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# The limits of named language varieties and the role of social salience in dialectal contact: The case of Spanish in the United States

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**Abstract**

Studying dialectal contact offers linguists an opportunity to critically examine some of our most basic assumptions about language. In particular, careful consideration of geographically constrained patterns of linguistic variation highlights the limitations of named language varieties as tools for linguistic inquiry. Ultimately, the locus of contact is not to be found in the interaction of such abstractions, but rather in the individual minds of those who live in contact communities. The present paper highlights these issues through a discussion of Spanish dialectal contact in the U.S., with a special emphasis on the variable social salience of regionally differentiated features. Work reviewed here is consistent with previous research that finds the relative salience of features to be a key determinant of their trajectory in situations of contact. Change in the use of high salience features is likely to be the result of direct accommodation between speakers, while change in low salience features is likely to arise by other, indirect mechanisms. The role of salience in shaping the outcomes of contact reinforces its inherently social nature, reminding us that what we hope to understand are not the results of dialects in contact, but rather, those of people in contact.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Spanish wasn't born a global language. Long before it became 'Spanish', a named language with half a billion users around the world, it was the local way of speaking for a comparatively tiny group of people in central northern Iberia. As these people grew more powerful, their linguistic practices spread not only throughout the rest of the peninsula they occupied, but also onto ships bound for the then unknown. During the sustained age of imperialism that followed, Iberian colonists brought their language to vast and varied areas. As they made their way from tropics to highlands, they encountered

other civilizations, each possessing their own linguistic and cultural traditions. Over time, often through the coercive force of physical, social, and economic violence, huge numbers of indigenous peoples adopted the colonists' linguistic practices and made them their own, as did large numbers of Africans who had been forcibly extricated from the Western coast of that continent and enslaved in the so-called New World.

A number of factors all but guaranteed that the colonists' ways of speaking would undergo substantial transformation as they spread, leaving to the emergent Hispanophone world a legacy of wide-ranging internal variation. First, the Iberian colonists themselves differed socially and linguistically. While some were emissaries of the empire, most were poor, uneducated young men, many of whom had been born in Andalusia, a region far to the south of the imperial court and home to its own linguistic norms. Second, the sheer immensity and variety of the physical space in which Spanish imperialism unfolded meant that some areas were explored earlier and more extensively than others. Places like modern day Mexico and Peru, for instance, were home to major colonial activity for hundreds of years before substantial European settlement occurred in what is today Argentina. The differing time scales of imperial activity coincided with changes in the way that newly arriving colonists spoke, such that European linguistic input to the Americas was itself diachronically variable. Third, the Amerindian peoples with whom Iberians interacted varied widely, meaning that the acquisition of European linguistic norms was shaped by the differing linguistic traditions of the Inca, Aztec, Arawak, and Maya peoples, among many others. Fourth, the distribution of African slaves, who were themselves a linguistically heterogeneous group, was concentrated in the islands of the Caribbean Sea and among the coastal plantations and port cities of Mainland Latin America. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the social and political power dynamics between the colonists and the colonized, as well as those between the enslavers and the enslaved, were inherently unequal and regularly hostile. As such, there was limited concern among early colonists for developing explicit methods of language instruction.[1] If anything, Europeans found it advantageous to hinder and delegitimize the acquisition efforts of Amerindians and Africans, as doing so made it easier to maintain racist ideologies that sustained imperial advancement.

By the time sun finally set on the Spanish Empire, the preceding complex of factors had given shape to one of the largest events of linguistic contact and expansion in human history. Through it, Castilian linguistic practices had spread, over the course of a half millennium, from a community residing in the northern center of a peninsula in Western Europe to one that stretched across a tenth of all land on earth. From the start, language scholars interested in understanding the resulting global Hispanophone community were struck by the wide-ranging linguistic variation found within it. A seemingly unremarkable strategy for assessing its internal diversity has been to partition the Hispanophone world into a collection of dialects. Indeed, the idea that languages can be delineated into regionally circumscribed varieties is one that is common to the popular imagination and linguistics alike, and it is routinely applied not just to Spanish, but to all broadly spoken languages. The central argument of this paper is that there is a fundamental incoherence underlying this conception of linguistic diversity, and that this incoherence is compounded when it is applied to another linguistic reality, namely, contact between speakers with differing regional backgrounds. The inevitable result is a perspective that puts the imagined interaction of named abstractions front and center, sidelining the individual language user who is the real locus of variation, contact, and change.

This critique is particularly important to keep in mind when we shift our attention from the historical emergence of the Hispanophone world to consider a contemporary contact event within it. I refer to the one presently unfolding in the United States, where ongoing immigration to this country continues to increase the size and diversity of its Hispanic population as well as the amount of linguistic

interaction occurring within it between individuals of differing regional origins.[2] These circumstances provide an excellent opportunity to reconsider what is meant by 'dialect' in the first place, and they also offer an occasion to reframe 'dialect contact' as *dialectal contact*. That is, once the value and limits of the concept of 'a dialect' are made clear, it becomes sensible to recast this term, shifting from the use of 'dialect' to that of 'dialectal'. This orthographically minor reformulation is conceptually significant in that it emphasizes our interest in understanding a kind of contact occurring between actual people, not between abstract things.

In addition to providing a more precise name for the intended object of inquiry, this reformulation of perspective also makes it possible to capture a fact that remains opaque to the impersonal conception of dialects in contact. This is that the outcomes of dialectal contact are shaped by the social salience of linguistic forms. Specifically, there is reason to believe that features which figure prominently in ideologies of linguistic prestige and regional identity are actively renegotiated in contact communities, frequently resulting in the leveling of regional differences in their use (Trudgill 1986, Britain 2010). Changes in the distribution of low salience features, on the other hand, are less likely to be the result of direct accommodation between speakers, and are, instead, more likely to be due to other factors shaping the contact community. One such factor is its potential relationship with other, still larger linguistic communities. In the case presently under investigation, this refers to the fact that dialectal contact among U.S. Hispanics occurs within the broader context of American life. This means that the linguistic experience of Spanish speakers in the U.S. is shaped not only by their interactions with people originating from various parts of the Hispanophone world, but also by their linguistic engagement with and membership in the Anglophone world.

Whatever the proper understanding may be of the different status of high and low salience features in contact communities, what is of central importance to the present argument is that the very distinction between them, and the potential insights that this affords, are inaccessible to the inherently depersonalized perspective of dialects in contact. Even if the abstraction of the dialect were a coherent linguistic object, which I (and many others) argue that it is not, there is no way to build into it sensitivity to the variable social salience of linguistic forms. For this, one needs people.

As a first step towards fully developing the perspective sketched above, the paper surveys modern Spanish dialectology, with the goal of restating that field's well-established recognition of the conceptual and linguistic limitations of named language varieties. As an alternative to a depersonalized conception of contact based on such abstractions, an idiolectal, feature-centric approach to linguistic contact is offered instead. Built into this approach is an appreciation of the uniquely individual nature of linguistic experience and the inherently social nature of linguistic contact. These facts help frame the paper's proposal that the relative salience of specific linguistic features predisposes them to different kinds of contact-induced change. The differing trajectories of high and low salience features are illustrated through a survey of research on coda /s/, *voseo*, and subject personal pronouns, each of which have been extensively investigated in U.S. contexts.

## 2 | SPANISH IN THE AMERICAS AND THE LIMITS OF NAMED LANGUAGE VARIETIES

The proliferation and diversification of Castilian linguistic practices in the Americas[3] has been of interest to language scholars for some time. At the outset, philologists and dialectologists recognized the heterogeneity of 'el español en América' and warned, often on the basis of factors mentioned above,

against descriptions that were over general. Consider the following from the first of three works by Pedro Henríquez Ureña entitled 'Observaciones sobre el español en América' (1921, 1930, and 1931):

> *Toda generalización corre peligro de ser falsa. Diferencias de clima, diferencias de población, contactos con diversas lenguas indígenas, diversos grados de cultura, mayor o menor aislamiento, han producido o fomentado diferenciaciones en la fonética y en la morfología, en el vocabulario y en la sintaxis.* (Henríquez Ureña 1921: 358)

> *Every generalization [about Spanish in the Americas] runs the risk of being false. Differences in climate, population, contact with diverse indigenous languages, diverse levels of culture, greater or lesser isolation, have produced or fostered differences in phonetics and morphology, in vocabulary and in syntax.*

Henríquez Ureña's reaction to the linguistic diversity he observed was to partition it in terms of physical space. He proposed five principal *zonas dialectales*, geographic zones in which the variable distribution of linguistic features might be circumscribed, and he delineated them with the names and boundaries of the political entities found therein. Zone one consists of the Southwestern United States, Mexico, and the Central American republics. Zone two is made of up the island nations of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Dominican Republic. The Andean highlands of Venezuela, together with the interior as well as the western coast of Colombia, plus all of Ecuador and Peru, as well as most of Bolivia, make up Zone three. Chile alone constitutes the fourth zone, and the final zone is made up of Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and southern Bolivia. After describing how Spanish is spoken within these zones, Henríquez Ureña writes, anticipating a central theme of current paper, '*Dentro de cada zona hay luego subdivisiones*' 'Within each zone, there are additional subdivisions' (Henríquez Ureña 1921: 360). Henríquez Ureña recognized that within any single dialect zone there exist smaller zones, which could themselves be further and further subdivided in terms of the distribution of one linguistic feature or another.

Over the following decades, precisely such subdivision occurred in the scholarly literature, and ever more detailed iterations of the linguistic zonification of Spanish in Latin America emerged. In his aptly titled 1964 work *El problema de la división del español Americano en zonas dialectales*, Urugauyan dialectologist José Pedro Rona proposed sixteen different zones on the basis of three linguistic features, those known informally as *zh-/sheísmo*, *yeísmo*, and *voseo*. These refer, respectively, to (1) the production of the initial sound of words like *yo* 'I' and *llamar* 'to call' as a post-alveolar fricative, (2) the merger of the palatal approximant /j/ and the palatal lateral approximant /ʎ/, through which words like *haya* 'there is' and *halla* 'find' become homophonous, and (3) the use of the second-person singular pronoun *vos*.

In 1980, Melvyn Resnick proposed an even more elaborate system based on eight binarily variable phonological features. These included: (1) yeísmo, (2) the neutralization of liquids, e.g. *mal* 'bad' and *mar* 'sea' are homophonous (3) the weakening of /s/ in syllable coda position, (4) a glottalized realization of /x/, (5) the spirantization of /b/ after /l/, (6) the velarization of coda /n/ (7), an assibilated production of /r/, and (8) the devoicing of vowels. The possible combinations of this set of features yield 256 different dialectal zones. Resnick himself acknowledged that this system, which effectively doubles the total number of possible dialect zones with each additional feature it includes, could quickly become so unwieldy as to be uninformative and unusable. Indeed, it is the incoherence of a system of 25 such dialectal features (which has the characteristic of producing more possible dialect zones than there are people in Latin America) to which Orlando Alba was partly reacting when, in 1992, he wrote the following:

*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.* (80)

*The establishment of boundaries that precisely define the 'dialect zones' of Hispanoamerica seems, especially today, a hopeless and impossible task.*

Alba's pessimism towards the feasibility of demarcating dialect zones does not constitute a rejection of the tradition of descriptive Spanish dialectology. Such work has shed considerable light on variation in the use of Spanish in the Americas as well as on the relationship between European and Latin American ways of using Spanish. Nor is the impossibility of clearly delineating dialect boundaries a problem just for scholars of Hispanic linguistics. Instead, Alba's frustration, and ultimately that of Henríquez Ureña, arises from the very notion of 'a dialect', which they and others recognize as an intractably limited abstraction. Its limitations go beyond those implicit in the dialectologist's truism that 'isoglosses don't bundle', which is a shorthand way of saying that the geographic distribution of even two dialectal features is rarely, if ever, entirely overlapping (see Penny 2000:9-10). The real problem with dialects is that they do not exist.

More precisely, a named dialect, like *Iberian Spanish* or *American English*, can never be something that anyone actually speaks. This is because abstractions like these are at odds with the linguistic uniqueness of individuals. In the same way that no two people are exactly alike, the expression of the human capacity for language, which unfolds within individual minds, is unique to each person. This reality is what the term *idiolect* is meant to capture, as it highlights the linguistic competence of the individual language user. While the idiolects of people who are bound together in time and space do tend to overlap, often substantially, they are never exactly the same. This is at the heart of the matter when de Saussure writes that 'there are as many dialects as there are places' (2001:200), or, when Kayne remarks that 'the number of syntactically distinct languages/dialects is at least as great as the number of individuals presently alive' (2000:8). Put yet another way, 'a named language is defined by the social, political, or ethnic affiliation of its speakers… it is not, strictly speaking, a linguistic object; it is not something that a person speaks' (Otheguy et al. 2015:286).

The depth of these statements can be difficult to appreciate, as they challenge what is sometimes a deeply entrenched habit of mind; namely, that enumerable linguistic systems exist autonomously somewhere in the linguistic ether, and that speakers are vessels or hosts for such systems. This view gets backwards the relationship between named languages and the linguistic competencies of actual people. The possibility of positing the former is contingent on the existence of the latter, not the other way around. Throughout human history, collections of idiolects have been named using geographic, social, and political labels. While naming a collection of idiolects may delineate genuine spatial, historical, or interpersonal boundaries between groups of language users, they do so in a way that linguistically essentializes them. Because named languages exclude the uniqueness of individual experience, it is impossible for them to ever represent the full expression of any single person's linguistic capacity.

## 2.1 | From 'dialects in contact' to dialectal contact

While it is possible then to think of Latin America as representing a particularly daunting exercise in descriptive dialectology, it remains the case that phrases like *Caribbean Spanish* or *Central Altiplano Mexican Spanish* can never refer to the actual linguistic behavior of real people, and, ultimately, they do not correspond to anything in the natural world. Rather, they are socially motivated, geopolitically

shaped abstractions of the apparent overlap in the phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical behavior of individuals (typically) living in physical proximity to each other. When the goal of the linguist becomes understanding the outcomes of contact between people who have historically *not* shared physical space – that is, the situation traditionally referred to as *dialect contact* – the preceding critique acquires additional import. Indeed, uncritical acceptance of named language varieties can easily lead to a depersonalized conception of such contact, one in which different dialects are imagined to knock about as if in an abstract game of linguistic bumper cars.

One strategy for reasserting the concrete and personal nature of contact in such situations is to rename it. To this end, I suggest the phrase *dialectal contact*, as this characterization emphasizes the critical dimension of the contact – differences in the geographic origins of people (and the varying linguistic experiences that such differences entail) – without falling back on the limited concept of the dialect itself. While I will use this label throughout the rest of the paper (and hope that others find it worth using), what is more important than the relabeling that I suggest is the position that it represents, namely, an approach to dialectal contact that privileges idiolects over dialects, as the former, though not the latter, is a coherent linguistic object. By emphasizing individual language users as the locus of dialectal contact, we become better positioned to track its outcomes in a specific way. Note that while the perspective outlined above dispenses with the named zones of dialectologists, it embraces the real fruits of their labor, which is the identification of specific linguistic features that constitute sites of overlap or difference between idiolects. It also embraces a fact about such features that is beyond the reach of abstract systems, namely, that features vary in how prominently they figure in the minds of language users. Some are salient while others are not, and this, as will be argued below, is a key determinant of the outcomes of dialectal contact.

## 2.2 | For U.S. Hispanics dialectal contact occurs alongside language contact

Before shifting to examine the variable salience of features in the context of dialectal contact, there is, in the case of Hispanics in the United States, an additional factor that requires consideration. This is the fact such individuals regularly interact with, and are in many cases themselves, what society calls English speakers. Indeed, it is clear from U.S. Census data that most Americans who identify as Spanish speakers also identify as English speakers, and that the majority of these individuals (22 of the 38 million people over five years old reported to speak Spanish at home) claim to speak English 'Very Well' (American Community Survey 2009-2013). This means that in addition to the shaping forces of dialectal contact, the linguistic behavior of U.S. Hispanics is also under the influence of what the linguistic tradition refers to as *language contact*. Insofar as this term relies on the imagined interaction of abstract systems disembodied from individual language users, it suffers from the same weaknesses that plague the conception of 'dialects in contact', which was critiqued above. Indeed, as linguistic objects, *English*, *Spanish*, *Yoruba*, *Chinese* etc. are subject to the same criticisms as are the named varieties of these languages. However, when recognized as socio-politically motivated ways of grouping people, rather than for defining linguistic objects, these labels are useful to the idiolectal, feature-centric approach to linguistic contact being proposed here. Indeed, from this perspective, language contact and dialectal contact are two sides of the same coin. They both refer, not to the interaction of linguistic systems, but to that of people, and linguistic change that results from this interaction is seen to manifest as shifts in the distribution of specific features in the idiolects of those people. The difference between these terms lies in the kind of interaction that they identify. Dialectal contact refers to interaction that occurs *within* a single socially defined group, whereas language contact refers to interaction *between* two (or more) such groups.

## 3 | THE CONFLUENCE OF CONTACT AND SALIENCE

Since the linguistic experiences of many U.S. Hispanics are shaped by both language contact and dialectal contact, it is natural to ask whether these forces might, either independently or through interaction, produce certain outcomes. Among the changes they are known to respectively induce are *structural convergence* and *dialectal leveling* (Thomason and Kaufman 1988, Silva-Corvalán 1994, Winford 2005, Britain 2010, Kerswill 2013). These two contact effects are, like the situations that produce them, closely related but different. While one emphasizes an increase in similarity, the other highlights the loss of differences. Convergence effects are seen when contact between groups promotes increasingly similar use of a given feature. Leveling effects are seen when contact within a group promotes the erosion of differences in the use of a feature. In situations characterized by both dialectal contact and language contact then, which features will level and which will converge? The work of Trudgill provides a possible answer, one in which the salience of linguistic features is paramount.

Trudgill (1986) frames his landmark investigation of dialectal contact within *Accomodation Theory* (Giles et al. 1973). This theory offers a psychosocial explanation for accommodation, suggesting that a speaker may, in order to gain approval, adopt or approximate[4] the linguistic behavior of an interlocutor. What determines the availability of a particular feature for the purpose of accommodation is its salience. Trudgill writes, 'In contact with speakers of other language varieties, speakers modify those features of their own varieties of which they are most aware' (1986:11). Trudgill proposes that a feature is likely to figure prominently in the consciousness of speakers if it is (a) overtly stigmatized (especially if it contrasts orthographically with a standard form), (b) involved in ongoing change, (c) phonetically radically different, and/or (d) involved in the maintenance of a phonological contrast.

Consider again the features that were mentioned above in section two: *zh-/sheísmo*, *yeísmo*, *voseo*, the neutralization of liquids, weakening of /s/ in syllable coda position, a glottalized realization of /x/, spirantization of /b/ after /l/, velarization of coda /n/, an assibilated production of /r/, and the devoicing of vowels. While some are perhaps more prominent than others, each of these features satisfies at least one of Trudgill's criteria for salience. In the remainder of the paper, I will focus on two of these features, the weakening of coda /s/ and *voseo*. I will also focus on a feature that is not in this list, but which is a well-established site of regionally constrained variation, namely, the variable presence/absence of subject pronouns (e.g. *yo canto ~ canto*, both 'I sing'). All three of these features have been extensively studied in U.S. contexts. The difference that is relevant to the current argument is that two are high salience features and one is not. Indeed, that variation in subject pronoun use is absent from early dialectological work speaks to its status as low in salience – it was below the radars of the dialectologists themselves. A review of the research that examines these features in the U.S. reveals two different patterns. For coda /s/ and *voseo*, the bulk of the research is consistent with a pattern of leveling. For subject pronouns, the strongest evidence reflects a pattern of convergence.

### 3.1 | Coda /s/

In syllable final position, /s/ is variably produced by Spanish speakers (see Canfield 1981, Lipksi 1994, and Penny 2000 for overviews; see also Brown and Torres Cacoullos 2003 for a discussion of /s/ variation in syllabic onset position). Variants range from a canonical voiceless alveolar fricative to the complete absence of any phonetic reflex, often called *s-deletion*. In between these poles lies a continuum of frication. Linguistic research on /s/ varies in terms of the description and classification of this continuum. A common approach is to perceptually code and segmentally categorize tokens as cases of [s], of [h] (sometimes called *aspiration*), or of [0] (deletion). In some studies, deleted tokens

are considered to be a separate category from those that have some phonetic substance (e.g. [s] and [h]), and in other research all tokens that are non-canonical are grouped together as *weakened* (e.g. [h] and deletion together). A less common but increasingly frequent method for describing /s/ variation relies on measurements of the acoustic properties of fricative moments, leaving aside the question of segmental categories (Minnick Fox 2006, Erker 2010, File-Muriel and Brown 2011). Despite this methodological variability in the description of /s/ weakening, the research literature converges in demonstrating that it is systematically constrained by a range of linguistic factors,[5] including preceding and following segments (Ma and Hirashimchuk 1975, Alba 2000, File Muriel 2007, Lynch 2009), word-position and speech rate (Hammond 1980), prosodic context (Poplack 1981, Alfaraz 2000, Brown and Cacoullos 2003), lexical frequency (Bybee et al. 2016, Erker and Otheguy 2016), and morphemic status and other functional considerations (Terrell 1975a 1979, Poplack 1980b, Uber 1981, 1989, Hochberg 1986, Hundley 1987, Ranson 1992, Cameron 1996).

With respect to Trudgill's criteria, there are at least two ways in which /s/ weakening qualifies as salient. First, weakened productions of /s/ differ from the orthographic representation of lexical items in written Spanish. That is, there is a mismatch between written representation and phonetic realization when /s/ is either aspirated or deleted, e.g. when *mismo* 'same' is produced as either [mihmo] or [mimo]. Furthermore, /s/ can function as a plural-marking as well as a person-marking morpheme. When morphemic /s/ is deleted, the formal contrast between pairs such as *casa* 'house' and *casas* 'houses' and *habla* 'she speaks' and *hablas* 'you speak' is neutralized. Furthermore, though /s/ weakening is widespread in the Hispanophone world, it is generally viewed as non-standard. This can be seen both in folk linguistic sayings (e.g. the familiar prohibition against *comerse las eses* 'swallowing one's S's') as well as in the sociolinguistic literature: higher rates of weakening are more likely to be observed in informal settings (Alba 2004), in the speech of men compared to women (Fontanella de Weinberg 1974, Cepeda 1995), and among working class speakers (Cepeda 1995, Lynch 2009). Variation in /s/ also tends to be regionally constrained, with higher rates of weakening typically found among speakers in coastal and Caribbean communities than among speakers in mainland Latin America (Canfield 1981, Lipski 1994, *i.a.*)

Several scholars have investigated /s/ in U.S. settings characterized by dialectal contact. Many of them report evidence of dialectal leveling (or patterns consistent with leveling, broadly construed), typically in the form of decreased rates of /s/ reduction among speakers with regional origins in areas known for relatively high rates of weakening (Parodi 2003, Aaron and Hernandez 2007, Lynch 2009, Erker 2012, Hernández and Maldonado 2012, Raymond 2012, and Villareal 2014, though see Lamboy 2004 and Ramos Pellicia 2012 for alternative results).

In their 2007 study, Aaron and Hernandez examine /s/ among Salvadorans living in Houston. In data drawn from 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.

These results run parallel to those reported by Hernández and Maldonado. Their 2012 study, which also focuses on contact between Salvadorans and Mexicans, examines rates of /s/ reduction among three groups: (1) residents of San Sebastian, El Salvador, (2) Salvadoran migrants in Brownsville, TX who are in the midst of migration towards Houston, and (3) Salvadorans who have settled in Houston. Observed rates of /s/ weakening are highest in El Salvador, lower among transmigrants in Brownsville, and lower still among Salvadorans in Houston. This study, in addition to providing further evidence of leveling in /s/ production, highlights the potentially gradual way in which contact-induced accommodation may take shape: '*Para los salvadoreños que ingresan a los Estados Unidos*

*por las ciudades fronterizas del norte de México, el contacto cultural y lingüístico empieza mucho antes de llegar a su destino final.*' For Salvadorans who enter the United States through border towns in northern Mexico, cultural and linguistic contact begins long before reaching their final destination' (Hernández and Maldonado 2012:45).

In his 2009 study, Lynch investigated roughly two and half thousand tokens of /s/ that occurred in sociolinguistic interviews with two groups of Cubans in Miami, Florida. One group consisted of five older adults who arrived in Miami in the 1960s and 1970s. The other consisted of eleven younger individuals born in Miami whose parents arrived to the city before 1980. In addition to potential generational differences, this study investigated the possible constraining effects of speaker sex and social class. Lynch also examined the effects of five linguistic conditioning factors, including the morphemic status of /s/, word position in which /s/ occurs, prosodic stress, following segments, and discourse topic. Tokens were perceptually coded as either [s], [h], or deletion. Results of a logistic regression analysis (where the dependent variable was defined as [s] vs. [h] and deletion) revealed the following hierarchy of constraints (in descending order of predictive power): following segment, generation, morphemic status, speaker sex, prosodic stress, and social class. Word position and discourse topic were not significant in the model. While the different generations were similarly sensitive to the various linguistic factors included in the analysis, they differed significantly in overall rates of [s] production. The Miami-born speakers produced [s] at roughly twice the rate of the Cuban-born speakers, 25 percent compared to twelve percent, respectively.

These results ran contrary to Lynch's initial hypothesis, which was informed by the perspective that weakening of coda /s/ represents a change in progress and that contact situations can accelerate rates of change in such features (Silva-Corvalán 1994). Lynch interprets his results as a case of 'reversed language change' and suggests a number of potentially interrelated explanations for it. One is that the Miami-born speakers are partially motivated by sociopolitical ideology to differentiate their speech from other groups of Miami residents of Cuban origin. Another potential factor is the linguistic proficiency of the speakers in question, and an additional dimension may be the more familiar contribution of overt prestige. To this end, Lynch raises the possibility that Miami-born Cuban males feel a particular pressure to excel in Miami's economic sectors, and that, quoting a male informant, 'people who don't pronounce /s/ come across as uneducated' (784).

An interesting feature of this discussion is that the Miami-born speakers in this study have had little formal education in a standard Spanish curriculum, which raises the question of how they might have settled upon norms of /s/ production that differentiate them from their older generational counterparts. One possibility, which is not mutually exclusive to but in fact directly in line with Lynch's set of explanatory factors, is that the Miami-born speakers have had comparatively greater contact with non-Cuban Hispanics who may, in light of their own regional origins, be likely to weaken /s/ at lower rates. While Lynch's 2009 study did not include speakers with other regional backgrounds, he has, in other work, highlighted the wide-ranging regional diversity of Miami's Hispanic population: 'South Florida is among the world's most pan-Hispanic places in sociolinguistic terms. Miami-Dade and Broward Counties are home to large contingents of Cubans, Nicaraguans, Colombians, Venezuelans, Argentines, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Hondurans, Peruvians, Spaniards, and Mexicans (the latter found mostly in rural areas of these counties).' (Carter and Lynch 2015:373) It is certainly possible, if not plausible, that an additional factor shaping the /s/ production of the Miami-Born participants in Lynch's 2009 study is that they have, over the course of their lives, participated in intensive and sustained dialectal contact in which, as Lynch puts it, '[s] assumes responsibility as a social differentiator' (2009:783).

Results of the preceding studies are complemented by those of Erker, whose 2012 study examines coda /s/ among Spanish speakers in New York City. Erker also finds evidence of leveling in /s/

production, but accommodation between regional groups is more symmetrical in nature. In this study, /s/ is examined acoustically as well as in terms of deletion rates. The data consist of 4,000 tokens of coda /s/ collected from twenty speakers in the *Otheguy Zentella Corpus of Spanish in New York* (Otheguy and Zentella 2012). Half of the speakers have origins in the Caribbean (they or they parents were born in Cuba, Dominican Republic, or Puerto Rico) and half have origins in non-coastal regions of the Latin American mainland (in Colombia, Ecuador, or Mexico). Nine of the speakers had spent less than 6 years in NYC at the time of their interview while the remaining eleven had either been born in New York or spent at least seven years living in the city. Among the newcomers, the average age of arrival to the city was 26 years old and the average number of years spent in NYC was 3. Among the longtime residents in the study, average age of arrival was 12 and the average number of years in NYC was 22.

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 frication. Speech-generated frication was observed in 2,912 tokens, or 72.8 percent of the data, making the deletion rate of the entire sample 27.2 percent. Among non-deleted tokens, mean frication duration and COG is 83 ms and 2,410 Hz, respectively. Recall that a broad generalization in the literature is that observed rates of /s/ deletion are typically higher in Caribbean locales than they are in Mainland Latin America. This is true in Erker's study as well, for both newcomers to the city and longtime residents. However, the intensity of the regional difference is considerably diminished in latter group. Caribbean longtime residents have lower deletion rates than their more recently arrived counterparts, while deletion rates of longtime resident Mainlanders are slightly higher than those of their regional counterparts. See Figure 1 below.

A similar picture emerges at the acoustic level. Figure 2 plots the twenty speakers in the study according to mean duration and COG of their non-deleted /s/ tokens. That is, each dot represents the average spectrotemporal profile of that speaker's /s/. A clear pattern of regional differentiation is observed among the newcomers such that Caribbeans speakers produce /s/ with a shorter duration and lower COG than Mainlanders. Results of a multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA), which compares the groups simultaneously in terms of both acoustic parameters, are statistically significant (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).
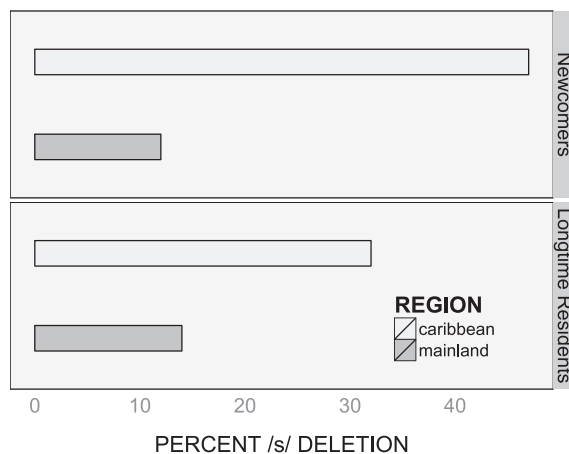


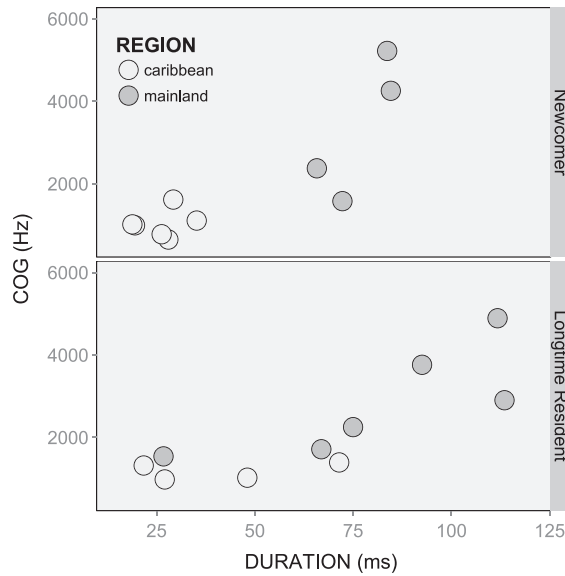**FIGURE 1** Deletion rates by region and apparent time generation

**FIGURE 2** COG and duration of /s/ by region and apparent time generation

Considered together, the research discussed above presents a clear picture: In the U.S., patterns of variation in coda /s/ are susceptible to reconfiguration. Such modification is, given the high salience of this feature, very likely the result of direct accommodation on the part of the individuals living in the contact communities. A similar pattern, one of leveling through accommodation, emerges with respect to *voseo*.

## 3.2 | Voseo

*Voseo* refers to the use of *vos* and its associated verbal morphology as a means of second-person singular address (e.g. *vos hablás* 'you speak'). In Latin America, voseante communities are concentrated in Central America, Colombia, and the Rioplatense region of South America (Lipski 1994, Benavides 2003). In the last of these regions, the use of *vos* is widespread and typically unstigmatized. The majority of voseantes in the U.S., however, have origins in Central America, where the use of *vos* is more sociolinguistically complex (Lipski 1988, Michnowicz and Place 2010, Quintanilla Aguilar 2009, Sorenson 2013). Broadly speaking, the use of *vos* in Central America is constrained by perceptions of social distance and formality. *Vos* is typically more likely to be used in informal contexts and when social distance between interlocutors is diminished (e.g. between siblings, friends). In other contexts, such as in interaction with strangers, with figures of authority, or in prayer, *usted* and *tú* are more likely (for a nuanced treatment of the social signaling potential of *vos* see Castro 2000). Despite its frequent use in Central America, *voseo* is at odds with educational language instruction, governmental announcements, and television advertising in the region, which tend to feature *tú* instead of *vos*. Lipski interprets these patterns as evidence of '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 since disappeared from Peninsular dialects' (Lipski 1988:103).'

The first investigation of *voseo* in a U.S. setting was Lipski's 1988 study of Salvadorans living in Houston, TX. This study highlights the way in which the already high salience of *voseo* can, in a U.S. context, be dramatically amplified, bearing on 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 find themselves motivated to suppress this feature of their linguistic repertoires so as to decrease their chances of deportation. That it may be socially and practically disadvantageous (at least in public life) to speak in a way that indexes Central Americanness is a likely contributor to the fact that in the U.S. *voseo* is losing ground to *tuteo*.

Several studies focus on Salvadorans who reside in communities where Mexicans are the largest Hispanic group. Baumel-Schreffler (1994) observes diminished use of *voseo*, especially outside of the home, among 50 Salvadoran residents of Houston and attributes this trend to increased contact with speakers of Mexican origin. Similar patterns are observed by Hernández (2002) and Sorenson (2013). Sorenson's study is noteworthy for its comparison of *voseo* and *tuteo* among Salvadorans in several locales. This includes speakers in El Salvador as well as those living in Washington D.C. and Houston. Sorenson finds that speakers residing in the U.S. have shifted away from *voseo*, and notes that the relatively larger size of the Salvadoran population in Washington D.C., compared to its smaller size in Houston, does not make intergenerational *voseo* retention any more likely.

Similar patterns emerge in research carried out in Los Angeles, where, despite representing the second largest national group (after speakers of Mexican origin), Salvadorans appear to shift away from *voseo*. Parodi (2003) proposes that in Los Angeles, Hispanic immigrants and their children shift towards a regional vernacular, *Los Angeles Vernacular Spanish* (LAVs), which is itself a koine based on rural Mexican linguistic norms, among which is the non-use of *voseo*. Indeed, Parodi observes that in L.A., 'El voseo está casi totalmente perdido en la población de origen salvadoreño' 'Voseo is almost completely lost in the Salvadoran population' (2003:35). This is further substantiated in the work of Raymond (2012) and Villareal (2014), each of whom investigates the linguistic behavior of the children of Salvadoran immigrants in Los Angeles. Raymond's case study of a Salvadoran family finds phonological as well as morphosyntactic differences between parents and children, one of which is the non-use of *voseo* by the latter. This is despite the fact that the parents in the study use *vos* with each other and sometimes with their children. When asked directly about *vos*, the children express strongly negative attitudes towards it. This result is consistent those of Villareal, who, in a study of fourth and fifth graders in Los Angeles schools, found that children rated *voseantes* less favorably than *tuteantes* in a matched-guise test.

Additional support for the idea that in the U.S., *voseantes* accommodate towards *tuteante* norms is found in the work of Woods and Rivera Mills (2010 and 2012). These studies examine attitudes toward and use of *voseo* among Salvadorans and Hondurans living in communities of Oregon and Washington, where Mexicans represent the Hispanic majority. Woods and Rivera Mills conclude that the domain of use of *voseo* has contracted. While participants in their study may retain *vos*, it has all but disappeared from use in public domains. 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.' (Woods and River Mills 2012: 198).

## 3.3 | The presence vs. absence of subject pronouns

The variable presence vs. absence of subject pronouns with finite verbs has been extensively investigated in communities throughout the Hispanophone world (Guitart 1982, Silva-Corvalán 1982,

Cameron 1993, Bayley and Pease-Alvarez 1997, Flores-Ferrán 2002, Orozco and Guy 2008, Torres Cacoullos and Travis 2010, Claes 2011, Holmquist 2012, Otheguy and Zentella 2012, Shin 2014, Michnowicz 2015, Carvalho et al. 2015). Despite widely shared norms in terms of linguistic factors that condition the presence or absence of pronouns, regional differences in overall rates of pronoun use are routinely reported (Lipski 1994:221, Otheguy et al. 2007:71). However, unlike coda /s/ and voseo, which are not only geographically but also socially constrained, pronoun rates tend not to vary systematically in terms of class, sex, age, or style (Otheguy et al. 2007:778, though see Orozco and Guy 2008 as an exception). Furthermore, whereas /s/ deletion and the use of *vos* figure prominently in folk ideologies of Spanish norms, the presence or absence of subject pronouns is rarely, if ever, a locus of sociolinguistic stigma or prestige.

Numerous studies have explored the possibility that language contact influences the pronominal behavior of Hispanics in the U.S. While many such studies find evidence of change that lends itself to a language contact interpretation (Klein-Andreu 1985, Lapidus and Otheguy 2005a, Lipski 1996, Otheguy and Zentella 2012), other studies have been more skeptical about the possibility of contact-induced convergence in pronominal norms (Bayley and Pease-Alvarez 1997, Flores and Toro 2000, Flores-Ferrán 2004, and Travis 2007). For the purposes of the present discussion, the primary issue is not whether pronominal changes are always observed among speakers in a contact community. Rather, the central argument is that to the extent that pronominal change *is* observed, the prevailing trend will be one of convergence rather than leveling.

A broad generalization regarding regional differences in pronoun rates is that they tend to be higher in communities in the Caribbean and in coastal areas of mainland Latin America than in communities located within the interior. Differences between speakers with origins in these zones are the focus of the largest study of Spanish subject pronouns in the U.S. to date, that of Otheguy and Zentella (2012). Their data consist of 140 sociolinguistic interviews with speakers who have origins in Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico and Puerto Rico. The average pronoun rate of Caribbeans in the study (those of Cuban, Dominican, or Puerto Rican origin) is 39.4 (sd = 10.1) while the average rate for Mainlanders (those of Colombia, Ecuadorian, and Mexican origin) is 27.6 (sd = 9.8). The difference of 11.8 percentage points between the means is statistically significant, $t(138) = 7.03, p < .001$.

Another trend in the data is that pronoun rates significantly increase alongside apparent-time generation. Otheguy and Zentella group participants into three categories on the basis of their ages of arrival to and years spent living in New York: *Newcomers*, *Established immigrants*, and *New York-raised*. A comparison of the pronoun rates of these groups reveals significant differences between them (see Table 1).

Another way of examining the relationship between pronoun rates and speakers' length of residence in the contact setting is presented below, in Figure 3a. On the x-axis speakers are plotted according to their percentage of life spent in the United States (PLUS), which is calculated by dividing a speaker's years in the U.S. and age. Pronoun rates are plotted on the y-axis. A significant positive correlation between PLUS and pronoun rates is observed, $(r(138) = .3, p < .001)$.

**TABLE 1** Pronoun rates for three generational groups in the OZC

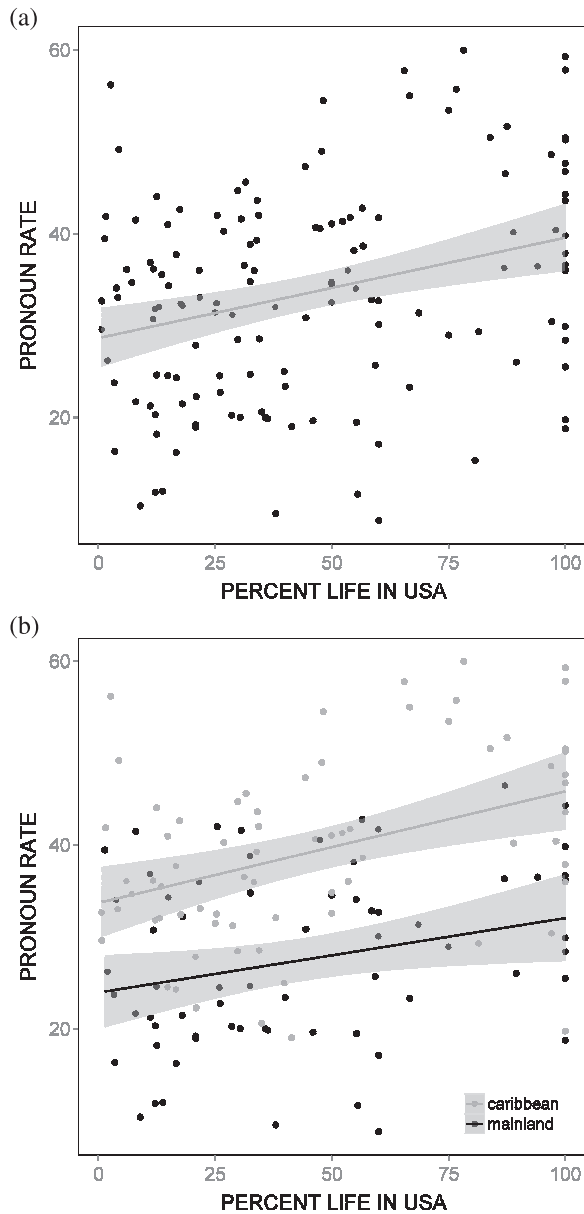| | AGE OF ARRIVAL | YEARS IN USA | RATE |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Newcomers (N=39) | ≤ 17 | <5 | 29 |
| Established Immigrants (73) | ≥ 13 | ≥11 | 33 |
| New York Raised (28) | < 3 or NYC born | - | 38 |
| F (2,137) = 4.4. p <.01 | | | |

(a)



(b)



**FIGURE 3** (a) Subject pronoun rates and speaker PLUS. (b) Subject pronoun rates, speaker PLUS, and regional origin

Now consider Figure 3b, which is the same as 3a with the difference that speakers are grouped by regional origin. The overall trend in the data, an increase in rates alongside an increase in PLUS, is present within each regional group, such that a significant correlation between pronoun rates and PLUS is observed among Caribbeans (r(70) = .39, p <.001) as well as among Mainlanders (r(66) = .26, p <.03). In a linear regression Region and PLUS account for roughly a third of the variance in pronoun rates (adjusted $R^2$ = .33, F(3,136) = 24.3, p <.001). While both Region (B = .5 p <.001) and PLUS (B = .28 p <.001) are significant predictors of pronoun rates, there is no statistical evidence of an interaction between them (p = .41). These results are strongly indicative of contact-induced

convergence. That is, the systematic increase in pronoun rates is very likely related to the language contact that tends to accompany longer residence in New York. Furthermore, the results highlight how convergence can take place in the presence of persistent[6] regional differences, illustrating the potential independence of the effects of language and dialectal contact.

## 3.4 | If high salience features are sites of direct accommodation, what drives convergence?

When considered alongside the trends of leveling in coda /s/ and *voseo*, the trajectory of change in pronoun rates observed above is markedly different: regional differences persist despite significant intergenerational change. What accounts for this? Previous researchers have suggested that different types of features are, by definition, variably susceptible to the shaping forces of contact situations. Indeed, in his 2009 paper, Lynch remarks that 'processes of phonological variation and change may not respond to the language contact situation in the way that morphological and syntactic processes do' (2009:787). This commentary strikes me as on the right track but in need of refinement in light of the preceding discussion. The leveling trends observed in research on coda /s/ and *voseo*, the latter of which is an indubitably morphosyntactic feature, suggest that the key determinant of contact-induced change in the use of a given feature is not whether it belongs to a particular grammatical domain. Instead, according to the proposal offered here, what accounts for the different fate of features in settings characterized by both dialectal and language contact is their varying social salience. Of the features reviewed here, the two that figure prominently in speaker consciousness (one phonological and another morphosyntactic) are more prone to leveling, while the one that is relatively low in social salience is more prone to convergence.

If patterns of leveling are the direct result of psychosocially motivated accommodation between speakers actively manipulating features that constitute prominent sites of idiolectal similarity and/or difference, then what is the mechanism driving the change in subject pronoun rates reported above? The answer suggested thus far is that such change is consistent with a language-contact interpretation, in that it arises as a byproduct of the linguistic experiences of speakers who simultaneously belong to the group of people society calls Spanish speakers and to the group of people that society calls English speakers. It is well known that these groups differ in their use of subject pronouns, such that rates observed among the latter group are substantially higher than those reported for the former (Shin and Montes Alcalá 2014). But what is the mechanism of change at the level of the idiolect, which has been posited here as the genuine locus of contact? One answer is that, in addition to social factors, idiolects are also shaped by cognitive factors. From this perspective, the increase in pronoun rates that accompanies increased life experience in the U.S. is a singular instance of a more general strategy, one that Silva-Corvalán has described as follows: 'In language contact situations, bilinguals develop strategies aimed at lightening the cognitive load of having to remember and use two different linguistic systems.' (1994:6).

Though the conception of bilingualism as a state in which two systems reside in one mind runs the risk of imposing a named language perspective on the idiolect, there is good reason to believe that Silva-Corvalán's interpretation is correct with respect to the issue of cognitive load. Indeed, it suggests that patterns of convergence such as the one observed for subject pronouns might be seen as the product of cognitive economy principles driving speakers to develop maximally general strategies for language use. This line of thinking is supported by experimental research in the field of multilingualism, specifically that which engages the notion of a 'bilingual paradox' (Sorace 2011). This term relates to findings that multilingualism comes with cognitive costs as well as benefits. Among its proposed benefits are enhanced executive function (Costa et al. 2008) and increased defense against age-related cognitive decline (Bialystok 2009). With respect to costs, experimental results indicate that

multilinguals access lexical items more slowly than monolinguals and also experience more frequent tip-of-the-tongue states (Bialystok 2009). A potential explanation for these results is that they reflect the greater processing burden borne by multilinguals, especially as they work to resolve what Bialystok describes as 'the central conflict created by joint activation of the two competing language systems' (2009:7).

From this perspective, structural convergence can be seen as constituting a reduction in such competition, thereby decreasing some of the cognitive costs of multilingualism. That said, while speakers in contact communities may indeed be expected to employ such strategies, the research reviewed here suggests that the features to which they can be applied is restricted by social salience. It precisely because subject pronouns fly under the sociolinguistic radar that they are prime candidates for convergence, as shifts in their usage constitute an increase in cognitive economy that comes at little social cost. The high salience of /s/, by contrast, makes it a very unlikely site for convergence. Indeed, a strong proposal for the influence of cognitive economy principles would predict a global decrease in rates of /s/ weakening among U.S. Hispanics. That is, in their capacity as language users in the Anglophone world, they would be unlikely to systematically weaken /s/ in coda position. But this prediction is inconsistent with the literature in two ways. First, Erker's 2012 study found direct evidence of mutual accommodation, such that the observed leveling trend depended in part on an intergenerational *increase* in /s/ weakening among several Mainlanders. More importantly, this result and the other shifts in /s/ production reported above have strong social motivations that are clearly tied to ideologies of identity and prestige that have currency *within* the Hispanophone world.

## 4 | CONCLUSION

The preceding discussion presented a strategy for understanding how language contact and dialectal contact shape the linguistic experience and behavior of Hispanics in the United States. At the center of this strategy is a recognition of the disconnect between named language varieties and the real locus of linguistic contact, which is the mind of the individual language user. In order to reconnect with the individual, an idiolectal, feature-centric perspective to linguistic contact was offered. This perspective emphasized the uniqueness of individual linguistic experience and the social nature of contact. It also highlighted the fact that in the U.S., dialectal and language contact are frequently coincident, and social salience was presented as a tool for disentangling their effects. Insofar as contact-induced change occurs through psychosocially motivated accommodation, features that stand out in the minds of speakers as a locus of a regional linguistic difference will be prime candidates for leveling. Research on coda /s/ and *voseo* in the U.S. suggests that change in these features arises primarily in this way. By comparison, changes in low salience features, like the presence/absence of subject pronouns, are likely to arise by another mechanism. Rather than undergo socially motivated reconfiguration, such features are more likely to be shaped by organizing principles of multilingual minds.

### ENDNOTES

[1] While it is true that many religious missionaries were interested in fostering cross-linguistic exchange, this was typically in the service of proselytizing and largely restricted to the teaching and translation of religious texts.

[2] For a detailed account of historical and recent trends in the migration patterns and socio-demographic makeup of Spanish speakers in the U.S. see López Morales 2009, Instituto Cervantes 2015.

[3] For discussion of the linguistic impacts of Spanish imperialism outside of the Americas, see Quilis 1992, Sayahi 2004, and Lipski 2012.

[4] The opposite may also be true, such that a speaker wishing to disassociate herself from an interlocutor may strive to maximize differences in linguistic behavior.

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