The Expression of Futurity by New York Puerto Ricans

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In this study we determine the distribution of variants used by New York Puerto Ricans (NYPRs) to express futurity. We also identify the constraints affecting this linguistic variable and explain their impact. Additionally, we contrast our results against those from other speech communities. We used data extracted from sociolinguistic interviews with a socially stratified group of twenty Nuyoricans. The distribution reveals that, while the periphrastic future (PF) registers one of the highest usage rates in the Hispanic world, the morphological future (MF) registers one of the lowest. The results also revealed that the factors constraining the expression of futurity include imminence of a future event, length of MF inflection, presence of a time marker, age and education. Most of the internal constraints conditioning the expression of futurity in this community also condition it among New York Colombians as well as in Barranquilla, Colombia (Orozco 2007, 2008). These findings support Guy’s (2000) theory that the linguistic factors constraining language change and variation are consistent within different segments of a speech community. That is, the similarity of constraint effects suggests that, despite some minor differences, all three communities are still members of a larger speech community. However, the effects of external constraints, mainly the lack of significance of speaker’s sex, reveal some interesting differences. The results of this study indicate that, among the Caribbean speech communities studied to date, NYPRs appear to lead the change in progress from the preferential use of the MF to that of the PF. These results help explain other instances of morphosyntactic variation, especially those involving analytic and synthetic variants. They also provide important information that helps compare the sociolinguistic forces constraining variation here and in other Hispanic speech communities. Furthermore, besides reflecting adjustment to cross-linguistic phenomena, these findings augment our knowledge of language variation and change.

References
Orozco, Rafael. 2008. A sociolinguistic comparison of two linguistic variables in two communities. Presented at NWAV 37, Houston, TX.