

Fought, Carmen. 1999. A majority sound change in a minority community: /u/-fronting in Chicano English. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 1/3: 5-23.

Previous literature (e.g. Wolfram 1974, and Thomas and Green 1998) has suggested that minority groups are not influenced by the local sound change of the majority community. Fought investigates the phenomenon of /u/-fronting observable in California Anglo speakers, and claims that the minority Mexican-American community (speakers of Chicano English) does participate in this local sound change.

Fought argues that the traditional social factors (e.g. age, sex, and social class) are insufficient to explain variation in this community. These factors interact with nontraditional community specific categories (e.g. gang membership) to provide a successful sociolinguistic analysis of this Latino community.

Fought relates her study to the studies of social networks, seen in Milroy (1980). For example, gangs represent a demarcated locally-loyal network. The author expects to find that gang members as a group may share a similar use of /u/-fronting.

Subjects

- A group of young Latino adults between 15 and 32 years old
- Many of them attend Westside Park, a school for students who have learning or disciplinary problems.
- Speakers use gang membership as the most salient category to identify themselves and others. Most gang members are affiliated with Culver City.

Preliminary Findings

Within the network of this community, there are different social classes. Applying the factors of either social class or gang affiliation alone cannot adequately account for the /u/-fronting:

- Middle class speakers tend to front more than low income speakers (Figure 4).
Exception: Sylvia and Veronica = heavy /u/-fronting; belong to the lowest socioeconomic level.
David and Chuck = less /u/-fronting; belong to middle class speakers.
- Gang members and people affiliated with the gangs disfavor the /u/-fronting (Figure 5).
Exception: Amanda patterns with middle class speakers rather than with her gang affiliation.

Fought conducts a cross-class network analysis, and seeks to show how the analysis of network and social class can be best integrated, a problem to which previous research has not provided a clear answer (e.g. Guy 1988 and Milroy 1980).

The results reveal that:

- Gang-affiliated women use higher or lower /u/-fronting according to their social class. Non-gang status correlates with a high degree of /u/-fronting, regardless of social class (Figure 6).
- For men, social class is a stronger variable affecting fronting than gang affiliation.
- All gang-affiliated men group together in low /u/-fronting. The amount of /u/-fronting for non-gangs is dependent on social class (Figure 7).

Finally, Eckert (1987, 1989) proposes that social pressure related to gender causes conflicts within membership of social network. Fought adopts Eckert's proposal to explain why men and women have distinct ordering of social constraints:

- Women are pressured to conform to social standards, and to the conservative norms of middle class membership, which include avoidance of gang affiliation.
- Gang membership emphasizes the characteristics of toughness. The combination of middle class and non-gang status override the pressure to sound tough. Non-gang men from the working class use less /u/-fronting because of its association with toughness.