

A majority sound change in a minority community: /u/-fronting in Chicano English¹

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ABSTRACT

Many sociolinguistic studies have found that minority groups are not participating in the sound changes characteristic of the majority community. This study, however, presents evidence that /u/-fronting, a sound change observable in California Anglo speakers, is found in the minority Mexican-American community as well, among speakers of Chicano English. Furthermore, while a high percentage of variation research has focused on correlating sociolinguistic variables with traditional social factors (age, gender, and social class being the most common), the results of this research underscore the need to analyze variation within the context of those social categories that are of particular significance to the specific community being studied, as well as the importance of incorporating interactions among social factors into a sociolinguistic analysis.

KEYWORDS: Chicano English, /u/-fronting, California, gang membership, gender

1. INTRODUCTION

Much general sociolinguistic research on language change in the United States has focused on majority communities, often on speakers of Anglo ethnicity in large urban settings. In studies of minority communities, more attention has been given to examining linguistic elements that are distinctive of the speech of the minority group in question; some examples include grammatical constructions such as habitual *be* in African-American Vernacular English, or code-switching in bilingual Latino communities. The more general studies that have been done have tended to focus on stable sociolinguistic variables, such as consonant cluster simplification (cf. for example Santa Ana 1991), or on standard versus non-standard forms (e.g. Wolfram 1974; Edwards 1992). However, a broader sociolinguistic study of sound change within a minority community could serve to test current theoretical claims about language in relation to social structure, and to explore how majority and minority communities might be similar or different in this respect.

This broader perspective is the goal of this study, which focuses on a group of Latino young adults between 15 and 32 years of age who live mostly in a single region of western Los Angeles. Many of them attend Westside Park (a pseudonym), which is a continuation school: separated from the regular public high school, and intended only for students who have had learning or disciplinary problems. I conducted sociolinguistic interviews in English with the monolingual English speakers, and in both English and Spanish with the bilingual speakers. The data presented here focus only on the English of these young adults, which is a variety of the dialect known as Chicano English.

2. THE ISSUE OF CROSS-DIALECTAL INFLUENCES

The first question I will address is whether any of the sound changes taking place in the California Anglo Dialect play a role in the Chicano English of Los Angeles. There is ample evidence in previous studies for dialect influence across ethnic boundaries, particularly where either stable sociolinguistic variables or variation between standard and non-standard forms are concerned. With respect to Latino communities in particular, Wolfram (1974) documented the ways in which contact with speakers of African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) influenced the speech of Puerto Ricans in New York. He found, for example, that speakers with many African-American contacts used habitual *be*, or had surface realizations of /θ/ as [f]. More recently, Edwards (1992) found marked generational differences in the use of African-American Vernacular English variables in Detroit. Younger speakers, and particularly those whose networks included more contacts with Anglos, tended to use the AAVE variants of these features less frequently. The findings of both of these studies fit well with the principles of accommodation theory (as presented for example in Giles and St. Clair 1979), since those who had more contact with speakers of other ethnicities were most likely to assimilate linguistic variables or patterns from external dialects.

There is, however, a surprising paucity of studies on the nature of actual sound changes in progress in minority communities. Many large sociolinguistic studies focusing on more than one ethnic group have reported that minority groups do not participate in the local sound changes affecting Anglo speakers (Labov 1966; Labov and Harris 1986; Bailey and Maynor 1987). In contrast to the influence of inter-ethnic contacts discussed above, Henderson (1995) found no evidence of the Philadelphia short *a* pattern even among those middle class African-Americans who had extensive white contacts. And Labov suggests that:

[ethnic minority speakers] are not oriented to the local vernacular development at all, but are instead oriented to a national pattern of koine formation within the nonwhite groups. (Labov 1994: 157)

However, so little has been done on sound change in minority groups that no firm conclusions can really be drawn.

Furthermore, there are a few studies that show the use of local dialect

features by minority speakers. One of the most relevant here is a study by Poplack (1978) which is of particular interest because it also focused on a Latino community: Puerto Rican speakers in Philadelphia. The Puerto Rican children she studied showed evidence of phonological influences from both the Anglo and African-American local communities. Most notably, they were participating in several Philadelphia Anglo vowel shifts, including the fronting of /ow/ and the raising and backing of the nucleus of /ay/ before voiceless consonants. Since the studies cited above where participation in local changes was not found focused mainly on African-Americans, one hypothesis might be that Latino and African-American communities differ; in other words, Latino speakers participate in some of the changes from the matrix Anglo community while African-Americans do not. Yet this possibility is contradicted by a recent study by Wolfram, Thomas and Green (1998) looking at language change among African-Americans in the Outer Banks region of North Carolina. The researchers found some sound changes that were in progress in both the black and white communities, including ungliding of /ay/ and the loss of front-glided /aw/. The question of when minority speakers participate in local sound changes, therefore, remains open.

3. SOCIAL GROUPS

3.1 *The selection of social factors for analysis*

An important secondary question is whether the social factors traditionally used in studies of majority sound change, such as age, sex and social class, are sufficient for an explanation of sociolinguistic variation in this community. There has been an increasing focus on the use of ethnographic techniques in sociolinguistics. As Eckert observes:

The use of ethnography in the study of variation allows the researcher to discover the social groups, categories and divisions particular to the community in question, and to explore their relation to linguistic form. (Eckert 1991: 213)

Eckert's own work has shown the importance of non-traditional social categories, namely the groups of *jocks* and *burnouts* (cf. Eckert 1987, Eckert 1991). Mendoza-Denton (1995) explores how differing gang memberships are reflected in the speech of adolescent girls in Northern California. Such use of community-specific categories is not new. As early as Labov et al.'s (1968) study of peer groups in Harlem, for example, there was evidence that gang membership can play an important role in sociolinguistic variation. However, there continue to be sociolinguistic studies in which general sociological categories are applied without attempting to identify community-specific factors that might also be relevant.

3.2 Community-specific categories

Among the Latino young adults, several non-traditional social categories came up again and again as ways of identifying themselves and others. In many ways the most intriguing of these, and certainly the most salient in the media, is the category of gang member (also *gang-banger*, *gangster* or *cholo/chola*). Most of the gang members in this study are affiliated with Culver City (CC). Yet equally important are the relationships non-gang members have to the gangs.

First of all, several Westside Park students were described to me as 'not a gang member but he *knows* them.' It was clear from looking at several of these cases that *know* means something specific in this type of context. Everyone at this small school, for example, 'knows' everyone else in the usual sense, i.e. knows their names and a little about them. This specialized use of *know* means something like 'have a connection with,' or 'sometimes spend time with.' People described in this way seem to fall into three groups:

1. people who are friends or family of gang members and might have grown up with them in the same neighborhood, but are not themselves interested in being in a gang;
2. people who spend most of their time with the gang, sometimes participate in its activities, and may someday become members; or
3. people who pride themselves on having some amount of information about the gang, want to keep on the good side of the gang members, but do not participate in gang-type activities.

An example of someone who *knows* the gangsters is Reina, whose brother is in the Culver City gang. The following narrative from Reina's interview illustrates how people who are not gang members can still be deeply connected with the gang lifestyle:

Me and my brother, we almost got sha- shot. [CF: Oh, really?] Cause we went to go drop off his girlfriend at work. [CF: Mhm, which brother, the older brother?] The older one. And we stopped at a red light. It was in Santa Monica, then some gangsters from Santa Monica stopped us, and they got off the car. And the one that had the gun stood by my side, and kept asking me if I was from, you know, Culver City. And I told him *hh* I wasn't from anywhere. And they already knew my brother. Then my brother goes, 'You know what? At least - if you don't respect me, at least respect my sister.' He goes, 'You're you're the one- I'm the one that you wanna get not her. Don't do nothing to my sister.' And they just stopped, and th- and they were like, 'Naaah, nah, it's all right, it's cool, it's cool.' And then they're like, 'We're gonna let you go, just don't tell anybody this happened.' And they- they were about to shoot, but like, my brother told 'em, you know, disrespec- you're disrespecting my sister. And they just left, and *hh* before they left *hh* one of the guys got off and asked for my number! *hhh* And they got me mad! And I- and I said, 'I'm not gonna give you my number after you tried to shoot me!' *hhh* And then he goes, 'Oh, I'm sorry, I'm sorry' and then he left. But like, before I would, um. . . . Before I think I w- I- told- they used to tell me I used to look like a gangster . . . before. And I used to get chased, by some, like gangs.

In the narrative Reina tells the gang members that she isn't 'from anywhere,' which means specifically that she is not herself a gang member. And yet through her brother, she is affiliated with the gang and is involved in gang-related incidents such as this one. Another important subset of the people who *know* gang members is the group known as *wanna-bes*, such as David and Chuck, who are not gang members, but spend time with them and hope to be *jumped in*, i.e. initiated into the gang (cf. Klein 1995 for a further discussion of *wanna-bes*).

In contrast to people who *know* gangsters, there are those who have, and want to have, no association whatsoever with the gangs. In many places, young adults are by default not gang members because that choice would never present itself in their community. However, all the speakers I interviewed have had to make a choice determining whether or not they would be a gang member. I stress this point because I believe that the social category of 'gang status' is as much a part of the linguistic identity constructed by the non-gang members as it is for the *cholos* themselves. Linguistic behavior aimed at maintaining group boundaries comes from those outside as well as from those inside the group.

The young adults who have rejected the gangs are generally more traditional in behavior and more law-abiding. The non-gang group, however, also includes the *taggers*, known mainly for creating graffiti, who are often anti-social. Nonetheless, taggers have no connection with the gang members or gang activities, and are perceived in the community as completely separate from the gangs. Their role is reminiscent of that of the 'bad' *lames* mentioned by Labov (1972: 258–259).

Distinct from gang-related identity, although sometimes intersecting with it, is the category of *mom*. This is not a category that one would assume a priori to be important among high school students. However, there are a number of students who come to Westside Park when they discover that they are pregnant, since there is an infant care center at the school itself, which allows students with babies to continue going to class. Other students become pregnant after transferring to the school. In any case, the *mom* identity was used as part of a description of an individual much more frequently than I expected, indicating that it is in fact a group label that the students recognize. Though there may be additional categories at Westside Park that I did not observe, these were the most salient.

3.3 *The role of social networks*

Results from studies of social networks, such as Milroy (1980), are highly relevant to this work. Gangs, for instance, represent a clearly demarcated locally-loyal network. Although I have not attempted to quantify these network ties, gang groups among these adolescents appear to be both multiplex and dense, in the sense that the gang members all know one another, and tend to see each other at school, at home, and in outside (gang) activities and parties.

For this reason, we might expect to find that the gang members as a group pattern similarly with respect to the use of certain linguistic features.

One interesting thing about these networks, particularly at Westside Park, is that they contain speakers of different social classes. As will be seen in the social class analysis, of the CC gang girls, Erica, Ana and Amanda are from middle class families, while Patricia and Rita are from the lowest income level in the community (in fact they live in a low-income housing project). Yet all of these girls are clearly part of the same network, a fact which was explicitly confirmed for me by Amanda, who told me:

Okay it's me and [Erica] – you talked to [Erica] right? – [Ana] and [Patricia], we're like all friends, we're like good friends, all four of us. We ki- we- we hang around each other every day, we go out every weekend, we're at each other's house all the time, we're with each other every day.

Note that this explanation was brought up spontaneously by her as part of a narrative and was not in response to a question on my part about social groups.

There have been several recent attempts to address the issue of how analyses of networks and of social class might be integrated theoretically, but none of them seems to allow for the possibility of cross-class networks. Guy (1988: 54) describes network studies as reflecting the microsociological level of the more 'macroscopic' class studies, and takes for granted that personal networks only occur within a class. Though Milroy (1980) does not state explicitly that networks can occur only within a class, the networks that are the focus of her study are completely homogeneous with respect to social class. Milroy and Milroy (1992) discuss the integration of social class studies and social network theory in terms of 'strong' and 'weak' ties. Yet still, the underlying assumption seems to be that networks of the close-knit type occur only within classes, with the 'weak' ties to other classes forming an important part of the mechanism of linguistic change.

The possibility that social networks in a community might include members of different social classes raises many intriguing questions. If the class and the network represent different value systems, for example, how does an individual speaker resolve these conflicting loyalties, linguistically and otherwise? The community under study here should shed some light on this question.

4. MEASURING /u/-FRONTING

In order to determine whether these speakers are participating in sound changes characteristic of California Anglo dialects, it is essential to know something about the English of the majority Anglo community. Unfortunately very little research has been done on variation in *California English*. There is, however, a small but interesting study by Hinton et al. (1987) comparing a sample of young native Californian speakers with dialect materials from early in the century and from the 1950's. They looked at several vowel variants, one of

which is the fronting of /u/. They found that all of the vowels in the study had shifted in California since the early data were collected. My own interviews with young Anglo speakers from Los Angeles also show evidence of the variables mentioned in Hinton et al., with /u/-fronting being particularly salient.

To check for the presence of /u/-fronting among the Latino young adults, I did a preliminary analysis in which I collected tokens of four peripheral vowels in English: /i/, /u/, /æ/ and /ɑ/, for 32 of the speakers. The tapes were made on a Sony TCM-5000 recorder with an external lavalier microphone. As much as possible, I extracted the tokens of each vowel from passages of speech that occurred well into the interview, preferably during narrative passages, in order to access the most vernacular speech style. I used occurrences of the vowels that received primary or secondary stress, excluding any reduced or extremely rapid tokens in order to get a clear formant structure. The segments were digitized, cut, and analyzed using the 'Computerized Speech Resource Environment' software produced by Avaaz, Inc. From a computer-generated spectrogram, I took measurements of the first and second formant frequencies (F1 and F2) for each vowel by using a small averaging window (approximately 15 ms) which I located in the nucleus of the vowel, avoiding any strictly transitional effects of the surrounding environments.

There was a great deal of variation in the location of /u/ on the F2 axis among the speakers. A comparison of two individual speakers can be used to illustrate the extremes of this variation. Ramon (Figure 1) shows a high level of /u/-fronting, while Avery (Figure 2) shows no significant fronting at all. Some of Ramon's tokens are so far front as to overlap with his /i/ space, while all of Avery's tokens remain well back, none of them, for example, overlapping with /æ/ in F2 space.

This visual appraisal of differences in the F2 of /u/ must of course be supported by a quantitative analysis of the variable. Already evident, however, is the striking fact that at least some of the Latino speakers, e.g. Ramon, are taking part in a sound change that characterizes the California Anglo community. In contrast to the results of several studies mentioned earlier, these data support the claim that non-white speakers do sometimes participate in the same sound changes observable in the majority community.

In the main part of the analysis, I begin by looking only at the most favorable contexts for fronting: preceding alveolar stops and palatal fricatives. The /u/-fronting variable involves both closeness to /i/ and frontness relative to /ɑ/, and these vowels can be used to normalize for differences in the sizes of the speakers' vocal tracts. For each speaker, I took the ratio of their mean F2 for /u/ to their mean F2 for /ɑ/ (one measure) and then to their mean F2 for /i/ (a second, confirming measure). The use of proportions in this manner effectively normalizes for vocal tract size. This permits comparisons across speakers, since it is not the raw F2 in Hertz of /u/ that is being analyzed, but rather its proportional frontness relative to the speaker's mean /ɑ/, as well as its relative closeness to the speaker's mean /i/. This method also gives a measure of the degree (as opposed to

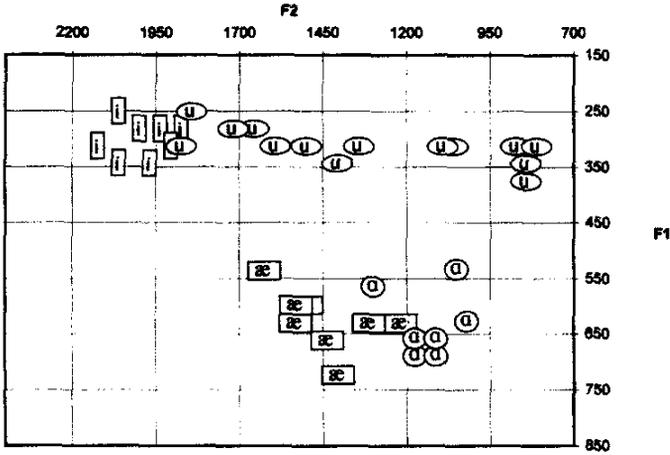


Figure 1: Positions of four English vowels: Ramon, age 18

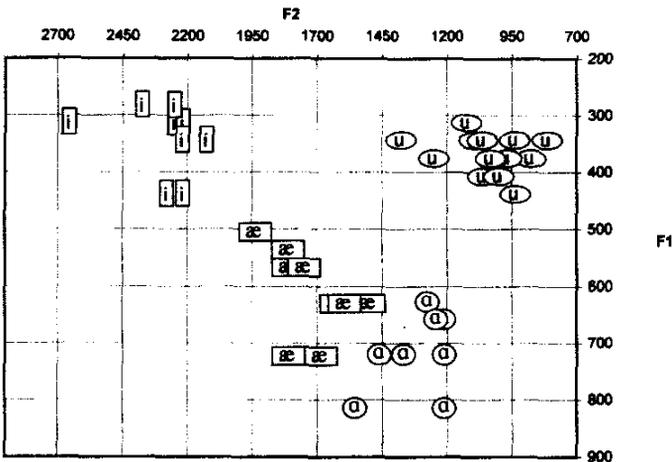


Figure 2: Positions of four English vowels: Avery, age 16

the frequency) of /u/-fronting, relevant because the preliminary study had shown large variations in degree among people who fronted.

Figure 3 presents these values graphed against each other for 34 of the speakers in the study. The chart shows a correlation between the two fronting measures (the Pearson correlation coefficient is .78, $p < .001$), and significant variation among the speakers of this community. I have included two Anglo speakers on the chart (Helena and Richard, in italics) to serve as reference points for /u/-fronting in the majority community, although their values were

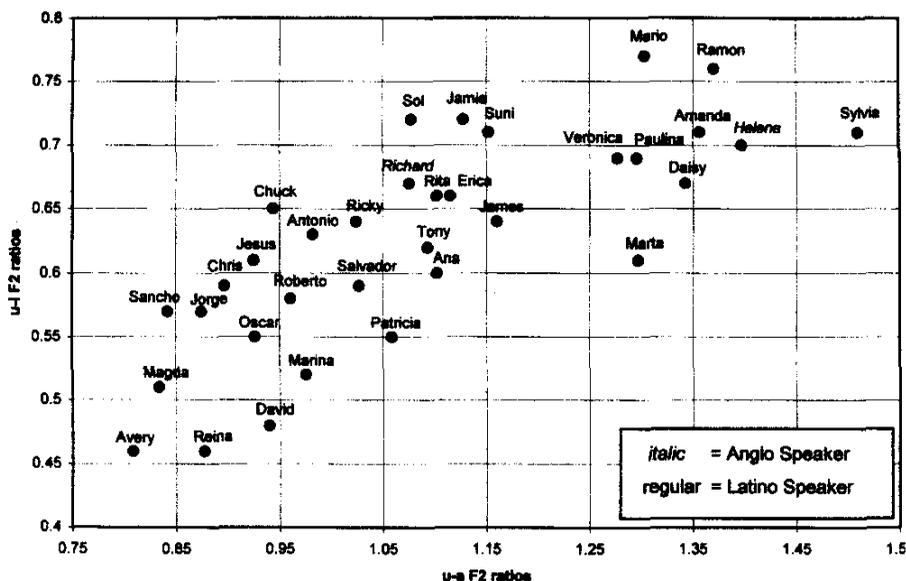


Figure 3: Degree of /u/-fronting for all speakers

not used in the statistical analysis. The speakers that appear in the upper right quadrant of the graph are those who front /u/ the most. Those in the lower left quadrant front the least. The distribution generally coincides well with my own auditory evaluation of which speakers seemed to front /u/.

5. SOCIAL CATEGORIES AND /u/-FRONTING IN CHICANO ENGLISH

Figure 4 shows the same /u/-fronting chart with the speakers labeled for social class. Their social class ranking was determined on the basis of factors relevant to the community, such as whether they live in a house or an apartment, their own or their parents' occupations, etc. The speakers in the lowest class are labeled low income since this is the community term for them. The chart shows a correlation between /u/-fronting and social class, with a tendency for the middle class speakers to fall at the higher-fronting end, and the working class and low income speakers to fall at the opposite end of the chart. A t-test of the means for middle class versus working class and low income speakers meets the .05 significance level for both /u/-fronting measures. But a look at Figure 4 reveals that some speakers strongly contradict this pattern. Why, for example, are Sylvia and Veronica heavy /u/-fronters, given that they fall at the lowest part of the socioeconomic scale? What are middle-class speakers like David and Chuck doing in the group that fronts the least?

To answer these questions, it is necessary to look at factors other than

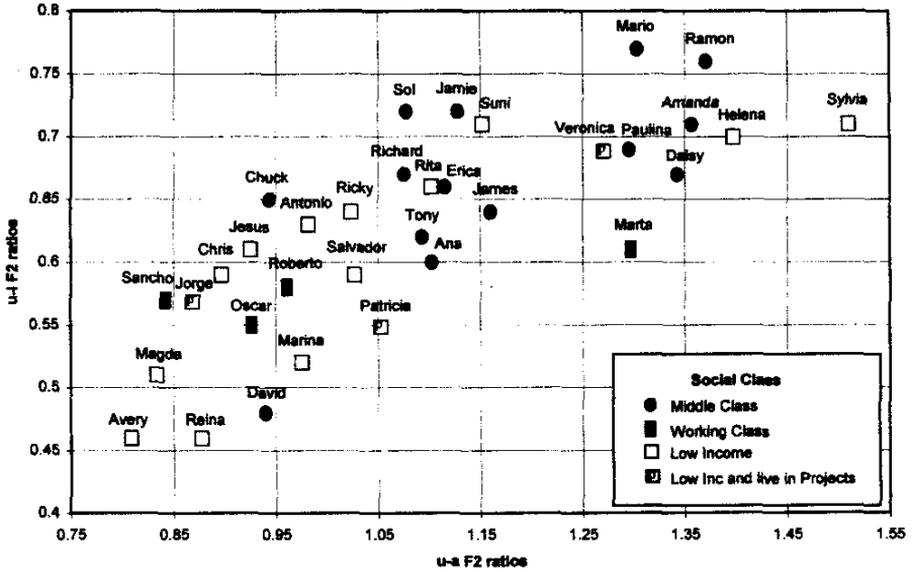


Figure 4: Degree of /u/-fronting by social class

social class that figure prominently in this community, such as gang status. Figure 5 shows the relationship of gang status to /u/-fronting. The pattern is in some ways reminiscent of that which was seen for social class. Gang members and those affiliated with the gang are found in the lowest part of the chart, while the highest /u/-fronting values occur mainly in people who have no gang affiliation; this difference is significant at the .001 level (in t-tests of both the u-i and u-a measures). Once more, however, there are some salient exceptions. Amanda, a Culver City gang member, has very high /u/-fronting, while Roberto, with no connection to the gang, shows very low values. The possibly former gang members are spread across the range of values, a not unexpected result given their different histories, which I will not discuss in detail here. I will mention only that James and Mario have no contact with the gang, while Marina and Rita are still technically gang members but participate less since becoming *moms* . In sum, Figure 5 shows a strong relationship between gang status and /u/-fronting, with gang-affiliated people fronting less than other speakers. But the exceptions noted above (e.g. Amanda) remain.

6. INTERACTING SOCIAL FACTORS AND THE ROLE OF GENDER

The analysis of social factors so far has shown many clear tendencies, but no single factor has been able to explain the distribution of /u/-fronting among

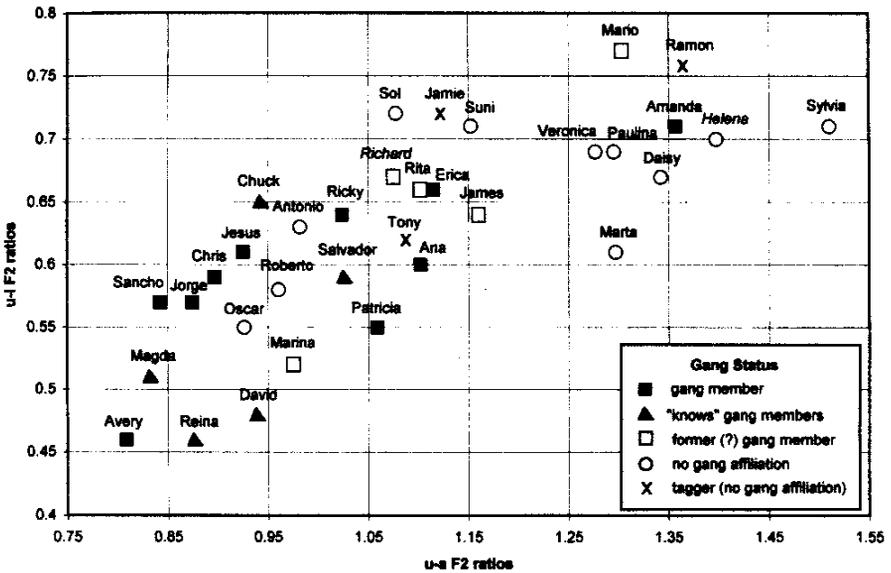


Figure 5: Degree of /u/-fronting by gang status

these speakers without leaving out certain striking exceptions. Furthermore, the exceptional individuals were different for each social factor, as opposed to the consistent recurrence of the same speakers that one would expect if these particular individuals were anomalous in some way, for example with respect to the normalization. Eckert (1989) and Labov (1990) among others have stressed the importance of looking for interactions among variables. If instead of examining the social factors in isolation we take their intersections, looking at each speaker as, e.g. a gang-affiliated, working class male, a pattern of variation emerges in which gender plays a crucial role. In the next section, I will show that men and women have a different ordering of social constraints, parallel to the way in which linguistic constraints on a rule might be ordered differently in two communities.

Figures 6 and 7 show the degree of /u/-fronting for speakers separated by sex, and labeled to show both their gang status and their social class. The speakers who *know* gang members are grouped with the gangsters and labeled 'gang-affiliated', while the taggers, as discussed earlier, are included with the non-gang group. Working class and low income speakers were combined in the working class category, since this difference had no statistical significance.

As can be seen in Figure 6, for women, non-gang affiliation is the strongest social variable affecting fronting. Note that I am not referring to the general category of gang status, but to the specific sub-group of non-gang speakers. The women with no gang ties all appear in the upper right quadrant of the chart, except for Sol, who has a very high ratio for only one of the measures, but can

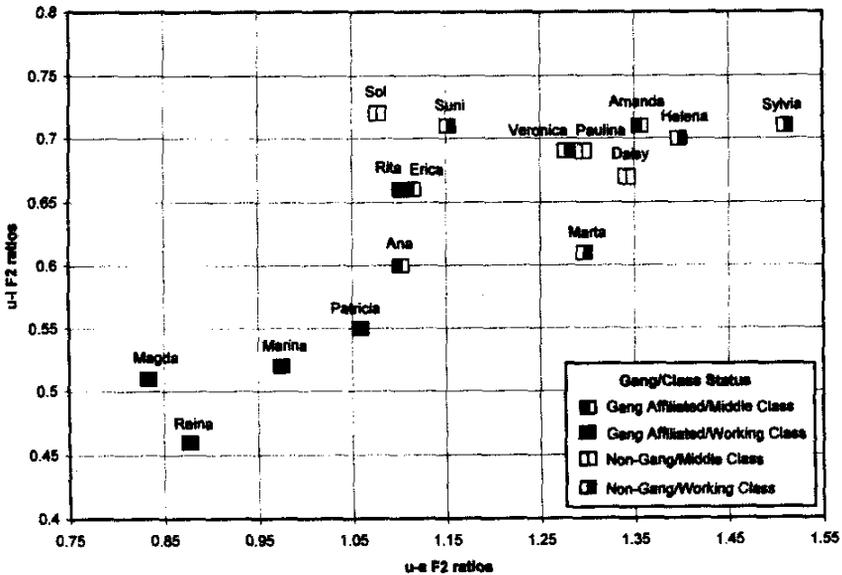


Figure 6: /u/-fronting for females by class and gang status

clearly be heard to front /u/. Interestingly, Sylvia shows an even higher degree of fronting than Helena, the Anglo speaker. Many of these women were from lower socioeconomic groups, a factor which in Figure 4 appeared to have a negative effect on fronting generally. Veronica, for instance, lives in the Projects. However, for the women as a group, social class was not a significant determiner of /u/-fronting (at the .05 level), while gang status showed a highly significant correlation at $p < .007$.

Social class status does have an important secondary role, though. For just the gang-affiliated women, social class determines how much they front. Gang members with lower socioeconomic status fall at the bottom of the chart. Those with middle class status fall higher on the chart. Though the numbers are small, the difference is significant at the .05 level. As in the case of Amanda, it is possible for middle class gang members to front as much as or more than some non-gang women. It should also be noted that women like Magda and Reina, who are gang-affiliated but not themselves in a gang, clearly pattern with the women who are gang members.

In sum, then, social class does not affect /u/-fronting for non-gang women, who all show some degree of fronting. But for gang-affiliated women, social class is crucial, with middle class status contributing to a high level of /u/-fronting, while lower social status leads to a lower level of /u/-fronting. Grouping the factors in this way yields correlations with the linguistic variable that are highly statistically significant, and the speakers who seemed anomalous before can be seen to fit the pattern.

In looking next at the male speakers, it becomes evident that the effect of gender is also clearly delineated, though it cannot be seen from a direct correlation with the linguistic variable. Figure 7, showing the men only, looks superficially very different from Figure 6, particularly as regards the group of highest fronters. The top 6 women /u/-fronters, for example, were mixed with respect to social class. But all of the top 6 men are from the middle class group. The social class factor, which did not show a significant correlation with /u/-fronting for the women as a group, is significant (at $p < .05$) for the men as a group. On the other hand, non-gang status does not have the same strong effect for men that it had for women. All the non-gang status women were in the high /u/-fronting region of the chart; for men, however, the non-gang factor is tied to social class. The non-gang men who are also middle class are the highest fronters, but those in the working class group, like Roberto, fall at the middle or low end of the /u/-fronting scale.

There are other ways in which men and women differ regarding the ordering of social correlates of the linguistic variable. The effect of gang affiliation is much stronger for men. Gang-affiliated women had more or less fronting depending on their social class. However, none of the male gang members appears in the top part of Figure 7 (comparable to Amanda in Figure 6); this could be attributed to the fact that there are no middle class male gang members in the sample. However, there are two gang-affiliated speakers who belong to the middle class group, David and Chuck. These two speakers pattern with the gang members, in the lower part of the chart.

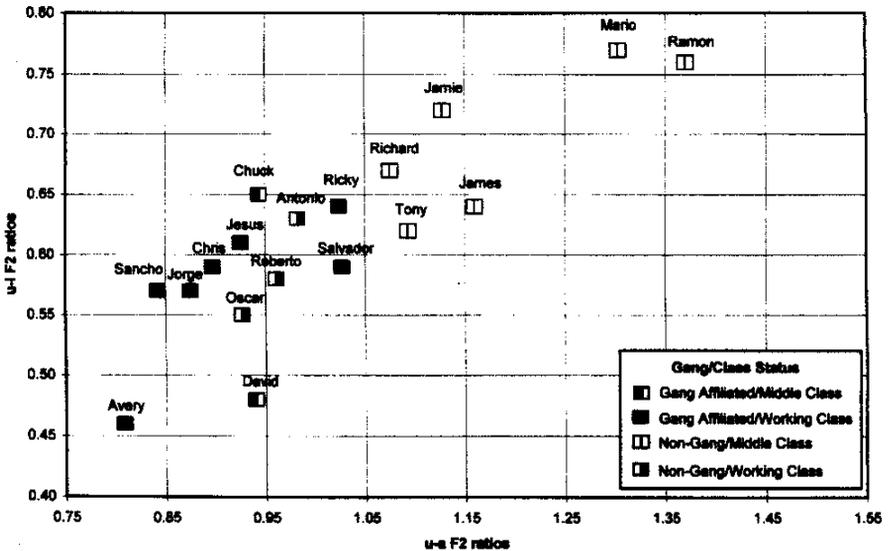


Figure 7: /u/-fronting for males by class and gang status

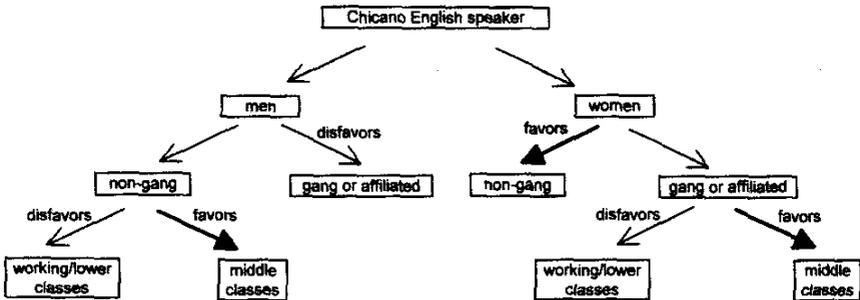


Figure 8: The interaction of social factors in /u/-fronting

Generally, then, the men and the women show orderings of these two social factor groups (social class and gang status) that are mirror images of each other. Figure 8 gives a visual representation of the ordering and interactions of social factors as they correlate with /u/-fronting. For women, non-gang status correlates consistently with a high degree of /u/-fronting, regardless of social class. But within the group of women connected to the gangs, social class determines whether the speaker exhibits a higher or lower degree of /u/-fronting. For the men, gang affiliation correlates consistently with relatively low /u/-fronting. Within the non-gang group, however, the amount of /u/-fronting depends on social class.

The importance of this interaction between the three variables of sex, social class, and gang status is confirmed by a multivariate analysis of the data. Table 1 presents the results of a generalized linear model (GLM) of /u/-fronting, in which relative position of /u/ to /a/ was used as the dependent variable and the three social categories mentioned above were used as

Table 1: Generalized Linear Model of /u/-fronting with the independent variables of sex, gang status, social class, and the interaction of the three variables

Source	Sum-of-Squares	DF	Mean-Square	F-Ratio	P
Class\$	0.066	1	0.066	5.787	0.023
Gang\$	0.273	1	0.273	23.836	0.0001
Sex\$	0.264	1	0.264	23.010	0.0001
Sex\$*Gang\$*Class	0.147	1	0.147	12.874	0.001
Error	0.309	27	0.011		

Dep Var: UAF2RATIO N: 32 Multiple R: 0.845 Squared multiple R: 0.714

independent variables. All possible cross-products were tested in other models, but only the 3-way interaction of sex, gang status and social class was found to be significant.

7. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1 *Network, social class, and conflicting norms*

First of all, these findings have implications for the issues of network theory that were raised earlier, particularly how network analysis and social class analysis can best be integrated. The clear significance of gang status in explaining the data suggests that networks are playing a role in the linguistic patterning of /u/. An analysis based on social class alone would not have been adequate, as the discussion of Figure 4 reveals. Nonetheless, it cannot be said that networks have primacy over social class in the analysis, either. Speakers like Amanda, who patterns with other middle class speakers rather than with her gang cohort, show that network alone cannot adequately explain the data. This conclusion is further supported by the strong tendency for /u/-fronting among all the non-gang women, who in this sample do not belong to the same networks. It may be tempting to posit that local networks (e.g. the gang) have primacy for the men but not the women, since all the gang-affiliated men grouped together on the charts, while gang-affiliated women fell higher or lower based on social class. But the patterning of non-gang working class men exactly in the midst of the gang members suggests that a more comprehensive explanation is needed.

The analysis that best accounts for the patterning of /u/-fronting among Los Angeles Chicanos is that this variable reflects the intersection of conflicting social norms in the community. The work of Eckert (1987, 1989) first highlighted this type of situation among adolescents in the Detroit area, where two clear and opposing norms could be identified: 'conservative' (typified by the *jocks*) and 'tough' (typified by the *burnouts*). Eckert notes that social pressure related to gender caused conflicts with social category membership.

Girls are still expected to be 'good' in other ways – to be friendly and docile . . . Boys, on the other hand, are expected to be physically powerful and able to defend themselves . . . Just as the jock boys are caught between conservative corporate social norms and 'tough' gender norms, burnout girls are caught between 'tough' urban norms and conservative gender norms. (Eckert 1987: 106–108)

In the case of /u/-fronting in Los Angeles, use of the variable is associated more with middle class membership and non-gang speakers. Non-use is more often associated with working class membership and gang-affiliated speakers.

For women, the societal standards that pressure them to be 'good' etc. dovetail well with non-gang status, and also with the conservative norms of middle class membership. In the Latino community, this leads to a situation where even those women who are from the lowest socioeconomic backgrounds

use language norms associated with the middle class group to mark their non-gang status. The intersection of conservative norms also suggests why female gang members might front /u/ if they were from the middle class.

However, society – and this is maximally true of Latino society – pressures men to be ‘tough,’ to defend themselves physically, etc. Since gang membership emphasizes exactly these qualities, it may be more difficult for Latino men to express their dissociation from the gang linguistically than it is for the women, even among men who have made a clear choice not to be gang members. When these men are also middle class, the combination of their class status and non-gang membership is enough to override the pressure to sound tough. When non-gang men are from the working class, though, another group associated with toughness, the effect on their speech patterns is greater, and results in less /u/-fronting.

7.2 *Distribution by social class and the curvilinear pattern*

A final result of this research which merits some discussion is the fact that /u/-fronting, a sound change in progress in California, shows a pattern of social distribution in the Latino community that does not fit the traditional curvilinear pattern. In the studies of what is usually termed ‘untargeted’ sound change done on majority communities, the interior social classes lead the change, as summarized in Labov (1994):

The pattern now seems clear, at least for cities in the United States. In the course of change from below, the most advanced vowel systems are found among younger speakers: young adults and youth in late adolescence. Furthermore, these innovators are found among ‘interior groups’ – that is, groups centrally located in the class hierarchy . . . In terms of social class labels, this means the upper working class and lower middle class . . . (Labov 1994: 156)

In an earlier section Labov notes that ‘the occupational groups with highest and lowest social status disfavor the changes in progress’ (Labov 1994: 62). However, in the Chicano English speaking community of Los Angeles we find that the group with the highest /u/-fronting includes women from both middle class backgrounds and very low socioeconomic backgrounds.

There are several possible reasons why this pattern might be found in the Latino community, and I will discuss some of them here. One possibility might be that the class representations made for these women are inaccurate; in other words, is it possible that the ‘low income’ women are actually from a higher social class? The answer is clearly no, despite the difficulty in applying traditional social indices to this community. Veronica lives in the Projects, which means that by definition her one-parent family is from the lowest end of the socioeconomic scale, yet she fronts /u/ clearly and frequently.

Another possibility would be that this is not a classic *change from below*, but rather more like a *change from above*, or *targeted change*, such as the pronounci-

ation of post-vocalic /r/ in New York City. Labov describes these as representing 'borrowings from other speech communities that have higher prestige in the view of the dominant class' (Labov 1994: 78), which could apply in this case, since the variable comes from the Anglo community. On the other hand, these changes are often associated with public awareness and almost always with use in careful speech, neither of which is true of /u/-fronting in Chicano English. However, it is possible that a contact-induced change might pattern more like a change from above than like a change from below.

Yet if this were, in fact, a case of targeted change, we would expect to find the highest social classes leading, with a gradual decline in use of the variable as we went down the social scale. Again, this is not the pattern for the Los Angeles data. While some middle class speakers show high degrees of /u/-fronting, others are at the low end of the /u/-fronting scale. The case of the women from the Projects who show heavy /u/-fronting would also remain unexplained.

The best explanation for this pattern, and the only one of the three presented here that fits the data, stems from the fact that gang status has such a high level of importance among these young Latino adults. Rather than playing a strong independent role, social class in this community interacts with gang status and other factors in a complex pattern, as reflected in Figure 8 and discussed above. The possibility that sound change in minority groups may not show a curvilinear pattern with respect to social class is certainly worth further investigation with a larger sample and in other communities. However, the availability of an alternative explanation based on community-specific factors which fits the data closely, along with the high level of significance revealed by the statistical model, suggests that these results are not simply an artifact of sample size. As further general sociolinguistic studies of minority communities are done, more data will become available which allow linguists to test the universality of the conclusions that have been drawn from studies of majority communities.

NOTES

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