

CHILLING, REAL VIVIENDO: THE RISE OF AAE-INFLUENCED SPANISH IN THE US

There has been little systematic examination or documentation of the effects of ‘non-Standard’ English on Spanish, in any region of the United States. We argue for the emergence of a Spanish variety that appears to have originated recently in the northeastern US. We provisionally coin the term *Lengua Reggaetona (LR)* for this “new” variety of US Spanish. As part of a larger project, in which previous studies have documented the distinguishing syntactic features of LR (Satterfield 2006, Satterfield & Alexander 2006), the current inquiry investigates LR’s innovative phonetic and phonological components.

LR likely arose in the South Bronx (metropolitan New York) in the 1960s-1970s from sustained interactions between Spanish-dominant Puerto Ricans and African Americans, the latter being monolingual English speakers using in-group African American English (AAE) in this neighborhood setting. Thus, LR is the product of contact between two language varieties—Puerto Rican Spanish (perhaps more generally, Caribbean Spanish) and AAE—both viewed by prescriptivists as degenerate forms of their respective languages, Standard Latin American Spanish and Standard American English.

Some identifying linguistic behaviors manifested in LR are calquing, the implementation of a specific set loan of words and translations, and restructured forms involving AAE. Certain aspects of the AAE lexicon and morphosyntax have no Standard English equivalents or have meanings very different from Standard English usage. Such innovations may not be known outside of the AAE-speaking community and appear to be gaining usage in parallel Spanish forms in this setting as well.

The primary focus of this paper is the ongoing convergence in LR to a set of distinguishing phonetic and phonological elements shared between the two source languages, including the following:

- Final obstruent devoicing: In AAVE, word final obstruents are frequently devoiced, such the final consonant /d/ in a word such as *rabid* is produced nearly identically to the /t/ of *rabbit*. (Bailey & Thomas 1998; Rickford 1999; Wolfram 1994). We report the acoustic-phonetic evidence for similar patterning in LR involving /d/, the one voiced obstruent Spanish phoneme which robustly occurs in word-final position.
- Glottalization: We also examine the evidence for irregular laryngeal vibration, or glottalization, (Valentín-Márquez 2006, 2007) particularly in word-final obstruents (which may also be devoiced). In AAVE, word-final devoicing is often accompanied by glottalization, unlike Southern White English and other American English varieties that also devoice obstruents but without glottalization (Fasold, 1981).
- Final consonant deletion: In both AAVE and Caribbean Spanish, word-final consonants are frequently deleted (AAVE: Craig et al. 2003; Rickford 1999; Wolfram 1994; Caribbean Spanish: Cedergren 1973; Terrell 1975, etc.). Here, we report rates of such deletions in LR relative to comparative rates for Caribbean Spanish, given that both source languages for LR share this property.

Empirical support for the emergence of LR comes from detailed analyses of texts, song lyrics and spoken interviews of prominent reggaetón (Spanish “rap”) artists. The majority of reggaetón artists are by necessity bilingual (with varying levels of bilingual proficiency ranging from AAE-dominant to Puerto Rican/Caribbean Spanish-dominant speakers).

In the broader context, the results contribute to our claims that what is especially unique in LR is not only that certain traits are shared and reinforced between the two source languages (Puerto Rican Spanish and AAE), but that this new variety is distinguished by systematic use of existing Spanish structures which LR extends beyond the ‘normal’ expectations of standard and popular monolingual Spanish grammars.

To round out our account, we explore the LR’s status as a linguistic code. Specifically, the question to be addressed is whether LR constitutes i) a (micro-)variety of Spanish; or ii) a burgeoning and independent new language in its own right, perhaps to be ultimately categorized as a creole; or iii) some other type of linguistic knowledge. Couched in this discussion are significant implications for language genesis and language change.