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Mexiqueño? A Case Study of Dialect Contact

Mexiqueño?: A Case Study of Dialect Contact

Elka Ghosh Johnson

1 Introduction

This paper presents findings from a case study done on contact between two dialects of Spanish, Puerto Rican and Mexican Spanish, in a Chicago high school, which I will call Payton High School. Most models of dialect contact predict that when two dialects come into contact, given the confluence of a number of factors, what will occur is the process of koineization. A koine “is a stabilized contact variety which results from the mixing and subsequent levelling of features of varieties which are similar enough to be mutually intelligible, such as regional or social dialects. This occurs in the context of increased interaction or integration among speakers of these varieties” (Siegel forthcoming in Kerswill 2002: 671). In this paper I show that despite the existence of factors that would predict the formation of a Hispanic koine, koineization is not occurring at Payton. This is because a basic and necessary condition is missing: interaction between the ethnic groups and the formation of new, integrated social networks.

There are a few mechanisms central to koineization. Trudgill (1986) shows that the main effect of contact between speakers of mutually intelligible dialects is short-term accommodation, which can become long-term adjustment. As speakers of different varieties come into long-term contact, the first thing to occur will be a chaotic dialect mixture – many variants will be evidenced for individual linguistic features. As the range of variants is reduced over time, a new dialect emerges, one which differs to some degree from all those which entered into the original situation. This occurs through leveling and simplification. Also necessary to the process of koineization is the formation of new, integrated social networks in the contact situation. As was seen in the above definition, it is “in the context of increased interaction or integration among speakers of [the different] varieties” that koineization occurs. These integrated social networks are essential to the establishment of group norms and to spreading of new features. This has been explicitly discussed by Penny (2000) and Kerswill and Williams (2000).

2 Methodology

The setting for this study is one that should have favored koineization. Fieldwork for this study was conducted in a high school in the city of Chicago, which has been a meeting point for Mexicans (Mexns) and Puerto Ricans (PRns) since the 1950s. The school that was chosen and the neighborhood in which this school is situated show an equitable distribution of PRns and Mexns. This fulfills the ‘balanced demographic’ condition for dialect leveling laid out by Zentella (1990). The two groups which were the focus of this study, Mexns and PRns, show similar social conditions in this context: they are overwhelmingly young, under-educated, and economically disadvantaged. Similar social conditions such as these should promote interaction rather than inhibit it (Zentella 1990). Fieldwork for this study was conducted over the period of one academic year. The junior class was the focus of the study, which gave the researcher an opportunity to focus on adolescents, a group that has been shown to be very important to situations of dialect contact and all situations of language change. There were 67 participants enrolled in this study, all voluntarily. Most of these participants were members of the first native-born generation, which is the generation where “extreme variability and further leveling” should be evidenced (Trudgill 1998, Trudgill et al. 2000 cited in Kerswill 2002: 679). Data were collected through four rounds of interviews and participant observation. Also, following Bailey (2002), one school day was spent with each of twelve key participants during which they carried a mini-disk recorder. This allowed for the collection of naturally occurring data and more in-depth observations.

3 Lack of Inter-Ethnic Interaction and Integration

In order for a koine to form, inter-ethnic interaction needs to occur, and integrated peer groups need to form. Studies by Britain (1997) and Omdal (1977) show that when this condition is not met, koineization does not occur as quickly as would be otherwise expected. In Britain’s case of the 17th century English Fens, there was no environment to encourage interaction and the development of wider peer group norms – education was not yet universal (Kerswill and Williams 2000). In the new town of Høyanger, Norway in the early 20th century, Omdal’s data show that the development of a koine was stunted because of a social segregation that occurred in the town, which coincided with regional and therefore dialectal differences. This again kept interaction between the social groups to a minimum, thus inhibiting the for-

mation of new social networks and ultimately slowing the formation of a koineized variety (Kerswill and Williams 2000).

In this section it will be shown that the situation at Payton High School is similar to these cases in that a lack of inter-ethnic interaction between the Mexn and PRn students and a lack of integrated peer groups is slowing down the process of koineization. Through an analysis of interview data and a network analysis, it will be shown that Payton High School organizes itself along ethnic lines. Language choice will also be shown to be a pertinent issue. The linguistic effects of this situation will be shown in the next section.

3.1 Interview Data

Early in the participant observation phase of fieldwork, it became apparent that the junior class at Payton High School was ethnically divided. An early indication of this came when the researcher was told to “look over there at one of the Mexican tables” in her search for a particular student. Further investigation confirmed that the organization of seating in the cafeteria was indeed ethnically patterned.

The following transcript is similarly revealing. This segment of talk comes from a conversation with a group of students, and what is being discussed is the recent spate of fights that have taken place:

- 1 EGJ: Who's not getting along with who?
 2 Vonnie: [The Puerto Ricans hate the Mexicans]
 3 Paz: [Mexicans and Puerto Ricans]
 4 EGJ: And where do the black kids fall into it?
 5 Paz: Some of the Blacks don't like the Puerto Ricans=
 6 Vonnie: =Some of the
 7 Blacks but they- but=
 8 Muñeca: = ((laughing)) It's really the Puerto Ricans
 9 against the Mexicans *and* the Blacks, put it like that.
 10 Vonnie: Yeah, but if it came down to it the Blacks would join the
 11 Puerto Ricans against the Mexicans.

Most evident in this conversation is the existence of ethnic divisions: it is apparent from this transcript that fights take place along ethnic lines. Also interesting is the way the participants refer to the different ethnic groups. In line 4, the researcher initiates an adjacency pair by asking about “the black kids”. Rather than using a parallel structure in the second part of this pair, Paz chooses to refer to “the Blacks” (line 5); thereby suggesting that “black” (or “Mexican” or “Puerto Rican”) is not only modifier, but also a group

name much like “the Jocks” or “the Burnouts” (Eckert 2000). In fact, this is how all three participants refer to the ethnic groups throughout this transcript (the only exception occurring in line 3). It becomes clear from this conversation that ethnicity is a salient concept at Payton, and that the different ethnic groups are conceived of as separate, discrete entities.

The following transcripts reinforce the idea that ethnic integration is lacking at Payton, and make evident how salient and central the category of ethnicity really is to these students. Once it became clear that the school was ethnically divided, the following question was asked during a group interview:

It seems like in this school the Puerto Ricans stick together, the Mexicans stick together, and the black kids stick together.

- a) Is that true/ Do you agree?
- b) (If so) why do you think that is?
- c) Do all of these groups get along?

Twenty-nine out of thirty students asked agreed with the assessment that members of the different ethnic groups associated most closely with each other. One pair of PRn students, with reference to the hallways, went on to say the following:

- 1 Tuti: Mmhm, Little Mexico’s over here ((points)), we have-- not
- 2 really, the Puerto Ricans and the Blacks are always together
- 3 over there ((points)).
- 4 Noodles: Hmm, you could say that’s all Puerto Rico ((points)), with a
- 5 little bit of Mexico in the middle, a little bit, and that’s it.

And another student (Mex), in response to *why* she thought this separation existed, responded with:

- 1 Berenice: I think cause the way they act. Like=
- 2 EGJ: =What do you mean?=
=
- 3 Berenice:
- 4 Mexicans listen to their own- their own kind of music, Puerto
- 5 Ricans listen- listen to Black music, so that’s why Puerto
- 6 Ricans and Black can mix sometimes? And then Mexicans-
- 7they’re just left out because they’re short and funny looking.

In the first example, we see once again, the existence of a physical, geographic segregation. As was the case with the cafeteria, each ethnicity has their own sections of the hallways, with some overlap allowed between the PRns and African Americans (AAns). While this “shared space” allowed between PRns and AAns is interesting, it will not be handled in this paper. Instead, the lack of shared space between the Mexn and PRn students should be noted. What is also interesting is the level of awareness on the part of the students. The question posed to Tuti and Noodles was whether or not they agreed that the different ethnic groups ‘stuck together’. Without hesitation, Tuti agreed and entered into a description of the hallways as an illustration of this assessment (lines 1-3). This was readily picked up by Noodles, who added to her description (lines 4-5). This is obviously something both participants had discussed previously, and is a salient feature of their school.

In the second example, Berenice asserts that what keeps the ethnic groups separate is “the way they act” (line 1). As an expansion, she discusses a very important social practice of adolescents – the music they listen to. We realize that ethnicity also plays a large role in this social practice; each ethnic group has a certain kind of music associated with it (with again some overlap allowed between African Americans and Puerto Ricans).

What becomes apparent from these examples is that ethnic identity is a very salient category for these students. These examples point to ethnic segregation rather than integration – the students themselves organize their school along ethnic lines. And their social practices reflect the centrality of ethnic identity. Where they hang out, the music they listen to, the side they fight on... these are all meaningful displays of ethnic identity. In the next section we will see that this is also reflected in another important social practice, their language.

3.2 Network Analysis

Before proceeding to the linguistic analysis, we will take a look at some of the social networks of the participants in this study. The analysis included here is a sample of a larger analysis that was undertaken elsewhere. It will become apparent from the following discussion that opportunities for the dialect mixing necessary for koineization are quite few within the junior class of Payton.

The figure below is a sociogram, which reflects the social networks of the 67 participants who were interviewed for this study. In the first round of interviews conducted, each participant was asked who their closest friends were and whom they spent most of their time with. The naming patterns were then diagrammed and are reflected below. Interview data were supple-

mented with personal observations. Also reflected in this sociogram is the ethnicity of each individual. The key for the sociogram is included at the bottom of the figure. Only the ethnicities pertinent to this discussion have been included in the key.

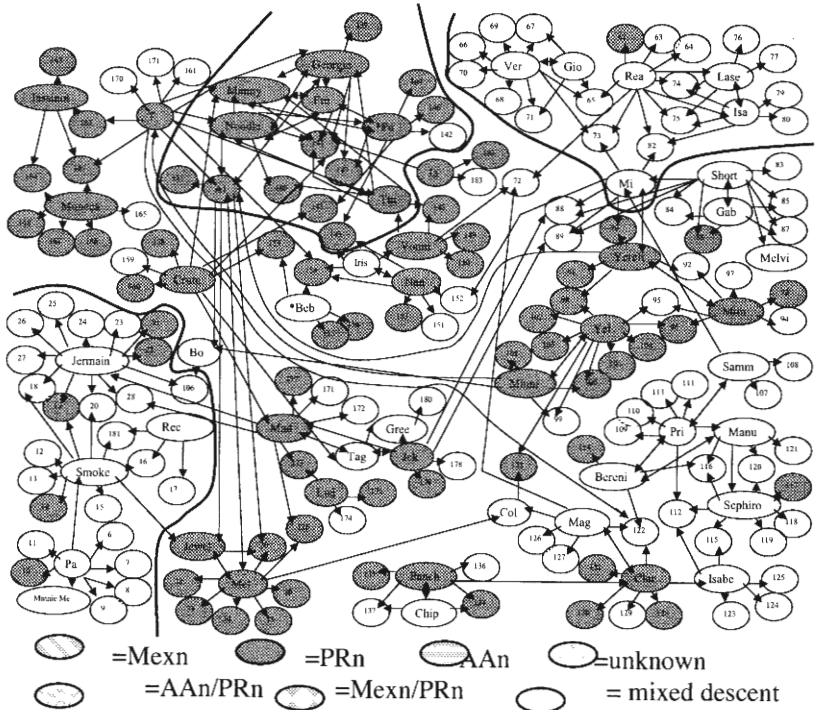


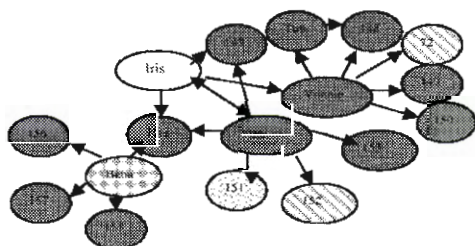
Figure 1: Sociogram

Three of the four networks that will be discussed in this section have been outlined in the diagram above. The first two (towards the top of the sociogram) are overwhelmingly mono-ethnic. The first is almost exclusively PRn, while the second is almost exclusively Mexn. Hence, opportunities for mixing between the PRn and Mexn dialects will be minimal within these two networks. A few individuals do have ties to people outside of their networks, but even these ties are usually of the same ethnicity. Thus what we see here is a lack of integrated peer networks, with a low probability for “intimate interaction of the kind which encourages dialect diffusion” (Rickford 1985: 115).

The third network that is outlined above (bottom-left) is a more integrated network, but the integration that is evidenced is between PRn and AAn students. This was mentioned above and is interesting, but for the issue at hand, the point remains: dialect mixing between PRn and Mexn Spanish, a necessary condition for the formation of a Hispanic koine, will not occur within this network. The integration is between PRns and AAns, and therefore the language of communication is English.

While there are a few exceptions within each of these networks, they will not be discussed here. Instead, we will closely examine one network, which looks like a possible site for dialect mixing and will proceed to rule out this possibility. The analysis of this network will also serve as a model of the larger analysis that was conducted – what will be seen in this network is similar to what was found in some of the other networks which also, at first glance, looked like possible sites for dialect mixing.

The following network is a more ethnically mixed network, though still PRn dominant:



There are a few relationships within this network that are possible sites for inter-dialectal communication/accommodation. For example, it would seem that Nani, who is PRn, and her friend 152, who is Mexn (and will be called Little Girl), could engage in the sort of communication necessary for the eventual formation of a Hispanic koine. Here it becomes necessary to examine the identities of the individuals involved. Nani is English dominant – when asked what language she communicated in with her friends, she responded that they mostly spoke English, with little bits of Spanish. Observations confirm that most of her time spent with friends occurs in English. In one full day spent with her, she was only observed to speak Spanish twice, and neither occasion was with any of her friends. Thus the likelihood of frequent and intimate inter-dialectal communication between Nani and Little Girl is unlikely (and was never evidenced throughout the observation period). This unlikelihood is compounded by Little Girl's identity. Little Girl identifies with what the students at this school call a 'ghetto' identity. This

refers to a local, urban identity that is shared between PRns and AAns, and is characterized by certain types of music, certain brands of clothing (and ways of wearing them), and 'ghetto English' – an urban language variety heavily dominated by AAVE features. With respect to dialect mixing, this "ghetto" identity is not one that lends itself to the inter-dialectal accommodation necessary for the formation of a Hispanic koine, since the language associated with this identity is "ghetto English", not Spanish.

Vonnie and her friend 72 (or *Princesa*) are another possible site for inter-dialectal communication. Because *Princesa* was not a participant in this study, not much is known about her identity, her language preferences, etc. Despite citing her as a friend, Vonnie was seldom observed interacting with *Princesa*. It is also known that Vonnie speaks little Spanish with her friends throughout the school day. This, taken together with the apparent infrequency of interaction between these two girls, again renders this an unlikely site for inter-dialectal accommodation.

Beba is of Mexn-PRn descent and has friends who are all PRn. Thus, if she were to speak Spanish with her friends and if her Spanish contained features typical of the Mexn dialect, she could be an influential figure in this linguistic landscape. Because Beba was never recorded speaking Spanish, the type of Spanish she speaks cannot be determined with any certainty. At the same time, it is known that her friends have always been predominantly PRn. Also, her mother, who is PRn, has been the dominant parent in her life and her father, who is Mexn, has been largely absent. And perhaps more importantly, both self-reported data from Beba and independent observations corroborate the fact that Beba does not speak Spanish with friends – according to her, the only people she speaks Spanish with (with any regularity) are her mom and her niece.

Iris is another participant who is of mixed-descent – her mother is Mexican and her father is Cuban. Because she is a fairly central and influential figure in her network, if some Mexn features remain in her Spanish, she too would be a good candidate as an innovator of change. According to Iris's friendship history data, she has never had any close, Mexn friends. Therefore, whatever Mexican features might be a part of her speech would have had to have become a part of her dialect via her family. And even then, it is the absence of a timely exposure to the influence of a peer group that would have allowed dialect features from her family to persist into her adolescent idiolect (Trudgill 1986, Kerswill 1996, Chambers 1995). While data on Iris's earliest peer networks were not obtained, it is known that by the age of six she had a circle of friends from school who were all PRn. But even more important is that at about the same age, Iris was put into the care of DCFS (the Department of Child and Family Services) and went to live with a PRn

family. In other words, at an age that falls well before the critical period cited by Trudgill (1986) and Chambers (1995)¹, Iris was removed from any Mexican linguistic influences. These factors seem to have had the expected linguistic effect: her friends insist that they “consider her Puerto Rican” because of, among other things, the way she speaks Spanish.

Two notes about the approach of this network analysis may be necessary. While the analysis may seem rather atomistic in nature, this individual-as-agent-of-change approach is particularly relevant to both accommodation theory and models of koineization. Also, one might wonder whether there aren't other inter-dialectal interactions taking place that are not 'seen' by this type of an analysis. To this I would once again call attention to the quote from Rickford – it is interaction of an “intimate” and frequent nature that leads to dialect diffusion. Therefore, it seems logical to focus on the relationships that the participants themselves consider to be their principal relationships.

In conclusion, it is clear from this network analysis that opportunities for Hispanic dialect mixing in this setting are minimal. Many of the networks are largely mono-ethnic. Very few show integration between Mexican and PRn students. And when exceptions are discovered, an examination of the identity of the 'exceptions' and the language of communication between individuals reveals that it is unlikely that the extended inter-ethnic accommodation necessary for koineization is occurring. The results of this lack of inter-ethnic interaction will be seen in the next section.

4 Ethnic Differentiation in Linguistic Patterns

In this section, a quantitative analysis of the speech of these participants will corroborate what has been argued for in the first part of this paper: that a lack of inter-ethnic socialization and interaction have led to the maintenance of separate Spanish dialects at this high school.

4.1 Methodology

The findings for one phonological variable, the variable (s), will be discussed in this paper. The linguistic variable (s) was chosen for analysis because it is a feature of Spanish that shows a high degree of dialectal variation. In particular, Puerto Rican Spanish is well known for its weakening and

¹Chambers (1995) finds that children who are exposed to a new dialect by the age of 8 are almost certain to accommodate fully. Trudgill (1986) puts this same figure somewhere between 8 and 12

deletion of /s/, while Mexican Spanish does not show this tendency. Also, Trudgill's (1986) model of long-term accommodation maintains that speakers will more likely adjust to the salient features of a dialect. The variable (s) complies with a number of the criteria Trudgill delineates as comprising saliency: first, it is involved in the maintenance of phonological contrasts, and secondly, s-aspiration/deletion is a process "often regarded as non-prestige, if not overtly stigmatized, in the world-wide, Spanish-speaking community" (Amastae and Satcher 1993: 78). These factors, along with the frequency of the variable in the data elicited, make (s) a good candidate for analysis.

The data analyzed here were collected during the first interview from twenty-two students who, amongst other criteria, were of either Mexn or PRn descent and were comfortable conducting the interview in Spanish. Thirteen of these twenty-two students were Mexn and nine were PRn. In the end, willingness to speak Spanish was the biggest exclusionary factor. Further familiarity with these students throughout the period of fieldwork revealed that the students who did not choose to speak Spanish during the first interview did not engage in very frequent Spanish interaction during their normal days. This suggests that the rate of response in Spanish was most indicative of their Spanish proficiency and/or their willingness to speak Spanish in the school context. Thus, in the end, the sample was reflective of the very individuals who are of interest to the possible formation of a Hispanic koine.

Fifty tokens of /s/ were analyzed from the interviews of each of these twenty-two students. These tokens were coded for a variety of contexts that have been found to constrain /s/ variation.

4.2 Results

The results for /s/ are seen below:

[s] variant from Mexns		[s] variant from PRNs			
<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Chi-square</u>	<u>p</u>
594/630	94.3	119/404	29.5	483.285	<.001

Table 1: Overall results for /s/

This table reflects the raw data for the frequency with which speakers of each ethnicity produced the [s] variant. In other words, out of the 630 total tokens of /s/ analyzed from the speech of the Mexn participants; the [s] variant was produced 594 times, or 94.3% of the time. This compares to the 119 times out of 404 total tokens that the PRn students produced the [s] variant

(or 29.5% of the time). A chi-square analysis was run on these data to test for the significance of the difference in linguistic behavior of the two groups. It is clear from these data that the two ethnic groups are significantly dissimilar in their linguistic performance with respect to the variable (s). In the rest of this section, data are presented on some of the different linguistic factors that were examined for /s/, and the difference in behavior of the two ethnic groups with respect to /s/ in these different contexts will be discussed. The overall picture will emerge as similar to above – there are no data to support the idea that the Mexn and PRn students are approximating each other's speech with respect to this linguistic variable.

	Context	[s] from Mexns		[s] from PRns		Chi-square	p
		n	%	n	%		
1	sC	176/183	96.2	26/106	24.5	163.748	<.001
2	s#C	148/157	94.3	31/124	25.0	143.749	<.001
3	s##	148/166	89.2	36/111	32.4	95.972	<.001
4	s#v	20/22	90.9	4/11	36.4	11.000	.001
5	s#v	73/73	100.0	7/36	19.4	80.123	<.001
6	\$s	27/27	100.0	13/13	100.0	N/A	
7	v#s\$	56/57	98.2	8/27	29.6	47.551	<.001
8	vs\$	121/127	95.3	18/79	22.8	116.620	<.001

Table 2: Linguistic context and /s/ variation; # word boundary, ## phrase boundary, \$ syllable boundary.

The above table compares [s] production from the two ethnic groups in a variety of linguistic contexts. The first columns under each ethnic group reflect how often /s/ was realized as the [s] variant. The significance of the difference in frequency is displayed in the last column. As can be seen clearly, the Mexn and PRn students at Payton performed significantly dissimilarly in every one of these linguistic contexts (except when /s/ was syllable initial, which is recognized as an /s/ preserving context for all dialects). The Mexn students consistently show high rates of /s/-retention while the PRn students do not. This would suggest that no convergence is taking place between the two dialects on this variable.

The interpretation of non-convergence is bolstered by a comparison of these data with data from speakers who are in non-contact situations. If the students at Payton, who are in a dialect contact situation, are behaving markedly differently than speakers in their countries of origin, then one could tenuously posit that the contact situation was responsible for this discontinu-

ity.² On the other hand, if the students at Payton are behaving similarly to speakers in their respective countries of origin with respect to this salient variable, it is reasonable to conclude that the dialect contact situation is not affecting their Spanish.

Lipski (1988) compiles data from numerous studies conducted on the realization of /s/ in various Latin American countries. While Mexico is not amongst the countries included, two other /s/-preserving dialects, Guatemalan and Costa Rican Spanish, serve as a good baseline for comparison:

Context		Guatemala			Costa Rica		
		s	h	Ø	s	h	Ø
1	SC	93	7	0	92	8	0
2	s#C	69	30	1	69	29	2
3	s##	93	3	0	96	4	0
4	s#V̄	100	0	0	98	2	0
5	s#V	100	0	0	98	2	2

Table 3: /s/ variation by country (in percentages)

A comparison of Tables 2 and 3 shows that the Mexn students in the current sample behave similarly to the Guatemalans and Costa Ricans in Table 3. In fact, in the first two contexts, the Mexn students actually preserve /s/ *more* than the Guatemalans or Costa Ricans in Lipski's paper. In the fifth context, the Mexn participants preserve /s/ more than the Costa Ricans, and the same as the Guatemalans – 100% of the time. Only in two contexts do the Mexns show a lower rate of /s/ maintenance: when /s/ is phrase-final (context 3) and when /s/ is word-final followed by an accented vowel (context 4). While these data are somewhat dated, it remains clear that the Mexn students in this sample a) behave similarly to non-contact speakers of other /s/-preserving dialects and b) perform significantly differently from their PRn peers. Thus it can be concluded that contact with the PRn dialect of Spanish is not affecting the linguistic behavior of the Mexn students with respect to the linguistic variable (s).

The data from the PRn students at Payton from Table 3 above can be compared to the following data, also from Lipski (1988):

²There are, of course, dangers associated with this assumption. See Lipski (1994), Silva-Corvalán (1990), Silva-Corvalán (1989) and Thomasson (2001) for some differing views as to the extent of possibilities for contact-induced changes.

		PRn realizations of /s/ (in percentages)		
	<u>Context</u>	<u>s</u>	<u>h</u>	<u>Ø</u>
1	sC	3	92	5
2	s#C	4	69	27
3	s##	46	22	32
4	s#V	45	32	23
5	s#v	16	53	30

Table 4: Realizations of /s/ in Puerto Rico

A comparison between Tables 2 and 4 yields that the PRn students from this study perform quite comparably to other non-contact PRns. We do see that in contexts 1 and 2, the PRn students at Payton maintain /s/ significantly more than the PRns in Table 5, but in contexts 3 and 4 these students maintain /s/ less than the PRns in Table 5, and in context 5 they perform almost the same. It would be worthwhile to investigate why the PRns at Payton are maintaining /s/ to the degree that they are in contexts 1 and 2, and the related finding that the results of the PRns at Payton (and those of the Mexicans) are quite consistent across the various linguistic contexts. But for the moment, it can be concluded that the two groups of PRns show similar behavior with respect to (s) – the Puerto Ricans at Payton, like those in their country of origin, show similarly (and consistently) high rates of s-weakening.

Thus we have seen through these data that not only do the Mexns and PRns at Payton perform very dissimilarly from one another, but with respect to (s), they also perform quite similarly to their non-contact comparison groups. Though they cannot be discussed here, (due to lack of space), similar findings were evidenced for the linguistic variable (r).

5 Conclusion

It has been shown in this paper that Payton High School is organized along ethnic lines – peer networks and important social practices all reflect the salience of ethnic identity. Integration between Mexn and PRn students is particularly rare, and very often does not occur in Spanish. This is resulting in a lack of opportunities for Hispanic dialect mixing and inter-ethnic linguistic accommodation which, in turn, is preventing the formation of a Hispanic koine. Findings discussed here for the variable (s) suggest that the Mexicans and Puerto Ricans at Payton are maintaining separate dialects.

Future research will further explore the role of ethnic identity in this setting, and in particular the construction of ethnic identities and the ethnolinguistic boundary. Related questions of linguistic and ethnic ideologies, language choice and shift will also be examined.

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