

## South Florida Latino English: Spanish substrate influence on embedded clause structures

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The influx of Spanish-speaking peoples to Miami-Dade County, Florida has been ongoing over the past 60 years culminating in Latinos making up 65% of the regional population according to recent census data. This has created a unique environment for a strong Spanish language influence on the varieties of English spoken among the members of the community. Embedded clause structures in Miami Latino English are potential examples of this effect as embedded clauses differ syntactically between Spanish and English.

In Spanish, we see:

(1) Maria no sabe a quién **detendrá la policía** por el crimen.

The Standard American English translation is:

(2) Maria doesn't know who **the police will** arrest for the crime.

This is as opposed to the following, which is impossible in Standard American English:

(3) \*Maria doesn't know who **will the police** arrest for the crime.

Everyday encounters with Miami-born Latinos show anecdotal evidence of construction (3)'s inversion in casual speech despite the fact that the construction has been historically impossible in the speech of Anglo-Whites of the same region. While similar constructions are productive in other varieties of English such as Belfast English (Henry, 1995), the relatively sudden syntactic change in Miami could be a result of the extensive language contact mentioned above.

We examined this construction using two tasks: 1) a judgment task to determine the acceptability of each inversion and 2) a dehydrated sentence task to elicit production of potential inversion structures.

The study was conducted using Qualtrics software. Participants included 20 Miami Latinos, 20 Miami non-Latinos, and 13 non-Latinos from outside of Miami. The 20 Miami Latinos are all second and third generation who learned English at or before age five. In the judgment test the participants were split evenly between an experimental and a control group. The experimental and control sentences were identical with the exception of the embedded clause inversion structure. Participants were asked to judge the acceptability of 60 sentences on a 4-point scale (natural, slightly odd, strange, impossible). They were asked to ignore formal grammaticality and concentrate on everyday language. 30 experimental/control sentences, 15 sentences acceptable in American English, and 15 sentences unacceptable in American English were shown one sentence at a time in random order. For the dehydrated sentence task, participants were presented with scrambled sentences and were asked to rearrange the words into what they felt were the most natural sentences. The task ended with a demographics section.

Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS and results show that Miami Latinos judge inversions of all types to be more "natural" than Miami non-Latinos. In the dehydrated sentence

task, only Latinos created inverted sentences. While the Miami non-Latinos did not produce any inversions during the dehydrated sentence task, the judgment task showed they were substantially more accepting of the inverted sentences than non-Latinos from outside of the region. This shows a divergence in the English spoken by Latino and non-Latino communities as has previously been shown with phonetic data from other U.S. communities.

## References

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