THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF SPANISH AS A HERITAGE LANGUAGE

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Taylor and Francis
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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2018
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
A catalog record for this title has been requested

ISBN: 978-1-138-83388-3 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-73513-9 (ebk)

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Typeset in Bembo
by Swales & Willis, Exeter, Devon, UK

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SPANISH DIALECTAL CONTACT IN THE UNITED STATES

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Introduction

Spanish speakers of varying regional and national origin routinely interact linguistically in the United States. *Spanish dialectal contact* results from this interaction, and it is the focus of the current chapter, which aims to accomplish three goals: (1) to identify several challenges that scholars face when studying dialectal contact, (2) to survey a selection[1] of studies that demonstrate how this topic can be carefully and effectively examined, and (3) to articulate generalizations about Spanish dialectal contact within the framework of contemporary sociolinguistic theory. The next section highlights a number of obstacles to gaining insight into the linguistic outcomes of Spanish dialectal contact. Then a range of studies is presented that examine the linguistic behaviors of particular groups of Spanish speakers in specific locales of the United States. These studies share a methodological focus on sociolinguistic variables, or linguistic features whose expression is constrained by social and linguistic factors and which, in a U.S. context, function as barometers of intergenerational maintenance or change. The following section articulates a number of generalizations that emerge from these studies, proposing that contact between speakers of different regional origins is one of many causes of intergenerational change in the linguistic behavior of Spanish speakers in the United States. It also suggests that the social signaling potential or *indexicality* of highly salient linguistic features, and particularly those with strong regional associations, is very likely amplified by dialectal contact in the U.S. The final section concludes the chapter.

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Challenges to the study of Spanish dialectal contact

Studying dialectal contact in the United States is a task fraught with challenges, which, while not insurmountable, substantially impede the development of a generalized understanding of the linguistic interaction between different groups of Spanish speakers in the United States. Three principal challenges are discussed here: (1) the Hispanophone world cannot be coherently linguistically zoned, (2) the concept of dialects suppresses the linguistic agency of individual speakers, and (3) the outcomes of language contact and dialectal contact are difficult to separate in a U.S. setting.

The Hispanophone world cannot be coherently linguistically zoned

One might think that the central premise of this chapter is that different dialects of Spanish are increasingly in contact with each other in the United States, and that it is possible to systematically investigate the linguistic outcomes of this contact. The problem with this way of thinking is that it rests on a problematic assumption, namely that there exists a clearly defined and unanimously accepted linguistic accounting of dialects elsewhere in the Spanish-speaking world. In truth, there is neither clarity nor consensus with respect to how the concept 'dialect' should be applied to rest of the Spanish-speaking world, including and perhaps especially in those areas of Latin America from which many U.S. Spanish speakers originate. There are many reasons why this is the case, not the least of which is the inherently problematic notion that variation in linguistic behavior can be neatly corralled into regionally defined compartments.

Spanish dialectologists have known for some time that patterns of intra-linguistic heterogeneity are resistant to strict geographic demarcation (Alba 1992; Henriquez Ureña 1921; Lope Blanch 1985; Resnick 1980; Rona 1964, among others). This is not simply because such patterns fail to align with geopolitical boundaries. Indeed, it does not require a linguist to observe that upon crossing the border from Mexico into Guatemala, for instance, there is no dialect switch that is flipped. Rather, it is clear that linguistically speaking, Mexicans in Tapachula have more in common with Guatemalans in nearby Malacatán than they do with their countrymen in distant Chihuahua. But the fact that patterns of language variation fail to coincide with the borders of nation states is not the highest hurdle that dialectologists must clear. What really stands in the way of the linguistically precise demarcation of dialects is that the sets of linguistic features upon which one might try to establish regional varieties do not themselves cohere. Consider, for example, two commonly discussed dialectal features, the use of *vos* and the weakening of coda /s/. The regions of Latin America in which one finds *vos* used as a second-person singular form of address are not contiguous, and within these separate *voseante* regions one finds frequent weakening of coda /s/ in some areas but almost none in others. That the regional distribution of even a single pair of dialect features may independently vary is the insight captured by the dialectologist's truism that *the isoglosses don't bundle*. These simple facts are what led Alba to the following conclusion regarding the zonification of Spanish:

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> *El establecimiento de fronteras que definan con aceptable precisión las "zonas dialectales" de Hispanoamérica parece, sobre todo en la actualidad, una tarea vana e imposible* [The establishment of boundaries that precisely define the "dialect zones" of Hispanoamerica is, especially today, a hopeless and impossible task].
>
> *(1992: 80)*

This is not a problem exclusive to Spanish, of course, but is instead one inherent to the very notion of dialects (see De Saussure 2011: 200). When one considers just a handful of hypothetical features with different areal distribution, the problem quickly comes into focus:

> It is overwhelmingly improbable that the line separating localities showing [linguistic feature *a*] from those with [feature *b*] will exactly coincide with the line separating [feature *x* from feature *y*] . . . Given that the language of any locality consists of at least several thousands of items, the number of "dialects" identifiable in a real territory of any extent is infinite.
>
> *(Penny 2000: 11)*

The truth then is that dialects cannot interact because they do not exist. Or, perhaps more precisely, it is impossible for linguists to point to separate, identifiable, and enumerable dialects. These unavoidable realities must be kept in mind when national or regional modifiers are used to name dialects of Spanish in any context. They are especially important to remember when attempting to understand contact between such dialects, because in doing so, one participates in an extreme act of abstraction, one that leaves behind the complexity, richness, and nuance of actual linguistic behavior as it is produced by actual speakers in actual places.

It is true that the reification of national and regional dialects is commonplace not only in the study of Spanish, but within linguistic inquiry more generally. It is also true that regionally or nationally named linguistic varieties are ideologically meaningful to non-linguists. These are understandable responses to a linguistic reality that is remarkably complex. But when named dialects are unified with descriptions of linguistic behavior (e.g., *in Dominican Spanish linguistic process X occurs* or *Mexican varieties of Spanish do not have feature Y*) we have granted these abstractions fixed and independent existence that is quite separate from any actual community of speakers. Even if these kinds of labels are employed as shorthand ways to refer to general trends in the totality of linguistic behavior observable in some place, one must be careful not to confuse heuristics with linguistic reality. And as we examine Spanish dialectal contact in the United States, we must bear in mind that, strictly speaking, dialects cannot interact because they have no basis in reality. Indeed, "there is no such thing as a dialect" (Penny 2000: 11) in the first place.

The concept of dialects suppresses the linguistic agency of individual speakers

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When a named dialect is applied to a group of people, the role that individuals play in directing their own linguistic behavior is substantially diminished, if not eliminated entirely. Dialects subject individuals to the imagined and essentializing authority of disembodied abstractions. That is, phrases like *speakers of Honduran Spanish* seem to suggest that it is the dialect that outfits speakers with a specific set of instructions for going about the business of speaking Spanish in the Honduran fashion. Such conceptions are inconsistent with reality and nontrivially misleading. Indeed, no matter what size the footprint of some imagined variety might be, whether its domain is that of a nation state, a town, or a single household, differences between speakers abound. Furthermore, no single individual speaks the same way all of the time. Instead, each person is the director of her own linguistic performance, selecting from a linguistic repertoire the set of behaviors that is appropriate for the situation and for the messages, both truth-conditionally and socially speaking, that she intends to convey.

Failing to acknowledge the individual agency that speakers possess in regard to linguistic variation is short-sighted in any context. It is an order of magnitude worse to do so when one aims to understand the dynamics of dialectal contact. Consider the limitations of a hypothetical prediction like the following about contact-induced change: *In a situation of contact in the U.S., speakers of Salvadoran Spanish, which is an /s/ weakening dialect, are likely to accommodate towards more prestigious Mexican Spanish, which does not have /s/ weakening*. Set aside the major problem that this prediction discretizes variation in /s/ that is assuredly better viewed as a continuum in communities throughout both El Salvador and Mexico. Also set aside the fact that many communities in Mexico do not speak in ways that are regularly associated with prestige. What remains is an even bigger problem, namely, the implication that Salvadorans are uniformly attracted by the presumed prestige of another dialect. This is demonstrably false.

Consider a single group of first-generation immigrants from El Salvador to an area of the United States in which the local Spanish-speaking community is predominantly of Mexican origin. It is easy to imagine that among this group of Salvadorans attitudes towards their own linguistic behavior as well as that of speakers of other varieties of Spanish will vary substantially according to a broad range of factors. These include but are not limited to social class in the home country, social class in the United States, documentation status in the United States, and motivation for immigration. A college-educated white-collar professional with legal immigration status is quite likely to have different attitudes towards her linguistic behavior and also that of newly encountered speakers of Mexican origin than is an undocumented individual with little education whose immigration was primarily motivated by economic hardship. These individual differences can have major linguistic implications and must not be washed out by a conception of dialects that is painted only in the broadest of strokes. Indeed, the latter speaker in this hypothetical but entirely plausible scenario is more likely than the former to employ a 'strategic non-identity' (Arias 2003: 168), assimilating into the dominant Mexican group because doing so may afford him a greater degree of social security. By comparison, the former may, due to her relatively more secure social position, be motivated to deploy linguistic features that she strongly associates with her Salvadoran identity.

The outcomes of language and dialectal contact are difficult to separate

Perhaps the greatest challenge to understanding the outcomes of Spanish dialectal contact in the United States is that it co-occurs with language contact. The United States is, despite its increasing ethnic and linguistic diversity, an overwhelmingly English-speaking nation. This inevitably means that the interaction between different groups of Spanish speakers takes place within the broader context of contact with speakers of English, which itself occurs at every linguistically important level of social organization: both between and within communities and individuals. The inseparability of language and dialectal contact greatly complicates the task of understanding patterns of intergenerational continuity and/or change in the linguistic behavior of Spanish speakers in the United States. Indeed, there is very good evidence that increased experience with English correlates with a range of behaviors that differentiate the Spanish of U.S. natives from that of their recently arrived regional counterparts (Erker & Otheguy 2016; Silva-Corvalán 1994; Zentella 1997, among others). Such behaviors are often consistent with general trends of interlinguistic convergence, whereby structural similarities between Spanish and English are increased. However, some of the results that emerge from these and other studies are consistent with hypotheses about the potential effects of dialectal contact. A clear example of such a case is that of subject pronoun use.

One of the primary findings of Otheguy and Zentella (2012) is that Spanish-speaking New Yorkers of Mexican, Colombian, and Ecuadoran origin who were born and raised in NYC use subject pronouns at significantly higher rates than do their recently arrived counterparts. This fact is consistent with the idea that these speakers have converged on a strategy of pronoun use that is more similar to that of English, which in general strongly favors the use of overt subject pronouns with finite verbs. However, there is an alternative explanation: Native New Yorkers with origins in Mainland Latin America are, in NYC, in more regular contact with Spanish speakers from Caribbean regions of Latin America, whose own communities regularly demonstrate higher rates of pronouns use than do those of the Mainland. The dialectal interpretation is that Mainlanders have accommodated towards the Caribbean norm. As will be seen later, determining which of these plausible explanations is better requires empirical rigor and care.

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Consider variation in coda /s/ as another illustration of the difficulty of disentangling the effects of dialectal and language contact. Variability in /s/ production (which also will be discussed in more detail later) falls out along lines similar to those of subject pronouns. Relatively high rates of /s/ reduction have been observed in Caribbean (as well as some Central American) communities, while relative lower rates are typically found in Mainland communities. In some research, it appears that rates of /s/ reduction decrease intergenerationally among Caribbeans and Central Americans in certain locales under certain circumstances in the United States (Aaron & Hernandez 2007; Hernández & Maldonado 2012; Parodi 2003; Raymond 2012). This may be due to accommodation on the part of Caribbeans and Central Americans towards Mainlander norms. At the same time, an alternative explanation is available from language contact: coda /s/ production in English is largely invariant, and it may be the case that a reduction in rates of /s/ weakening in the speech of Spanish-English bilinguals is partly due to a fortifying reconfiguration of this phonological category induced by the regular use of English.

Finally, the complications that arise from language contact extend beyond the ways in which structural convergence may impersonate dialectal accommodation and vice versa. Rather, it is the pull of English itself, and its associated social power and prestige, that likely has the biggest impact on how Spanish is used and maintained in the United States. The social privilege that English enjoys has always exerted a strong influence on immigrant communities in the United States (Veltman 1983). As such, the familiar generational fate of immigrant languages is one of attrition and shift. To the extent that Spanish undergoes these processes, it becomes increasingly difficult to explore the outcomes of dialectal contact over multiple generations. Indeed, there is nothing to examine among those who have stopped speaking Spanish.

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Region of origin is one of many factors that influence linguistic behavior

The goal of the preceding discussion was not to propose that it is impossible to study Spanish dialectal contact in the United States. Instead, the aim was to acknowledge and understand a set of challenges so as to better circumvent them. As such, we can reject a conception of dialectal contact that envisions the collision of enumerated, internally consistent, and independently existing linguistic entities. Such a perspective wrongly reifies geographically constrained intra-linguistic diversity into distinct varieties of Spanish and mistakenly views their interaction as a kind of linguistic bumper cars. Furthermore, this view submits individual speakers to the essentializing authority of socially decontextualized and static conceptions of linguistic variation.

Instead, we can adopt a view of dialectal contact that is informed by a more concrete connection with linguistic behavior, the hallmark of which is its abounding variability. In this context, dialectal contact simply refers to the linguistic interaction of speakers with different regions of origin. To assess the outcomes of this interaction we may employ *dialectal features*, which can be understood as specific linguistic forms or *sociolinguistic variables* (Labov 1994) whose distribution and expression are probabilistically sensitive to the geographic origins of speakers. In situations of contact, such features emerge as barometers of both change and stability in linguistic behavior.

This is the perspective that guides the research surveyed later in this chapter. In these studies, the central focus is on variation in a specific linguistic feature or features. It is assumed that variability in a given feature, whether it is a particular speech sound, lexical item, or unit of morphology or syntax, is conditioned by sets of competing and interacting linguistic and social factors. For a phonological variable, for instance, linguistic conditioning factors might

include the phonetic context in which the relevant sound unit occurs, the frequency of use of the word containing it, and the rate of speech during the production of the unit. As for social factors, one might consider the age, sex, and socioeconomic status of the speaker, alongside a characterization of the context in which the relevant speech event occurred as well as the relative prestige or lack thereof associated with the sound in question. The dynamic interaction of sets of factors like these is presumed to guide a speaker's linguistic choices as she uses the material in her linguistic repertoire. Patterns of use evident in linguistic behavior reveal aspects of her internalized linguistic knowledge or mental grammar. From this perspective, a speaker's region of origin is viewed as one among many social conditioning factors. Its influence coexists alongside that of other linguistically relevant aspects of identity and of the social contexts in which speakers find themselves.

Linguistic features and locales

As suggested in the preceding section, a subset of research on Spanish dialectal contact in the United States has been examined from a perspective informed by the interrelated fields of linguistic anthropology, the sociology of language, and variationist sociolinguistics. Together these fields of linguistic inquiry provide a powerful framework for describing linguistic form and for understanding its social meaning in linguistic practice. While not every study examined here explicitly adopts a particular theoretical framework, they are connected by their focus on variation in specific linguistic features and on how patterns of use may inform our understanding of Spanish dialectal contact in the United States. They include a large-scale study of subject pronoun use in NYC (Otheguy & Zentella 2012), two studies that explore the social meaning and use of voseo in the United States (Lipski 1988; Woods & Rivera-Mills 2012), a collection of studies examining variation in coda /s/ (Aaron and Hernandez 2007; Lamboy 2004; O'Rourke & Potowski 2016; Ramos Pellicia 2012), and finally an investigation of pronoun use and coda /s/ simultaneously in a single group of speakers (Erker & Otheguy 2016).

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Subject pronouns in New York City

Among studies of Spanish in the United States that have explored outcomes of language contact and dialectal contact, the largest in scale is that of Otheguy and Zentella (2012). The data in this study consist of 140 sociolinguistic interviews with Spanish-speaking New Yorkers whose ~~national~~ origins are in one of six Latin American ~~countries~~: Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, and Puerto Rico. The linguistic focus of the study is the variable use of subject pronouns, e.g., *yo canto* vs. *canto*, both 'I sing'. Otheguy and Zentella hypothesize that speakers with different degrees of exposure to the NYC environment will use pronouns differently, dividing their speakers into three *exposure groups*: immigrant newcomers, established immigrants, and New York raised. Of central interest is a comparison of the newcomers and the New York raised (NYRs). The former group consists of speakers who arrived in NYC at ~~18~~ years of age or older and who had spent less than six years in New York before being interviewed. The latter group consists of speakers who were born in NYC or who arrived before their third birthday.

Results indicate that in terms of their pronominal behavior, Spanish speakers raised in NYC have very much in common with their recently arrived counterparts. Overall, both groups are more likely to elect the non-use of a pronoun than they are to use one, and when they do, their choices are guided by the same sets of linguistic factors:

> Variable hierarchies are mostly the same to begin with, and they stay that way in New York. The broad principles that guide the decision to use or leave out subject pronouns are the same for speakers in both regions, and the dialectal leveling forces that are otherwise active in New York have no impact whatsoever on this pattern.
>
> *(Otheguy & Zentella 2012: 195)*

At the same time, the evidence for intergenerational structural continuity co-occurs with evidence of change. The NYR speakers do use pronouns significantly more frequently than the Newcomers, and there is also evidence that some aspects of regionally differentiated pronominal behavior observed among the Newcomers have been reconfigured in the speech of the NYR. Otheguy and Zentella argue that these differences reflect contact-induced changes that have arisen from increased experience with English as well as from the regular interaction of speakers from Caribbean and Mainland regions of Latin America. In the way they make their case, Otheguy and Zentella extend the value of their study beyond the specific content of their results. That is, in addition to providing a picture of Spanish pronoun use in NYC, their analysis offers a model for the way that dialectal contact can be explored empirically.

Their study is centered around a variable that is an ideal diagnostic for contact-induced change. It is frequently occurring in natural speech, meaning that sites of variation are abundant and easy to collect. It has been extensively studied elsewhere, meaning that the sets of linguistic and social factors that condition its variability are well understood (for a detailed review of subject pronoun research, see Carvalho et al. 2015). It represents a clear site of interlinguistic difference between Spanish and English, and it also represents a clear site of intralinguistic difference, such that broad regional differentiation is observed across different Hispanophone communities.[2]

To assess whether language contact and dialectal contact have shaped the use of this feature in a U.S. context, Otheguy and Zentella utilize three different analytical tools: *rates of use, variable hierarchies*, and *constraint hierarchies*. Rates simply refer to the overall trends in the use of some feature. Variable hierarchies are quantitative models that rank linguistic and social conditioning factors according to the relative strength of their influence on the feature in question. For example, two linguistic factors or variables that regularly condition pronoun use are those known as *Person and Number of the Verb* and *Switch Reference*. The first factor refers to whether the referent of a verb is singular or plural and whether it is first, second, or third person, e.g., the person and number of *digo* and *dicen* are first-person singular and third-person plural, respectively. Switch Reference is a factor used to track whether the referent of a verb is the same as or different from that of a preceding verb. In general, pronouns are significantly less likely to occur with a verb that shares a referent with the one that immediately precedes it. Constraint hierarchies refer to the relative strength of different values *within* a particular factor. That is, a constraint hierarchy for Person and Number would describe the strength and direction of the effect of each person and number combination on the probability that a pronoun will occur or not.

At the level of rates, Otheguy and Zentella find significant differences between exposure groups. The NYRs have a significantly higher rate of pronoun use than the Newcomers. This finding is consistent with a language contact interpretation, i.e., structural convergence with English is driving pronoun rates higher. When region of origin is taken into account, however, the limitations of a rates-only analysis become evident. Caribbean and Mainland newcomers have different rates of pronoun use, such that the latter use fewer pronouns than the former. When Mainlander and Caribbean newcomers are compared to their NYR counterparts, an increase in rates is observed within both regional groups. However, the increase is more dramatic for the Mainlanders than it is for the Caribbeans. It is impossible to determine on the basis

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of rates alone whether this is due to the influence of English, the accommodation of Mainlanders to Caribbean norms, or both. Neither is it possible to determine whether dialectal leveling in the other direction, that is of Caribbeans towards Mainland norms, might inhibit the influence of English on the pronoun rates of Caribbeans. This exemplifies the problem mentioned earlier. The solution is to examine the variable and constraint hierarchies.

At the level of variable hierarchies, Otheguy and Zentella find little evidence of differences between groups. That is, regardless of their region of origin or exposure to the contact setting, Spanish speakers in NYC make decisions to use or not use a pronoun on the basis of a similar set of factors which they attend to with similarly configured sensitivity. A more complex picture emerges at the level of constraint hierarchies. Here, Otheguy and Zentella find 16 changes across exposure groups in the rank and magnitude of particular constraints in 5 different variables. The majority of these changes, 12 of the 16, are consistent with a trend of asymmetrical dialect leveling, such that NYR Mainlanders have reconfigured their constraint hierarchies in the direction of Caribbeans. In sum, this analysis provides a macro and microscopic view of the dynamics of language contact and dialectal contact, revealing evidence of continuity and change in Spanish. Moreover, it indicates the changes observed in the data are likely due to a combination of structural convergence with English and asymmetrical dialectal leveling.

Voseo in Houston and the Pacific Northwest

Another morphosyntactic feature of particular interest in the study of Spanish dialectal contact is *voseo*. This refers to the use of *vos* as a second person singular form of address alongside a set of corresponding verb forms that are differentiated from those used with the second person singular pronouns *usted* and *tú*. *Voseante* communities in Latin America are concentrated in parts of Central America, Colombia, and the Rioplatense region of South America (Benavides 2003; Lipski 1994). While the use of *vos* is subject to widely varying local norms and attitudes (see Aguilar 2009; Michnowicz & Place 2010), its use is generally constrained by perceptions of social distance between interlocutors. Generally, it is less likely to be used when social distance between interlocutors is greater, though this is not always the case. Regardless, it can be said that this feature is of high social salience both within communities that use *vos* and between groups of voseante and non-voseante speakers.

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Extensive quantitative analysis of voseo in the United States has not been widely carried out. Instead, research on this topic has been largely qualitative in nature (though see Baumel-Schreffler 1994; Hernández 2002; Sorenson 2013 for exceptions). The first investigation of voseo in a U.S. setting is Lipski's (1988) study of Salvadorans living in Houston, Texas. In that study, Lipski contextualizes the social value of voseo in Latin America and describes how its social signaling potential may be modulated in a U.S. setting:

> Historically, [*voseo* verb] forms have always prevailed in Central America, and yet there has traditionally been a learned reaction against the *voseo*, which has been considered vulgar, plebian, anti-literary and a barrier to Central American aspirations to higher culture, principally because such forms had long disappeared from Peninsular dialects.
> *(Lipski 1988: 103)*

Lipski goes on to describe how a feature that may simply lack overt linguistic prestige in the panorama of linguistic ideologies found in the Hispanophone world, can, in a U.S. context, acquire dramatically amplified meaning and impact matters of real life importance:

> Another aspect of this situation is the Salvadoran laborer who is working under illegal conditions; although many Mexicans in Houston work under similar conditions, the presence of Mexican workers is in itself not sufficient to trigger migratory investigations or raids, whereas a Central American may be singled out for presentation of documents and declarations of citizenship or migratory status.
>
> *(Lipski 1988: 99)*

In other words, undocumented voseantes may be motivated to suppress this feature of their linguistic repertoire so as to decrease chances of deportation.

Woods and Rivera Mills' (2012) study of voseo in the Pacific Northwest reinforces Lipski's message that in the United States voseo is losing ground rapidly to tuteo. On the basis of interviews and ethnographic observation of Salvadorans and Hondurans living in communities of Oregon and Washington where Mexicans represent the Latino majority, Woods and Rivera Mills conclude that the domain of use of voseo has contracted. While participants in their study retain vos in private settings, it has all but disappeared from use in public domains.[3] They summarize their findings as follows:

> Linguistic insecurities among Salvadorans and Hondurans in the United States in situations of varieties in contact therefore facilitate accommodation and use of tú as a mask and as a method of gaining out group recognition and evading linguistic discrimination. At the same time voseo is used as a strategic approach for maintaining linguistic and cultural identity especially in familial domains.
>
> *(Woods and Rivera-Mills 2012: 198)*

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Note the thread running through the studies surveyed thus far: decreased regional differentiation via asymmetrical accommodation. Yet, there is also an important distinction to make between the findings. There is no pronoun rate analogue to Lipski's scenario about an immigration raid. This is because the social salience of differences in rates of pronoun use is simply too low to have real word consequences. In other words, variable linguistic features do not all possess the same social signaling potential. There are features that represent bigger or smaller blips on speakers' sociolinguistic radars, and there are those that fly entirely below the limits of sociolinguistic detection. Thus, even though they reflect a similar pattern of diminished regional differentiation, it is unlikely that the observed changes in subject pronoun rates in NYC and vos in the Southwest and Pacific Northwest arose by similar mechanisms. This topic will be revisited again later.

Coda /s/ across several locales

In syllable final position, the phonological unit /s/ is variably produced by Spanish speakers (see Lipski 1994; Penny 2000; and Erker 2010 for overviews). Its variants range from a canonical voiceless alveolar fricative to the complete absence of any phonetic reflex, or *s-deletion*. In between these poles lies a continuum of other variants. Linguists differ not only in terms of how they describe a given variant but also in terms of how they determine what category it should belong to. Sometimes tokens are perceptually coded and categorized segmentally. In this vein, a very common practice is to categorize variants as tokens of [s], [h] (sometimes called *aspiration*), or deletion. Sometimes deleted tokens are considered to be a separate category from those that have some phonetic substance (e.g., [s] and [h] together), and other times all tokens

that are non-canonical are grouped together as *weakened* (e.g., [h] and deletion together). A less common but increasingly frequent method of describing /s/ variation in Spanish relies on measurements of the acoustic properties of fricative moments, leaving aside the question of segmental categories.

Like subject pronoun use, coda /s/ is an attractive feature for the study of dialectal contact because extensive previous research provides a clear understanding of how its expression is conditioned by sets of linguistic and social factors, including those related to speakers' regional origins. Among the generalizations to emerge from the literature is that /s/ displays wide-ranging regional differentiation. Specifically, the highest rates of /s/ reduction have been observed in communities located in the Caribbean and in some coastal and lowland regions of Mainland Latin America. Furthermore, broadly speaking, /s/ weakening is viewed as a non-standard behavior. These observations lead to the familiar range of questions about dialectal contact in a U.S. setting: Will regional differentiation in this feature persist, or will one group accommodate towards the norms of another? Several scholars have examined variability in coda /s/ in Spanish speaking communities in the United States, and results are not entirely consistent with each other. A selection of studies is briefly reviewed here.

In their 2007 study, Aaron and Hernandez examine /s/ among Salvadorans living in Houston. In data contained in 12 sociolinguistic interviews they find evidence of a decrease in rates of /s/ reduction among a subset of their participants. Among those who arrived in Houston at an earlier age, rates of /s/ reduction are significantly lower. They interpret this trend as the result of contact-induced accommodation on the part of these Salvadorans towards the norms of the predominantly Mexican community in which they find themselves.

In his 2004 study of first- and second-generation Cubans, Dominicans, and Puerto Ricans residents of NYC, Lamboy examines a range of phonological variables, including the neutralization of liquids, the velarization of alveolar trills, and coda /s/. The principal trend that emerges from results of this study is one of generational continuity, as none of these features reveal substantial reconfiguration: "There are no great differences in the speech of first-generation and second-generation Cubans, Dominicans, and Puerto Ricans in the New York City area" (Lamboy 2004: 85). Ramos Pellicia (2012) uses reading passages to examine coda /s/ variation in the speech of 12 residents of Lorain Ohio, all of whom are of Puerto Rican origin. Her results reveal an intergenerational increase in rates of /s/ reduction, such that third-generation participants are more likely to delete /s/ than are their first-generation counterparts.

In a 2016 study, O'Rourke and Potowski examine data from sociolinguistic interviews with 88 Spanish-speaking Chicagoans. These speakers represent three generations of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans and two generations of MexiRicans, who are of mixed national parentage. In addition to comparing speakers who vary across generation and national background, this study also explores the potential effect of conversational interlocutors on the linguistic behavior of participants. That is, some individuals in the study interacted with interviewers who shared their national background while others did not. None of the national groups in the study appeared to be sensitive to differences in the regional origin of their interlocutor with respect to coda /s/. More generally, there was no evidence of any regional accommodation in the /s/ production of any of the groups in the study. Interestingly, O'Rourke and Potowski did find a significant generational difference among Mexican participants such that second- and third-generation speakers were even less likely than their first-generation counterparts to reduce /s/. That is, the already relatively low rate of /s/ weakening observed among the first-generation, at 21.6 percent, decreased to 8.8 and 6.9 percent among second- and third-generation Mexicans, respectively. This interesting result runs parallel to an aspect of a study of /s/ variation conducted by Erker and Otheguy (2016).

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In this study Erker and Otheguy examine coda /s/ variation in the speech of 20 speakers included in the Otheguy Zentella Corpus. Half of these speakers are of Caribbean origin and half have origins in non-coastal regions of the Latin American mainland. Nine of the speakers were newcomers to NYC at the time of their interview while the remaining 11 were either established immigrants or NYRs (according to the criteria of Otheguy and Zentella). The data for this study consist of 4,000 tokens of coda /s/ (200 from each speaker). All tokens were examined and described acoustically such that the presence or absence of fricative moments was determined on the basis of spectrographic and waveform evidence. In addition, all non-deleted tokens of /s/ were characterized in terms of two continuous parameters: (1) duration of frication in milliseconds, and (2) spectral center of gravity (COG) in Hz. The latter parameter is a weighted average of the distribution of spectral energy during the frication event.

Figure 18.1 plots the 20 speakers in the study according to mean duration and COG of their non-deleted /s/ token. That is, each dot represents the average acoustic profile of that speaker's coda /s/. When established immigrants and NYRs are grouped together as *longtime residents* and are then compared with the newcomers, several notable trends emerge. A pattern of significant regional differentiation is observed among the Newcomers such that Caribbean speakers produce /s/ with a shorter duration and lower COG than Mainlanders ($F = 40.79$, $p < .001$). Among the longtime residents, however, distinctive regional clustering has given way to a more diffuse distribution of speakers. Among this group, region of origin ceases to be significantly predictive of differences ($F = 2.94$, $p < .11$).

Also noteworthy in Figure 18.1 is that the range of variation present among the longtime residents is wider than that of the newcomers. Specifically, several Mainland longtime residents produce /s/ with a duration that far exceeds that of the Mainland newcomers. Though additional data and comparative analysis would be required to adequately explore this possibility, it is possible this trend is analogous to what Potowski observed among her later-generation Mexican

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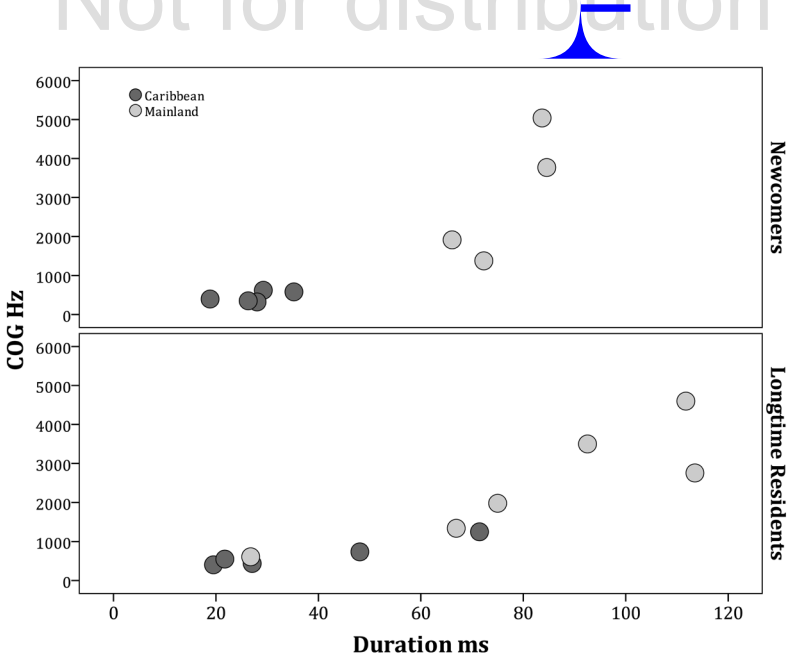

Figure 18.1 Mean COG (in Hz) and duration of /s/ (in ms) for 20 speakers

participants. To the extent that they encounter Caribbeans accommodating towards Mainland norms for /s/ production, and to the extent that they are motivated to maintain distinct patterns of linguistic behavior for this feature, Mainland speakers may modulate their behavior so as to maintain some kind of locally reconfigured regional distinction.

Discussion

A number of generalizations emerge from the preceding survey. First, these studies highlight the way that linguistic variables can be used to assess the outcomes of dialectal contact in a U.S. setting. Second, they strongly suggest that dialectal contact is partially responsible for intergenerational changes in the linguistic behavior of Spanish speakers in a number of communities. Third, they raise the important issue of the relative salience of specific dialectal features and their related capacity for acquiring increased social signaling potential or reconfigured *indexicality* (Eckert 2008) in a contact setting in the United States. Let us consider this third point in more detail by examining some additional data from Erker and Otheguy. In addition to examining coda /s/, they also examined the pronominal behavior of the speakers in their study. Figure 18.2 adds a pronominal dimension to the data presented in Figure 18.1, indicating the pronoun rate of each speaker as well as the mean duration and COG of their non-deleted /s/ tokens. The statistical results confirm that region of origin is significantly predictive of the newcomers' behavior for both the phonological and morphosyntactic ~~measures~~ under investigation ($F = 27.93$, $p < .002$). In contrast, region of origin fails to significantly differentiate the behavior of the longtime residents along the same dimensions ($F = 2.7$, $p < .13$).

Recall the observation made earlier that there is no subject pronoun analogue to Lipski's scenario in which the use of vos had very high social stakes. While it is unlikely that the regular deletion of /s/ could have equivalently dire practical consequences, it is hardly the case that /s/ flies below the sociolinguistic radar of Spanish speakers. Indeed, variation in /s/ production

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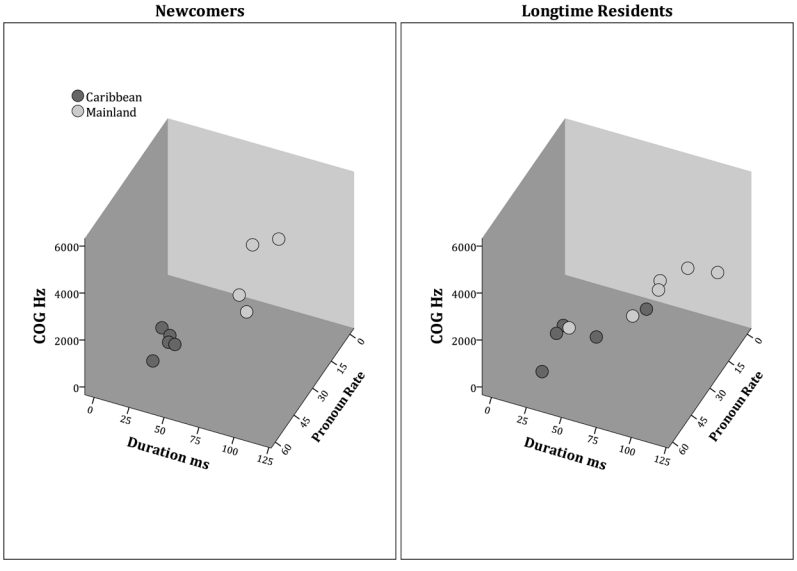

Figure 18.2 Subject pronouns rates and acoustic properties of /s/

is likely to be the single most socially salient phonetic variable in the Hispanophone world. Reduction of /s/ is not only the frequent target of explicit prescriptive instruction in Spanish-language educational settings, its use also has clear folk-linguistic associations (e.g., the joking phrase *hablar fisno* 'speaking finely or elegantly' gently mocks hyper-correction in /s/ production with a superfluous /s/ inserted into the word 'fino'). This and other phrases, such as the prohibition against *comerse las eses* 'eating one's S's' illustrate the high social salience of this feature. These facts bear on the interpretation of the data in Figure 18.2, because while it is true that the linguistic behavior of the longtime residents reveals a general pattern of diminished regional differentiation, the different salience of these features raises the question of whether the apparent dialectal leveling in /s/ and pronoun rates arose by similar mechanisms. There is good reason to think that they did not.

Consider the following quotation of one of the participants in the study of Woods and Rivera Mills:

> *La gente de otras culturas tienden de hacer chiste del vos. Lo notan extraño, les da risa, entonces cambio a usar vos por usted o tú dependiendo de la situación.* [The people from other cultures tend to mock the vos. They think it is strange, it makes them laugh, so I opt to use usted or tú instead of vos depending on the situation].
>
> *(Woods & Rivera-Mills 2012: 202)*

While people may joke about the use of a specific pronominal form, there are no jokes about *rates* of pronoun use overall. Moreover, stereotyped imitations of speakers from the Caribbean almost always prominently feature /s/ deletion. This difference in social salience between linguistic features – i.e., low salience for the presence vs. absence of pronouns and high salience for vos and coda /s/ – likely has implications for the social motivation of the leveling trends. Specifically, it is unlikely that changes in the presence vs. absence of pronouns overall, in contrast with diminished use of vos, has a social motivation at all. In contrast, it is difficult to imagine that leveling of differences in /s/ could occur in the absence of some social motivation. What this suggests is that in situation of contact, seemingly similar patterns of linguistic behavior, e.g., reduced regional differentiation in a set of dialectal features, can arise for different reasons. In this case, the lack of an obvious social motivation for changes in the presence vs. absence of pronouns suggests that what appears to be a case of mutual dialectal accommodation is rather a byproduct of language contact. In other words, decreased regional differences in the pronoun rates may have more to do with the destabilizing influence of English than they do with contact between speakers from different parts of the Hispanophone world. In contrast, features that are highly salient are much more likely to have their indexicality reshaped or renegotiated directly through the interaction of different groups of Spanish speakers. In sum, an important outcome of dialectal contact is not necessarily changes in rates of dialectal features, but rather changes in the value and intensity of their social meaning.

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Conclusion

This chapter presented a survey of Spanish dialectal contact in the United States. It began by highlighting a number of challenges inherent to the study of Spanish dialectology and to investigating Spanish in the United States. It argued that there are serious limitations to the concept of dialects, and that named dialects of any language, Spanish included, are static and essentializing abstractions that can be neither precisely defined nor concretely connected to actual language users. Additionally, it was argued that the dominance of English at a national level in the United

States all but ensures that language contact and dialectal contact co-occur in this country, and that completely unraveling their respective effects is likely impossible. A conception of linguistic variation informed by sociolinguistic theory was offered as a means to circumvent these challenges, such that region of origin is best viewed as one among many social factors contributing to the linguistic choices of Spanish speakers in the United States. The chapter surveyed a small number of studies that embody this approach to Spanish dialectal contact. Overall, these studies reveal trends of both intergenerational continuity and change in the Spanish spoken in the United States. They also suggest that the social signaling potential of high salience linguistic variables is especially sensitive to reconfiguration and/or modulation in a U.S. context.

Notes

1 For a broad survey of Spanish dialectal contact in the United States, see Lamboy (2004), O'Rourke & Potowski (2016), and Potowski (2011). For an account of historical and recent trends in the migration patterns and socio-demographic makeup of Spanish speakers in the United States, see López Morales (2009) and the report from Instituto Cervantes (2015).
2 While the logic, design, and methodology of Otheguy and Zentella's study of pronouns is broadly applicable to the study of dialectal contact in general, Spanish-speaking communities across the United States vary widely in their size, settlement history, and socio-demographic profile. As such, it is crucial that any investigation be sensitively attuned to particular aspects of the community that may bear on local linguistic practices and attitudes.
3 Similar patterns of intergenerational reduction in use of vos have also been observed in studies of Salvadoran residents of Los Angeles. This group routinely interacts with speakers of Mexican origin, who typically do not use vos (Parodi 2003; Raymond 2012; Villarreal 2014).

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