

Intrafamilial dialect contact: The Spanish of “MexiRicans”

Kim Potowski

The University of Illinois at Chicago

The U.S. is becoming more heterogeneous in the dialects of origin of its Spanish speakers. As a result, dialect contact is increasingly occupying the attention of linguists interested in U.S. Spanish. A situation called *intrafamilial dialect contact* occurs when speakers of distinct dialects raise children together and provide them with input in both dialects from birth. This simultaneous exposure distinguishes intrafamilial dialect contact from situations in which a child, teenager, or adult moves from one geographic area to another. In the same way that researchers have identified different outcomes resulting from bilingual first language acquisition vs. second language acquisition, it is possible that intrafamilial dialect contact leads to different outcomes than does later onset dialect contact.

I explore the Spanish features of 71 “MexiRican” individuals in Chicago, Illinois who have one Mexican parent and one Puerto Rican parent. First, I describe ideologies held by first, second, and third generation Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago about each other, revealing that tensions between these two groups are dissipating with each generation. Next, I describe three domains of MexiRicans’ Spanish: (1) Lexical familiarity, (2) Use of the discourse markers *entonces* and *so*, and (3) Phonological features via speech sample ratings and a PRAAT-supported analysis of coda /s/ and multiple /rr/. In this talk, I focus on two sets of findings. First, high scores on Puerto Rican lexicon and the presence of velarized /rr/ were both linked to having a Puerto Rican mother. Second, I examine whether individuals with predominantly Mexican or Puerto Rican features in one domain exhibit a similar predominance of features in the other two domains. For example, does someone with strong Puerto Rican lexicon also exhibit greater coda /s/ weakening?

I conclude by briefly describing some of the ways in which MexiRican individuals deploy linguistic and other resources in performing identities as “mixed ethnicity” Latinos, resisting pressures from monoethnic and monodialectal family members and friends to “choose” one identity over the other, and the ways in which intrafamilial dialect contact shapes their linguistic choices.