

Abstract

Phonological adaptation of borrowings in New Mexico Spanish

Spanish-English bilinguals living in New Mexico find themselves in constant contact with English. The most frequent evidence of this contact is single borrowings of English-origin. Poplack (1993:256) defines borrowing as, "... the adaptation of lexical material to the morphological and syntactic (and usually, phonological) patterns of the recipient language." This definition indicates that when other-language words are used they may or may not be adapted to the phonological system of the recipient language.

Early research on phonological adaptation of other-language words proposed that there was a link between phonological adaptation and the level of integration of a word into the language of the community (Haugen 1950:216). Bowen (1975:116) found that words that do not show full phonological adaptation are not integrated into the community. Espinosa (1975:103) claimed that only words that are fully adapted become part of the New Mexico Spanish lexicon.

Subsequent research, however, questions whether level of phonological adaptation is an accurate predictor of the status of English-origin words in the lexicon. (Poplack et al. 1988, Myers-Scotton 1993, Poplack and Meechan 1998, etc.) These researchers found that even a word that is traditionally considered an established borrowing may be pronounced in English by one speaker and Spanish by another. This lack of consistency in phonological adaptation led the researchers (Poplack et al. 1988, Myers-Scotton 1993, Poplack and Meechan 1998, etc.) to reject phonological adaptation as a measure of lone word status.

The present study extracted 1878 lone English-origin nouns from sociolinguistic interviews with 30 Spanish-English bilinguals residing in Northern New Mexico. The extracted nouns were coded for frequency of use, diffusion, phonological adaptation, dictionary attestation, and the social factors of sex, age, and socioeconomic status. The findings indicate that there are many different English-origin nouns in the Spanish of New Mexico. They also indicate that nouns that are used frequently by multiple speakers are statistically more likely to be adapted to Spanish phonology. Words that are phonologically adapted also have a high probability of being attested in dictionaries.

These findings indicate that forms that are phonologically adapted are likely to be integrated into the community and form part of the lexicon. The results of this study demonstrate that phonological adaptation can be an indicator of the level of integration of a word into the lexicon. The social factors of sex, age, and socioeconomic status were also found to correlate with phonological adaptation. Men use more phonologically adapted forms than women, lower social class speakers are more likely to adapt words to Spanish phonology than speakers of higher social status, and older speakers are also more likely to use forms that have been phonologically adapted.

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