

## Intonational Distinctiveness of Mexican American English

The features of intonation that distinguish Mexican American English (MAE) from Anglo English have been incompletely described in the past. Little research has examined MAE intonation, and final contours have dominated a good bit of that research (e.g., Fought, 2003) even though important diagnostic features occur in other parts of intonational phrases (Penfield and Ornstein-Galicia, 1985). Furthermore, intonation has not been used in quantitative studies of MAE, even though it is probably among the most salient features for listeners. We attempt to remedy both of these shortcomings.

Our data are derived from studies of Mexican American and Anglo American communities in two states, North Carolina and Texas. Mexican Americans were interviewed in Raleigh, North Carolina, and Pearsall, Texas. These two locales differ considerably. In Raleigh, the Mexican American community is incipient—so that all of our interviews are with first-generation speakers—and Mexican Americans are a decided minority. Conversely, in Pearsall, the Mexican American community is at least four generations old—allowing us to procure interviews with different generations of speakers—and Mexican Americans make up by far the majority of the population. Pearsall thus represents a baseline case of what happens when Anglo influence is reduced, with which we can compare the patterns found in Raleigh. Interviews were conducted with Anglos in several communities in the two states. All interviews were conversational, and thus all of our data are from conversational speech.

We concentrated on two intonational features that appeared to differentiate Mexican American speakers from Anglos most consistently. One, also noted in Penfield and Ornstein-Galicia (1985), is a predisposition in MAE toward rising glides—L+H\* in the Tone and Break Index (ToBI) notation. We found L+H\* accents to be more frequent in MAE than in Anglo English in both Texas and North Carolina, though perhaps more in Texas MAE than in North Carolina MAE. Social class differences are less clear, at least in our data. The other difference was that Anglo English tended to show sweeping drops in  $F_0$  between pitch accents, with discontinuities in  $F_0$  before pitch accents, while MAE showed gentler falls and rises in  $F_0$ . This difference was also manifested in both Texas and North Carolina.

Our quantitative analyses not only show that there are measurable differences in intonation between MAE and Anglo English, but also show how intonation can be handled quantitatively. Intonation is widely known as one of the most neglected realms in sociolinguistics. Our results demonstrate, however, that intonation can be integrated into quantitative sociolinguistics more readily than is often thought.

### References

- Fought, Carmen. 2003. *Chicano English in Context*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Penfield, Joyce, and Jacob L. Ornstein-Galicia. 1985. *Chicano English: An Ethnic Contact Dialect*. Varieties of English around the World, Gen. Series 7. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.