Bidialectalism and Mexican Lexical Assimilation to Puerto Rican Spanish

Keywords: Bidialectalism, lexical assimilation, lexical borrowings, Mexican immigrant community, Puerto Rican Spanish

Although bilingualism has been widely addressed in research conducted from different perspectives (e.g., Appel & Muysken, 2006; Silva-Corvalán, 1997; Weinreich, 1953), bidialectalism, on the other hand, has been comparatively less studied. Most dialect contact studies focus on phonological (Couplan, 1984; Giles, 1973; Molina, 2006; Trudgill, 1984; 1986), morphological (Kerswill, 1985a; Thelander, 1982) or syntactic aspects (Chesire, 1982; Silva-Corvalán, 1994). However, fewer studies have explored the lexical effects of dialect contact (Zentella, 1990; Zentella & Otheguy, 2007). Therefore, this pilot study set out to examine lexical assimilation in a population that has not been studied before: Mexican immigrants living in Puerto Rico (PR).

Three research questions were investigated: first, whether there is a correlation between the amount of time spent living in PR and the extent of assimilation of the Mexican community to Puerto Rican Spanish (PRS); second, if participants recognize and embrace their degree of assimilation to PRS; and third, whether participants are aware of linguistic differences between Mexican and Puerto Rican dialects and, if so, whether they reflect a dialect preference.

The eight participants in this study were born and raised in Mexico, had been living in PR for at least a year, and were at least eighteen years old. They were divided into two groups based on the number of years spent residing in PR: four had been living in PR for ten years or less (Group 1), while the other four had been living there for twenty years or more (Group 2).

Lexical production and comprehension was assessed by means of a sentence completion task and production self-assessments. In the first task, participants read sentences and completed them with lexical items from the Mexican, Puerto Rican or general Spanish dialect. In the second task, participants were exposed to another set of sentences, which contained target lexical items belonging to one of the three Spanish dialects. Their task was to read them and assess the frequency with which they used similar expressions. Attitude data was collected by means of a questionnaire.

Regarding the first research question, results from task 1 revealed that the use of Puerto Rican lexical items positively correlates with the amount of time spent living in Puerto Rico (0-20% for G1; 10-50% for G2). With respect to the second research question, participants from Group 2 ranked their use of the target words higher than Group 1 (10% for G1; 30% for G2), exhibiting more willingness from Group 2 to admit their degree of assimilation to PRS. Concerning the third question, all participants displayed knowledge of lexical items belonging to both Mexican and Puerto Rican dialects; however, Group 1 displayed preference towards the Mexican dialect (100% for MS vs. 50% for PRS), while Group 2 valued the Mexican and the Puerto Rican dialects similarly (95% for MS and 85% for PRS).

Taken together, these data suggest that participants' ability to know and use these two dialects regularly identifies them as bidialectal speakers who have not replaced one dialect with another, but, instead, have increased their linguistic repertoire.

References

Appel, R., & Muysken, P. (2006). *Language, Contact and Bilingualism*. Amsterdam University Press.

Chesire, J. (1982). *Variation in an English dialect. A sociolinguistic study.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Coupland, N. (1984). Accommodation at work: Some phonological data and their implications. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, *46*, 49-70.

Giles, H. (1973). Accent mobility: A model and some data. *Anthropological Linguistics*, *15*, 87-105.

Kerswill, P. E. (1985a). A sociolinguistic study of rural immigrants in Bergen, Norway. Disertación Doctoral inédita, University of Cambridge.

Molina, I. (2006). Innovación y difusión del cambio lingüístico en Madrid. *Revista de Filología Española*, *LXXXVI*(1), 127-149.

Otheguy, Zentella A. C. & Livert, D. (2007). Language and dialect contact in Spanish in New York. *Language, 83*(4), 770-802.

Silva-Corvalán, C. (1994). *Language contact and change: Spanish in Los Ángeles.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Silva-Corvalán, C. (Ed.). (1997). *Spanish in four continents: Studies in language contact and bilingualism*. Georgetown University Press.

Thelander, M. (1982). A qualitative approach to the quantitative data of speech variation. *Romaine*, 65-83.

Trudgill, P. (1984). *On dialect*. New York: New York University Press.

Trudgill, P. (1986). *Dialects in contact*. Oxford – New York: Basil Blackwell.

Weinreich, U. (1953). *Languages in contact*. New York: Linguistic Circle.

Zentella, A. C. (1990). Lexical leveling in four New York City Spanish dialects: Linguistic and social factors. *Hispania*, *73*(4), 1094-1106.