Final (z)-devoicing in Chicano English of South Texas

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Compared a number of English dialects Chicano English (ChE) has received relatively little scholarly attention. Although the situation has improved greatly in recent years with the appearance of survey articles and full-length studies (e.g. Fought 2003; Mendoza-Denton 1999, 2008; Santa Ana 1993; Santa Ana & Bayley 2004), many ChE features await full investigation. Final (z)-devoicing is one such feature (but see Doviak & Hudson-Edwards 1980). This paper, based on more than 1800 tokens extracted from sociolinguistic interviews with adolescents and young adults in a south Texas barrio, shows that (z)-devoicing is highly systematic and subject to multiple linguistic and social constraints. Specifically, multivariate analysis using logistic regression shows that, as expected, devoicing is conditioned by features of the preceding and following segments, with preceding stops and nasals and voiceless following segments favoring devoicing and preceding vowels and voiced following segments favoring voicing. Results also show that devoicing is constrained by the morphological status of the variable, with devoicing more likely for inflectional (z) than when it is part of a monomorpheme. In addition, although the prevalence of devoicing in Chicano English is often attributed to Spanish interference, results show that devoicing is more common among speakers who claim English as their first language than among speakers who claim Spanish as an L1. Further, although only one of the speakers regularly interacts socially with Anglos, speakers who express a desire to leave the community are less likely to produce the devoiced variant than those who express no such desire, regardless of their L1. Finally, the young women in this study are more likely to produce the devoiced variant than are young men. I discuss the implications of these results with emphasis on the linguistic constraints, particularly the role of sonority and the influence of morphological class.

References