

Gender Roles and the Variants of /r/

Mariadelaluz Matus-Mendoza

Drexel University

1. Introduction

As part of an ongoing longitudinal study, this paper explores the current state of the simple vibrant /-r/ in word final position in Mexican Spanish in an immigrant community residing in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania. The vibrant /-r/ in word final position might have three allophones: a tap [r], a trill [r̄], or a voiceless assibilation [r̥] that occur in free variation (Barrutia & Schwegler, 1994; Dalbor, 1997; Hammond, 2001; Lope Blanch, 1990; Moreno de Alba, 1994; Teschner, 2000). In Mexican Spanish, it is documented the occasional occurrence of the trill in the absolute-final position, i.e. before pause, (Avila, 1967; García Fajardo, 1984; Garza Cuarón, 1987; Lope Blanch, 1990 & 1991; Moreno de Alba, 1994). Lope Blanch (1991: 84) affirms that a possible explanation of the realization of /-r/ in word final position as a trill might be the conscious or subconscious emphasis of the speaker in his speech, “en la ciudad de México, la [r̄] final múltiple se oye sobre todo en situaciones lingüísticas de particular esmero o afectación”.

The results of this paper are based on the speech analysis of twenty-nine participants from two different age groups (from 18 to 34 and from 35 to 55). Each participant was interviewed for forty-five minutes. The participants were volunteers, recruited in their work place. All data was collected during the summer of 2002. All subjects are Mexicans who have moved to Kennett Square to live there permanently. At the time of the interview, they had lived in the area for at least 6 years. The only criterion to recruit the interviewees was that they were currently employed in the mushroom farms. The conversations dealt with the account of traditional rituals practiced in the United States such as baptism, “quinceañera”², marriage proposal and marriage, “Life cycle rituals strengthen a group sense of community and mutual bonding”³ (García, 2002).

The practice of these traditional rituals and of domestic routines, i.e. cooking, cleaning and watching the children as well as the economic dependency on their husband, are seen, here, as indicators of a woman’s traditional behavior. This is used as an apposite to non-traditional behavior, in systems of machismo⁴ or patriarchal society from which the informants come from. In the United States, the male in the family cannot support the whole family as they did in Mexico. Both men and women acknowledge this reality. An informant affirms, “My husband doesn’t make enough money to support us. I have to work to help him with the expenses. In Mexico, it was different.” “Mi esposo no gana lo suficiente para mantenernos a todos. Yo tengo que ayudarlo a pagar los gastos. En Mexico era

¹ The realizations of the vibrant /r/ in coda position oscillates from fortition to deletion in the Spanish speaking countries: it may be uttered as a trill [r̄], tap [r], voiceless fricative, or voiced fricative [r̥] (Dalbor, 1997: 258). Barrutia & Schwegler (1994:132) refers to the free articulation of /r/ in coda position: it is articulated as a trill [r̄], tap [r], or a weak vibrant.

² “Quinceañera” (from the Spanish word for fifteen-quince) refers to the cultural practice of celebrating a young girl’s fifteenth birthday...” (García, 2002: 71). It is like a wedding without the groom.

³ García (2002: 69) affirms that those people who experience a specific life cycle ritual will obtain a more in-depth knowledge and exposure to key values within their groups.

⁴ Machismo comes from the Spanish word “macho” that refers to the fact that the male is the only authority in the house. They are the providers in the house: women do not have to work. The sole role of the women is to bear and to look after their children (Nash, 1999).

diferente.’ Thus, the male inability to fulfill the role of provider might erode the basis for his patriarchy. At the same time, it violates the image of women as homemakers, circumscribed by domestic routines (Nash 1999).

I contend that migration to, and settlement, in the United States act as forces that trigger changes in the work place and in the immigrants’ households (Pessar, 1999; Crummett, 1993). They also “bring about changes in gender relations that have complex and uneven effects; they present women with opportunities...” (Menjívar, 1999: 604). Almost all the women interviewed did not work for an income in Mexico before migrating to the United States; so earning a living is new for them. The fact that women are wage earners seems to affect their relationship with their spouses; from the traditional obedient wives who follow their husband’s decisions, they become women who demand a more egalitarian treatment in decision-making and in the household chores. This change in the gender relations seems to be reflected in the constant increment of use of the allophone [ɸ] in environments that don’t seem to indicate emphasis⁵.

2. Site and Participants

The participants in the research come from small towns and cities in states that surround Mexico City⁶ to settle in Kennett Square. Kennett Square is located in West Chester County in Pennsylvania. The main industry is the production of mushrooms. The industry started with a group of Italians who gave up working in the local quarries to start the growing of mushrooms at the beginning of the 1900s. They were initially employees, and later, became owners. Under the Italian ownerships, different ethnic groups have been working in the mushroom industry: first Puerto Ricans (Bastalick, 1982) and currently Mexicans are the backbone of the industry (Perez-Itriago & Guendelman, 1989), in both manual labor and supervisory positions. In 1995-1996, when I first approached the community, men who were working in Kenny, as they called it, mainly comprised the work force. Then, some workers stated their desire to bring their families, “I have already filed the papers. I am only expecting to receive the appointment to bring my wife and my children”. ‘Ya he tramitado los papeles. Sólo estoy esperando recibir la cita para traer a mi esposa y a mis hijos.’ Nowadays, the population in Kennett Square is facing a change in the composition of the immigrants; for more than six years many male immigrant workers have successfully brought their families to join them in the United States. This is due to “granted amnesty to undocumented workers who had resided in the United States continuously since January 1, 1982⁷” (Garcia, 2002: 47).

3. Analysis

The first computer run of the Goldvarb 2001 program included twenty-six factors in twelve factor groups and four hundred and forty-one cells. In this first run of the program, the percentages of occurrence of the standard variant [r], the assimilated variant [ɾ] and the trill variant [r̄] were calculated. From two phonological factors, the program yielded only one relevant phonological factor: the segment following the variable that was classified as vowel, consonant or pause. Vowels favor with 87% the standard variant in words like “amo[r] y” ‘love and’, “cocina[r] antes” ‘to cook before’, “prime[r] hijo” ‘first son’, “lava[r] esto” ‘to wash this’, “deci[r] orita” ‘to say now’, “tener un” ‘to have a’. Consonants and pauses weakly favor the trill with 16% and 17% respectively in words like “se[ɸ]

⁵ To try to decrease the possibility of including tokens that appear in emphatic statements, I only selected one example of expressions that might be associated with emphatic remarks such as “por ejemplo” ‘for example’ or “por eso” ‘that’s why’.

⁶ None of the informants come from the zones that the *Atlas Lingüístico de México* reports as being of high frequency of the occurrence of the trill [r̄], that are Mixtepec (Oaxaca), Cruz Grande (Guerrero), Ojuleos (Jalisco), Doctor Arroyo (Nuevo León), Monclova (Coahuila), y Magdalena Quino (Nuevo León) [Moreno de Alba, 1994:136].

⁷ This was one of the sanctions stipulated by the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 (Garcia, 2002).

que” ‘to be that’, “vapo[f] si” ‘vapor if’, “busca[f] ya” ‘to look for already’, “esta[f] tan” ‘to be so’, “deci[f] cultura” ‘to say culture’, “sabo[f]” ‘flavor’ or “informa[f]” ‘to inform’. Pauses favor the assimilated variant with 22% in words like “alta[ř]” ‘altar’, “deci[ř]” or ‘to tell’ “albu[ř]” ‘risk, chance’, “cualquie[ř]” ‘any’ or “casar” ‘to get married’, “danza[ř]” ‘to dance’.

Regarding the length of the answer, it is important to indicate that this factor is used to measure stylistic variation. As was mentioned earlier in the introduction, according to Lope Blanch the variant trill [f] occurs in careful speech. Here a combination of Labov’s criteria (1972) and Finnegan and Biber’s (1994) establish the stylistic criteria used to differentiate between careful versus spontaneous speech. The length of the informants’ answers and the position of the dependent variable in the interview indicate stylistic or intraspeaker variation. The fact that the interviewees pay more attention to their speech at the beginning than at the end of the conversation is taken from Labov. Also the assumption is that the speakers are more careful with their speech in short answers than in narrations. The idea of oral registers, specifically the interview, where the speaker has “the opportunity for careful production” especially early in the utterance and/or in short utterances belongs to Finnegan and Biber (1994:321).

The first computer run of the Goldvarb 2001 program reveals that the factor groups of long answers and speech at the end of the conversation favor the trill with 17% and 15% respectively. Actually, when combined as shown in table number 1, clearer tendencies appear: 19% of occurrence for long answers at the end of the conversation and 16% of occurrence for short answers at the beginning of the conversation. I interpret this as the opposite of careful speech or “situaciones lingüísticas de esmero y afectación” (Lope Blanch, 1991: 84). Although there is only a 3% difference in the percentages of occurrence between the short answer and the narration, the binominal run of the statistical program considers significant these two factors; it yields a significance of 0.038.

Table 1. Stylistic Factors: Length of the answer (short or long) and position of the answer in the conversation (beginning or end) of the Variants of /-r/.

		Short	%	Long	%	Total	%
Begin	[r]	391	85	422	81	813	83
	[f]	45	10	82	16	127	13
	[ř]	25	5	18	3	43	4
		461		522		983	
End	[r]	428	83	384	75	812	79
	[f]	56	11	99	19	155	15
	[ř]	29	6	31	6	60	6
		513		514		1027	
Total	[r]	819	84	806	78	1625	81
	[f]	101	10	181	17	282	14
	[ř]	54	6	49	5	103	5
		974		1036		2010	

Table number 1 also presents evidence that the current shift in the division of labor in and outside the household has affected the informants’ speech in Kennett Square. In an earlier study (Matus-Mendoza, 2004) the percentage of occurrence of the assimilated variant was higher than that registered here. However, six years later, after women have become wage earners in their household, the trill variant occurs with higher percentages than the assimilated variant; three times more often, 15% for the trill and 5% for the assimilated variant. These percentages are actually the inverted order of frequency that Lope Blanch (1990) and Moreno de Alba (1994) reported in Mexico: “[T]he allophone more frequent before pause is the tap followed by the voiced and voiceless assimilated variants then the trill variant with 75%, 13% and 12% of occurrences”.

The binominal analysis of the program eliminated five factor groups: two linguistic and three sociolinguistic. Besides the preceding phonological segment of the variable mentioned earlier, the

program also discarded the morphological factor group. The sociolinguistic factors eliminated were the speakers' origin, education and some practices of specific rituals. The remaining sociolinguistic factors were their job held in the mushroom farms, gender, generation, and length of time in the United States.

The occupation of the participants seems to correlate to changes in speech in the mushroom farms. Of the twenty-nine informants, nineteen individuals hold a managerial or foremen⁸ position and ten informants work as pickers or as janitors. Individuals holding managerial positions utter the trill [r] more than pickers or janitors with, percentages of occurrence of 16% for the managers and 10% for the other jobs. It's interesting to note that the assibilated variant continues to exhibit the lowest percentage of occurrence: 6% and 3% for the managers and janitors respectively. The highest percentage of occurrence belongs to the standard variant, tap [r], with 86%: janitors and pickers use this variant more often.

In spite of the fact that the sample is not balanced in terms of occupation and gender⁹, some tendencies can still be observed among the population. Figure number 1 presents the data regarding the gender factor. As the columns indicate the highest percentage of occurrence belongs to the standard variant [r] with 82% and 80% for men and women respectively. Men favor the trill variant [r] with 16% whereas females favor it with 10%. Females offer the same percentage of occurrence for the assibilated [ř], 10%, versus 2% for men.

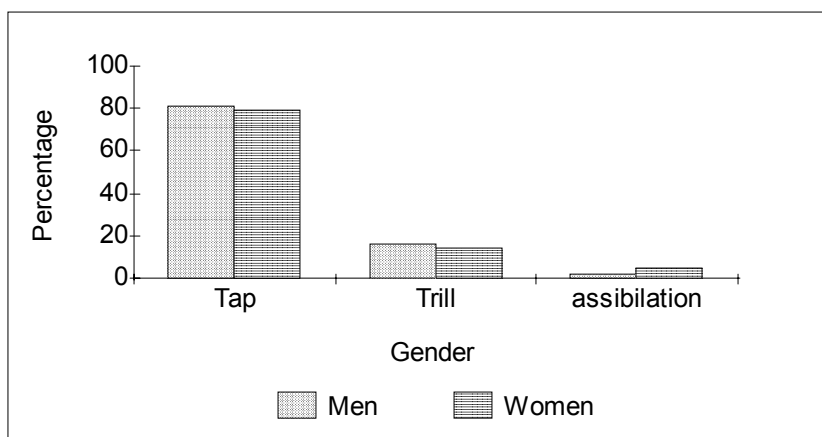


Figure 1. Variants of /r/ and Gender

To further prove my claim of the importance of the speakers' job in their choice of variants of /r/, I formed a subgroup within this group that only included eighteen informants. From the eleven women interviewed here, I selected five who have managerial positions and four who work as janitors. From the eighteen males, I chose five foremen and four mushroom pickers. These two subgroups form a homogenous group of individuals to confirm the importance of the occupation factor in the use of the trill [r] among the population surveyed here. The first run of Goldvarb of this subgroup indicates that men and women favor the trill [r] with 11%. They differ in the percentages assigned for the standard variant [r] and the assibilated variant [ř]: males favor the first with 86% and the second with 1%. In contrast females favor the first with 76% and the second with 11% respectively. Although the assibilated continues to yield high percentages of occurrence in this group, it offers a percentage of occurrence equal to the trill. This might suggest that the prestige attached to it no longer relies on the variant coming from a cosmopolitan city, Mexico City: it seems that its prestige derives from its speakers' responsibility in the production of mushrooms.

⁸ The term manager refers to someone in charge of one of the different processes of the production in the mushroom farms. It might be also appropriate to call them foremen, but the informants only use the term manager.

⁹ Of the nineteen managers, only five are women and fourteen are men. The remaining workers are five female janitors and five male pickers.

Women and men face a different linguistic and extra-linguistic reality in the United States than in Mexico. Women here are not only wage earners but, in some cases, they also work as foremen or managers in charge of males in the mushroom houses. A mushroom house is the green house where the mushrooms grow. The mushrooms should be picked at specific times to allow the harvest to continue. The managers of the houses must know when and which mushrooms should be picked. They are responsible for the productivity of the houses, in terms of both quality and quantity. I assume that this non-traditional role of women at work has influenced their speech. That is, they are no longer the traditional women who clean, take care of the children, and allow their spouses to make all the decisions at home. It seems that “important social processes of U.S. employment...[have altered] gender relations between men and women” (Menjívar, 1999: 602). Espiritu (1999:628) affirms, “migration may improve women’s social position if it leads to increased participation in wage employment, more control over earning, and greater participation in family decision-making”.

Even in the conversations, males have changed their attitude towards their spouses. When asked what would a man do if his spouse didn’t know how to cook or to take care of the children, they usually replied, “we can learn together. Being a woman doesn’t mean that she should know how to cook or to do house chores.” ‘Podemos aprender juntos. El ser mujer no significa que ella debe saber cocinar o hacer quehaceres domésticos’. In the interviews collected six years ago, men expected their wives to know how to be a good housewife or else. An informant replied to the same question, “I’ll make sure that she learns”. ‘Me aseguraré de que aprenda.’ Another replied stating “I married her to do the housework and to cook”. ‘Me casé con ella para que hiciera el quehacer y cocinara.’ Grasmuck & Pessar (1991) and Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) affirm, “[I]mmigrant women employed in the United States generally gain personal autonomy and independence, whereas men lose ground”.

Not only men, but also women, have a different attitude toward their spouses. They do not give them absolute power in the household and they demand the husband help with the house chores. Pesquera (1993:193) affirms, “the work demands for blue-collar [workers] are greater than clerical workers; therefore, greater male involvement in household chores is required”. Mushroom workers are forced by the short life of the mushroom to work overtime if necessary. Thus, the work schedule can vary. Then men have to cook and feed the children if their wives have to stay until the crop of the day is harvested. In fact, there are some couples in which women start working early in the morning, at four or five o’clock, while men stayed at home to prepare breakfast and send the children to school.

There are two generational groups represented in the sample: a younger formed by people between the ages of 18 and 34 and an older which includes people between 35 and 55 years old. Eleven of the twenty-nine informants belong to the first generation and eighteen belong to the second generation. Both generations favor the standard variant [r] with 82% and 80% of occurrence for the first and the second generations, respectively. However, the latter generation favors the variant trill with 17% whereas the first generation favors this variant with 11%¹⁰. The assimilated variant offers 7% for the first and 3% for the second generation. As members of a second generation usually have their habits formed and conform to the prevailing norms of society (Perissinotto, 1972:72), the establishment of this variant in the population might be a symbol of identity for a generation that has improved their socioeconomic situation. They also wish to continue doing their work without losing their identity as hard-working people. An informant commented, “I am not ashamed of working in the mushroom farms. It is a hard and filthy work because we work with manure. However, we, Mexicans, do a good job and we should feel proud of being so important in the production of this product”. ‘No me avergüenzo de trabajar en los hongos. Es un trabajo duro y sucio porque trabajamos con estiércol. Sin embargo, nosotros, los mexicanos, hacemos un buen trabajo y debemos sentirnos orgullosos de ser tan importantes en el proceso de su producción.’ It seems that working in the United States “has improved their self-esteem” (Menjívar 1999:609). In this context, the fact that the variable /r/ is pronounced

¹⁰ These results agree with the ones reported in the *Atlas Lingüístico de México* in that they report higher percentages of occurrence for the second than the first generation: 67% and 51% respectively. Although it should be kept in mind that these percentages are registered in regions that were not represented by the speakers here, in the so-called regions of high frequency according to the *ALM*. The informants, here, are from Almoloya, Toluca and Tunancingo (Estado de México), Moroleón and Yuridia (Guanajuato), Mayanalán and Tierra Colorada (Guerrero), Pozonatepec and Texmelucán (Puebla) and Reynosa (Tamaulipas).

among these individuals as a trill might suggest that the trill “functions as a symbol of identity and source of pride to its users” (Milroy, 1982:210). It might be a way to express that these men and women are the backbone of the mushroom production and they are proud of being so.

The tendencies in the population according to the length of residence in the United States are as follows: the overall results indicate that the standard tap occurs 80% of the time, the trill 15%, and assibilation 5% respectively. Individuals who have lived in the United States for more than six years use the standard variant [r] 79%, the trill [ʀ] 16%, and the assibilated [ʀ̥] 5%. For the population that has resided in Kennett Square for less than six years, the percentage of occurrence for the standard variant is 82%, for the trill [ʀ] 12%, and for the assibilated 6%. Even though the distance is not great between the two groups in the use of the trill [ʀ], some tendencies can be observed.

As it has become clear in this essay, with respect to the tendencies observed in the data, effects of style, the following segment, occupation, generation, and gender in the mushroom farms, are delineated. Foremen working positions for women have influenced sharing of house chores and decision making with their partners. At the same time, these changes have influenced their speech in that women use more the “new” variant than the assibilated one that they favored more than they did six years ago. Also, the trill seems to work in this community as a symbol of identity and an active linguistic phenomenon.

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