

A linguistic tour of Latino New York
(with emphasis on second generation bilinguals)

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A linguistic tour of Latino New York for conference visitors to the Big Apple offers several proposals regarding contact and cross-generational transmission. A large scale, corpus based study of the Hispanic community's lexical and grammatical resources provides evidence that, contrary to common assumptions, increasing amounts of lexical borrowing in the first generation are not related to growing bilingualism, but rather to the simpler fact of arrival and life in New York. And neither is extensive borrowing, as commonly believed, concentrated during the first generation stage on those with blue-collar occupations or little education (nor is it statistically led by nouns).

Following this lexical introduction, and using the same corpus, the linguistic tour takes participants to the most interesting morphosyntactic neighborhood of the City, the one inhabited by New York-born Hispanics. Here abundant theoretical context surrounds the home language of these second generation bilinguals. The research literature labels them with a distinct moniker ('heritage speakers'); studies their home language in terms of a sharp comparison (with 'Spanish'); and offers a clear linguistic construct to make sense of their speech ('incomplete acquisition'). In an attempt to overcome the serious empirical and theoretical difficulties of these notions, the grammar that guides variable usage in these Latinos is studied in its own right, focusing on choice of mood inflection and subject pronoun in finite verbs. The comparison that is proffered with regard to the home language grammar of this generation of Latino New Yorkers is not with that of 'Spanish', but with that of the generation of their immigrant parents, yielding a different picture of continuity, contact, and change.