

Variation in Loan phonology: The Case of Spanish Loanwords in Triqui
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In this paper I propose that insight into the generalizability of phonetic rules can be found in the borrowing of foreign phonemes in the context of loanwords. More specifically, this study focuses on the incorporation and distribution of two Spanish phonemes, voiced and voiceless bilabial plosives, into a pre-existing allophonic distribution of dental and velar plosive voicing in Copala Triqui, an Otomanguean language from Oaxaca, Mexico. Since these sounds only exist in a small number of Triqui onomatopoeias they provide an interesting test case. Traditional generative grammar might assume that these bilabials will behave similarly to their velar and dental counterparts. Hale and Reiss (2008), however, argue against the trend to make maximal generalizations, positing that people make just the specific generalizations for which they have evidence.

For this analysis I draw from a corpus of over 3,000 individual tokens of Spanish loanwords in Triqui consisting of 1,000 unique lexemes taken from a Triqui-Spanish dictionary (Hollenbach 2005), an article on Spanish loanwords in Triqui (Hollenbach 1972), consultations with individual Triqui speakers, and 80 hours of Spanish-Triqui bilingual radio programming. Nonce borrowings have been included following Poplack & Meechan (1988) and Paradis & LaCharité (1997).

In Triqui, the velar and dental plosives are separate phonemes in monosyllabic words as well as in final syllables, which in Triqui are always the stressed syllables, as in example 1. In non-final syllables and after nasals, the difference between voiced and voiceless dental and velar plosives is neutralized as in 2.

- (1) a. /dã/ – ‘that one’
b. /tã/ – ‘blood’
c. /gãʔ/ – ‘far’
d. /kãʔ/ – grindings
- (2) Context 1: non-final syllables
/kiriʔ/ ‘bought’ can be [kiriʔ] or [giriʔ]
Context 2: after a nasal
/nDo/ ‘a lot, many’ can be [ndo] or [nto]

It could be posited then, that in Triqui there is either one rule governing voicing contrast for plosives in non-final syllables or two smaller rules one for velars and one for dentals. Loanword data supports the latter showing that bilabials do tend to behave differently from their dental and velar counterparts in context 1 and similarly in context 2. In both newer and established loans, voiced and voiceless velars and dentals are variants of each other as seen in example 3. Bilabials, in turn, are more resistant to change and show only a limited number of cases of voicing, even in the most established loans. No bilabial devoicing can be found. When they do assimilate, it is more often toward the approximant /w/ or the voiced fricative /B/, as seen in 4, both of which already exist in Triqui native words.

- (3) Velar and dental voicing in loanwords in recorded bilingual radio
 - a. District (Sp ‘colonia’) – [kolonya] or [golonya]
 - b. Doctor (Sp ‘doctor’) – [dotoo] or [totoo]
- (4) Bilabial voicing in loanwords found in recorded bilingual radio
 - a. Horse (Sp ‘caballo’) – [kawayo] or [kaBayo], *[kapayo]
 - b. Passport (Sp ‘pasaporte’) – [pasaporte] or [Basaporte] or [wasaporte], *[basaparte]

Thus, the loan data seems to support the idea (in accord with Hale and Reiss) that Triqui speakers actually have two rules, one for velar stops and another for dental stops in non-final syllables, instead of one big rule that applies to all stops. If they did, they would extend this rule to borrowed bilabials. In order to give a more complete picture of voicing in Triqui, a case-by-case examination in non-plosives such as labiodentals /f/ and /v/, which are also borrowed from Spanish and for which no fricative voiceless bilabial alternative exists, as well as sibilants, which are much richer in Triqui than in Spanish, will be necessary.

On a sociolinguistic front, loanword data are showing that not only are bilabials less susceptible to Triqui rules of voicing, but also that dentals and velars may also be showing greater signs of differentiation in the context of loanwords used by bilinguals. This means that some aspects of the treatment of Spanish bilabials in the case of loanwords may also apply to velars and dentals causing a shift in Triqui voicing that may spread to non-loanwords with increased contact.

References:

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