropuertorriqueña Twitter user

ⁱ The same Afrocubana Twitter user provided the first 4 translations. When asked if any of the translations she provided had derogatory or negative connotations, she replied: "i'm pretty sure they do not. podría ser que el término "crespo" fuera malinterpretado dependiendo de la persona pero por lo que yo sé y por la información que he recibido te puedo asegurar que no es despectivo," meaning *It is possible that the term "crespo" can be misinterpreted, depending on the person, but as far as I know, and with the information I have received, I can assure you that it is not inherently derogatory.*"

ⁱⁱ Bing Translate option on Twitter desktop translates this to "braids cooked or braids glued."

ⁱⁱⁱ "Chino" can also be used to describe thick curly hair that is not kinky. From what I understand, "chino" became a popular term in Mexico, in areas where Africans and Asians (especially Pacific islanders) were enslaved. Due to the geographical proximity and similar social standing of both groups, the identities became conflated. During certain parts of the colonial era, the only people legally allowed to be slaves were Africans. Many enslaved Asians were listed as "africanos" on the census. Additionally, Africans were sometimes referred to as "chinos."

^{iv} Cuco is a type of bird.

Black Hair Vocab in Spanish: Discussion Questions

1. Are you familiar with any of the words on this list? If so, do you agree with their descriptions?
2. Have you ever had trouble translating the word for a hairstyle or technique in English or Spanish? What was that experience like?
3. Do you notice any words on the list that are not specific to Black hair (i.e. do you notice any words that could also be used to describe the hair textures of non-Black people)?
4. Do you think it is important to have words that describe Black hair specifically? Why?
5. Have you ever heard any of these words used before? In what context?
6. Are there any missing words that you think should be added to the list?

Activity

Come up with your own words/phrases to describe Black hair or Black hair techniques in English or Spanish. Feel free to use metaphors, similes, and other figurative language. Make your own chart of neutral and positive words/phrases.