Phonetic outcomes of dialect contact: Variation among Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and “MexiRicans” in Chicago
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Studies of Spanish dialect contact in the U.S. are becoming increasingly important as the origins of its Spanish-speaking populations become more diverse. Recent work has examined the outcomes of U.S. Spanish dialect contact on pronoun use (Otheguy & Zentella 2011; Schreffler 1994), lexicon (Zentella 1990) and phonetic features (Ghosh Johnson 2005; Aaron & Hernández 2007). Another possible outcome of the contact between speakers of different dialects is that of intrafamilial dialect contact (Potowski 2011) experienced by mixed ethnicity Latinos – that is, individuals raised by parents who each speak a different dialect of Spanish. For example, Potowski (2008) found that 75% of “MexiRicans” in Chicago were informally rated as sounding more like their mother’s dialect group than their father’s.

The present study works with a larger sample of MexiRicans (MXPR; n=28) and a more focused, PRAAT supported examination of three phonetic variables: coda /s/, prevocalic and prepausal /n/, and trilled /r/. It also examines the production of these variables by Mexicans (MX) and Puerto Ricans (PR) of three different sociolinguistic generations (G1, G2, and G3) in Chicago, comparing those who spoke with interviewers of the same ethnicity (“ingroup”) vs. of the other ethnicity (“outgroup”). Both the greater presence of MX than PR in Chicago (70% vs. 15% of local Latinos) as well as the higher dialect status of MX Spanish led us to hypothesize that PR would accommodate more to MX phonology than vice versa, so we analyzed 5 additional PRs who spoke with outgroup interviewers. Among the MXPR, half of the sample had a MX mother and half a PR mother. Table 1 displays our sample, including data on sociolinguistic generation (G1, G2, G3).

For each speaker, a minimum of five minutes were analyzed from an hour-long oral interview in Spanish. The following preliminary findings are based on over 10,000 tokens of coda /s/, over 1,200 tokens of prevocalic and prepausal /n/, and nearly 900 tokens of trilled /r/: (1) PRs used more PR variants (s-deletion, velar nasal, and velarized rhotic trill) than did MX. (2) PRs’ realizations correlated more strongly with Interviewer and Generation: higher rates of s-deletion and velarized trill /r/ occurred with ingroup interviewers, and higher rates of velar nasals appeared with G1, regardless of interviewer dialect. (3) MXPRs overall showed more MX than PR variants, with several individual exceptions. However, MXPR G3s with a PR mother produced more PR features, while G3s with a MX mother produced more PR features. (4) A significant amount of variation was observed with outgroup interviewers for all generations of PR and MXPR. Thus, both generation and interviewer outgroup status may be important in contributing to the features that will be favored by PRs and MXPRs. Implications for these findings and areas for future research will be explored.