

## **Sociolinguistic Variables of Judeo-Spanish and Modern Spanish Contact in New York City and Los Angeles**

Although an endangered language, Judeo-Spanish is still utilized by its speakers in two of the largest cities where Sephardim reside today — New York City and Los Angeles. These cities are also home to some of the largest Spanish-speaking populations in the United States. Benardete (1953) noted that contact between Judeo-Spanish and modern Spanish-speaking populations was common as early as the first quarter of the twentieth century and that interactions between these groups resulted in linguistic repercussions among the Sephardim. Decades later, Harris (1994) documented what such results of contact meant for the Sephardim, primarily from a phonological account. While Judeo-Spanish maintains the phonemes /dʒ/,/ʒ/ and /ʃ/, modern Spanish has collapsed them into /x/. However, speakers of Judeo-Spanish constantly produce forms such as [i.xo] for ‘son’ instead of the expected [i.ʒo], [xen.te] for ‘people’ instead of [dʒen.te] and [di.xo] for ‘s/he said’ instead of [di.ʃo]. Romero (2013) applied sociolinguistic theory to account for velarization of prepalatals and determined the importance of lexicalization in the conditioning of such phonological change. Harris and Romero indicate that such factors can be contributed to the prominent use of modern Spanish in areas where the Sephardim reside, also noting that many have learned or acquired the language at various stages of their lives for a number of familial or practical reasons. As demonstrated, previous research attests to interaction between speakers of Judeo-Spanish and modern Spanish; however, to date, no research has examined actual discourse between these two linguistically related populations.

In this presentation, I examine results from production experiments that I conducted in the summer and fall of 2014 among Judeo-Spanish speaking Sephardim (n=25) from Los Angeles and New York City when interacting with a modern Spanish-speaking interlocutor. Informants were each paired up with an L1 speaker of a variety of modern Spanish in the city in which they resided; that is to say, Sephardim in New York City spoke with a Dominican Spanish interlocutor and those in Los Angeles spoke with a Mexican Spanish interlocutor (or more appropriately, a speaker of Los Angeles Vernacular Spanish (Parodi 2011)). Each conversation lasted fifteen to twenty minutes and was recorded for further analysis.

In my research, I accounted for each occurrence of a prepalatal (/dʒ/,/ʒ/ and /ʃ/) or velar (/x/), in accordance to the patterns of distribution of these phonemes across languages. I utilized the multivariate analysis Varbrul (Tagliamonte 2012) to determine which of the following variables, if any, conditioned the production of palatalization or velarization among informants: 1) sex, 2) current city of residence, 3) residence as of nine years of age, 4) proficiency in Spanish, 5) source language of lexical item, 6) semantic content of lexical item and 7) variety of Spanish spoken by interlocutor. After coding for all occurrences of dependent and independent variables, results indicate significance of all sociolinguistic factors; the log likelihood of our model is 440.047, whereas  $p < 0.05$ . A constraint ranking of these variables organizes which variables are most likely to yield the dependent variables. Finally, I will make sense of such data and results by comparing them to theories of accommodation (Giles, Coupland, and Coupland’s 1991), primarily from the framework of divergence and convergence. Such research fills a lacuna in the corpus of Judeo-Spanish linguistic exploration, particularly from contemporary sociolinguistic analytical assessment.

**Linguistic subfields:** sociolinguistics, contact linguistics

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