Covert and overt prestige in Manchego Spanish: Segmental and suprasegmental findings
Nicholas Henriksen, University of Michigan

Since the publication of Trudgill (1972), there has been much empirical support for the overt vs. covert prestige paradigm. Overt prestige is a community’s widespread positive social evaluation of the linguistic forms employed by a high-status group, whereas covert prestige is the positive evaluation of a socially stigmatized variety at a smaller, more local level. It is also generally accepted that female speakers use forms associated with the prestige standard more frequently than men (e.g., Labov, 1966). This paper presents a systematic investigation of the prestige roles and the effect of speaker sex for two sociolinguistic variables in Manchego Spanish (spoken in south-central Spain): utterance-final pitch accents in wh-questions and yes/no questions, and intervocalic trills (/r/). For both variables we show that male speakers more commonly produce variants that are considered local (i.e., Manchego) or that are non-standard speech patterns; these findings are considered in light of recent developments in the education system in Spain and are reminiscent of Shuy’s (1969) original claim on young men’s reactions to the ‘school situation’ such that there may be negative views of young men toward variants associated with academic settings where prestige standards are favored.

Two exploratory data collection protocols were conducted. In the first protocol, 16 speakers of Manchego Spanish (8 female; 8 male) participated in two speaking tasks designed to elicit yes/no questions and wh-questions: a sentence reading task and a ‘gap task’, which was an interactive dialogue task conducted in pairs. The objective was to determine style-shifts in intonational contours across speaking conditions. In the second protocol, 12 speakers of Manchego Spanish and 12 speakers of León (northern) Spanish participated in a semi-spontaneous narrative of Frog, Where are you? The objective was to determine the effect of speaker dialect and sex on phonemic trill production. All speech data were analyzed in Praat. For reading and gap task data, nuclear trajectory scores were calculated to determine the shape of the utterance-final F0 gesture for each speaker based on speaking condition. For the oral narratives, the duration in milliseconds and the number of visible occlusions were tabulated for each intervocalic phonemic trill token.

Results show that for the intonational data, 12 of the 16 speakers exhibited at least one style-shift between speaking conditions. There is an effect of speaker sex in style-shifting such that when men style-shift, they tend toward patterns common to their local variety in the gap task, whereas when women style-shift they tend toward patterns common to nearby prestige varieties. In the oral narratives, Manchego speakers demonstrate greater incidence overall of (non-standard) trills containing one lingual contact followed by frication. It was shown further that male speakers produced less occlusions on average than female speakers in both dialects. More specifically, Manchego men produced 1.19 contacts per trill production on average, indicating that men of this dialect are those that tend most toward non-standard forms.

Finally, we note the relevance of Shuy’s hypothesis that in contexts of covert prestige men may reject speech variants associated with academic settings. Given recent data from Spain’s Ministry of Education (2011) that post-secondary education rates have risen sharply (i.e., 300% enrollment increase since 2005) and that the majority of Manchego students actually study outside of the Castile-La Mancha area, we speculate that Shuy’s hypothesis on the ‘school situation’ may represent a fitting working explanation to describe why post-secondary Manchego men show preference toward local and less prestige forms.