

ESPAÑGLISH CON MAS FLOW: THE EMERGENCE OF AAVE-INFLUENCED SPANISH IN THE U.S.

The 15th century African Slave Trade brought about contact between speakers of Spanish and African languages that has profoundly shaped varieties of Caribbean Spanish and elsewhere (Lipski 2005). With an eye to these historical contact scenarios, the current study investigates the emergence of a new Afro-Spanish variety in the eastern U.S. that we informally call *Lengua Reggaetona*. *Lengua Reggaetona* likely arose from sustained contact between Spanish-dominant Puerto Ricans and African Americans (speakers of AAVE) in the South Bronx (metropolitan New York area), and has continued to evolve and diffuse over the past decades.

Relatively little research has examined the nature of the possible varieties of Spanish surfacing in NY due to contact (Otheguy 2001, and his subsequent work is a notable exception), and even fewer studies investigate the effect of ‘non-Standard’ English on Spanish in any part of the U.S. *Lengua Reggaetona* is identifiable by its heavy lexical borrowing from AAVE to Puerto Rican Spanish, its intricate calques modeled from AAVE, and a general relexification of AAVE lexical items into typically Spanish syntactic structures. Extensive code-switching (CS) between AAVE and Puerto Rican Spanish, both inter- and intra-sententially, is often present in *Lengua Reggaetona* but is not obligatory. We argue that *Lengua Reggaetona* presently constitutes a new variety of Spanish; however, we stop short of stating that as a highly mixed variety it attains status as a distinct language, as in the case of Ecuador’s *Media Lengua*.

Empirical support for the emergence of *Lengua Reggaetona* comes from detailed analyses of texts and song lyrics from prominent reggaetón (Spanish “rap”) artists. The majority of *Lengua Reggaetona* artists are by necessity bilingual (with varying levels of bilingual proficiency ranging from AAVE-dominant to Puerto Rican/Caribbean Spanish-dominant speakers). We find differing patterns of CS and borrowing mechanisms in these songs that systematically link to the artist’s level of competence in AAVE and Spanish. The data suggest that AAVE-dominant and Spanish-dominant bilinguals consistently exhibit a preference for intra-sentential CS, with most lexicon and morphosyntactic elements deriving from Spanish. These same artists are also more likely to produce instances of CS in either language that appear to violate basic principles, e.g., “*you see i now **distingue** it (Puerto Rican-born Don Omar).*” In contrast, both intra- and inter-sentential alternations occur for bilinguals equally proficient in AAVE and Spanish.

While CS is optional in *Lengua Reggaetona*, we view it as a major catalyst for borrowing, insofar as single-switches become loanwords through increased frequency of use (Myers-Scotton 1993b). We illustrate that the nature of borrowing also varies given the artist’s levels of bilingual competence with AAVE and Spanish. Less proficient bilinguals tend to freely alternate between Spanish and AAVE words with similar meanings, while more balanced bilinguals with higher competence in both varieties often reserve use of AAVE borrowings for cases where no exact Spanish equivalent exists, and are more likely to create AAVE-based Spanish calques that convey specific meanings recognizable by in-group speakers of urban varieties such as “*retrásalo*/back it up→referring to a female’s posterior” or “*soy el hombre*/I’m the man→I’m the best.” More proficient bilinguals thus display a significant decrease in the overt use of AAVE in otherwise Spanish discourse. Certain items (*flow*, *bling-bling*, *gangsta*, etc) continue to be used in *Lengua Reggaetona* constructions by all speakers, regardless of degree of bilingualism.

To complete our account, we examine complex sociocultural factors (e.g., race, country of origin, social class, etc.) particular to this community that have led to growing implementation of *Lengua Reggaetona* as a means of expression among Latino youth.