

Different ways of sounding Spanish (in English)

In Latino English in California, Spanish contact can be examined relatively straightforwardly on one dimension. A variable, such as (uw) assumes a more Spanish like back variant or participates in the fronting process of local European American vernaculars. It is therefore possible to assign social values, such as more or less assimilation, degree of upward mobility to these variables (e.g., Mendoza-Denton 1997, Fought 2003).

By contrast, study of contact effects in Latino English in the Northeastern US is complicated by two assimilation targets: AAE and NY European American Vernacular, each with different social significance. Many Spanish-like variants are shared by one of these varieties (e.g., consonant cluster simplification in AAE) and participate in complex interactions (Wolfram 1974, Poplack 1978). Socially, assimilation is not necessarily associated with a single social trajectory.

This study compares two variables uniquely associated with Spanish contact and explores social factors conditioning their use among native born and generation 1.5 Latino adolescent males in New York. These variables are (l) onsets and the intervocalic voiced stops (b) and (d). Previous findings show Spanish contact influence in clearer (l)s than in other local English varieties. New findings show the presence of lenis variants of (b) and (d): fricatives, approximants, or Ø.

The (l) quality was determined by spectrographic analysis, with higher F2s indicating clearer variants, controlling for following vowels (Preceding segment was not significant). Degree of (b/d) lenition was determined auditorily, supported occasionally by with spectrographic analysis (i.e., presence/absence of stop bursts). The 18 participants vary by national heritage, peer cultural affiliation, degree of Spanish usage, and immigration generation. Data was gathered in interviews as part of a two-year ethnographic study in their school.

Results show surprisingly different behaviors of the two linguistic variables on several dimensions:

- **Robustness:** Whereas (l) of all but one participant are clearer than those of African American, Jamaican American, and European American peers, 2 show no lenis (b/d), and 5 rates below 10%. Only one speaker shows lenis variants at a more than 50% rate.
- **Interaction:** Correlation between the two variables is less than 0.1. Although, the two speakers with the lowest rates of (b/d) lenition also show the darkest variants of (l), the contrary is not the case. Speakers “sound Spanish” in different ways.
- **Social Variables.** Goldvarb analysis of (b/d) lenition shows two significant social factors, academic trajectory and national heritage, whereas (l) appears to correlate with peer culture.
 - (b/d): College orientation surprisingly predicts greater lenition. Puerto Rican origin predicts less lenition.
 - (l): Hip-Hop affiliation is associated with darker (i.e., more local English like) variants.

The conclusion is that “sounding Spanish” is not a unified concept, but that there are different ways to do so, and these have or are acquiring different social meanings. As a result, it may be better not to think of Latino English as a single stable dialect but as in a pre-koinized state unlike its local co-territorial varieties. (493 words)

Poplack, Shana. 1978. Dialect acquisition among Puerto Rican bilinguals *Language in Society*, 7, 89-103

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Mendoza-Denton, Norma. 1997. *Chicana/Mexicana identity and linguistic variation: an ethnographic and sociolinguistic study of gang affiliation in an urban high school*. Ph.D. Dissertation Stanford University.

Poplack, Shana. 1978. Dialect acquisition among Puerto Rican bilinguals. *Language in Society*, 7, 89-103.