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Language Contact and Dialect Contact: Cross-Generational Phonological Changes in a Puerto Rican Community in the Midwest of the United States

Pronunciation differences are observable between the Spanish of Lorain, Ohio and other Spanish dialects. I explain them by hypothesizing that a new Spanish dialect is emerging in Lorain because it is a Spanish-speaking community with a mix of different groups (i.e., Puerto Rican, Mexican and Mexican American). These dialects (i.e., Puerto Rican Spanish (henceforth PRS), Mexican Spanish (hereafter MS) and Mexican American Spanish (henceforth MAS)) are examined in the context of American English (hereafter AE) as a majority language.

The situation in the Lorain community is more complicated than it seems because, not only there are several ethnic groups interacting, but three different generations of Puerto Ricans have different patterns of linguistic and social interactions within their community and with Mexican and Mexican Americans.

The goals, then, are to determine how Lorain Puerto Rican Spanish (henceforth LPRS) has been shaped by the influence of AE and the differences in pronunciation between LPRS, MS, MAS, as resulting from these groups' social interactions in the background of a midwestern community. Because LPRS derives from Island Puerto Rican Spanish (hereafter IPRS), the latter is the basis for understanding how the differences arose.

Several hypotheses are examined to explain the special character of LPRS: (a) interference from AE in the phonology of PRS, (b) dialect contact within Spanish, in particular, MAS influence on LPRS, (c) natural developments from features present in IPRS and brought to Lorain, i.e., what I refer to as "continuities".

Several linguistic variables are investigated in this study including the following: (1) retroflex realization of /r/; (2) raising of unstressed /e/ to [i]; (3) raising of unstressed /o/ to [u]; (4) vowel reduction; (5) variation of [č] and [š] for /č/; (6) the realization of /b/ as [v]. These variables are found in the Spanish spoken by Puerto Ricans in Lorain, Ohio and may differ in frequency and usage not only from the Standard, but also from dialectal PRS.

One hundred and six people were recorded, subdivided by ethnic group (i.e., Puerto Ricans, Mexicans and AE speakers in Lorain, Puerto Ricans Islanders), generation and gender. Data collection methods include random sampling and sociolinguistic interview: a list of words, a paragraph and an informal conversation with the interviewer (Labov 1966, 1972). Long-term observation of the community was conducted considering the participants' social networks.

The data was transcribed, analyzed using PRAAT4022. The phonological variables were correlated with extra-linguistic factors (e.g. age, gender, education) using VARBRUL.

The different groups in the Lorain community show different patterns of social and linguistic interaction. Even within the same ethnic group, e.g., the Puerto Ricans in Lorain, the three different generations show different patterns of linguistic and social

interaction within their own community and with outsiders. These interaction patterns explain the differences in pronunciation within their own speech community.

References cited

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