

What Happens when Dialectal Parallelism Meets Language Contact?

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According to the theory of dialectal parallelism (Guy 2000), the constraints which condition language variation and change are consistent within different segments of a specific speech community. The present study tests this theory examining data from two corpora: CorCaBa (Corpus of the Castilian of Barranquilla) and CEsCoNY (Corpus of the Spanish of Colombians in New York City). These corpora were built on interviews with socially stratified groups of twenty-two and twenty speakers from each community, respectively.

We test the theory of dialectal parallelism by means of a series of analyses using a total of 8,900 tokens divided among the linguistic variables used to express futurity, possession, and pronominal subject expression in the two communities under study: Barranquilla, Colombia and the Colombian Community in New York City. As we explored the constraints that significantly condition these linguistic variables, we conducted a series of parallel statistical regression analyses for each linguistic variable to test the effects of nine factor groups on the expressions of futurity and overt pronominal subjects as well as thirteen on the expression of possession. We also explored five social constraints in Barranquilla and eight in NYC.

Our results reveal that the constraints conditioning language change and variation are consistent within different segments of a speech community only to a certain extent. The findings show interesting parallels between all three linguistic variables. There are innovating paradigms in the expressions of future and possession, respectively which occur more frequently in NYC. Moreover, the linguistic constraints conditioning the occurrence of a given paradigm in each community are similar for each linguistic variable; i.e., the linguistic constraints acting on the variables are largely the same in both communities. The similarity of the linguistic constraint effects suggests that, despite the influence of language contact in NYC, the two communities still belong to the same speech community. Nevertheless, some intriguing differences also appear in the constraints conditioning pronominal usage suggesting that not all linguistic variables may be equally susceptible to the same pressures in all sociolinguistic settings, specifically in language contact situations. These findings help explain other instances of morphosyntactic variation, especially those involving analytic and synthetic variants. Furthermore, these results contribute to augment our understanding of language variation and change with regards to Spanish in the US, Spanish in contact with other languages, and in general terms, in situations of linguistic contact.