

A Gender-based Analysis of Discourse Markers in Limonese Creole

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Introduction

This study analyzes the differing uses of discourse markers in Limonese Creole (LC) speech by men and women. Escure (1992) and Herzfeld (1997) have pointed out that the effects of gender on discourse have largely been studied from the perspective of white, middle-class speakers in developed countries. In the Black Creole community of Limon, Costa Rica women have gained economic and social power over the last few decades. These women, in many ways, are still subordinate to men in social, educational, and professional contexts. They provide a unique opportunity to evaluate language use in a unique community where traditional relationships of gender and power have changed.

The situation is even more interesting because these speakers have three distinct codes available: LC, Spanish, and a variety of Caribbean Standard English. Thus, discourse markers borrowed from Spanish may well represent prestige variants for the women who borrow them, reflecting the link between the ability to use prestige language and the benefits associated with it, benefits which have been experienced by Limonese women in recent decades and have contributed to their rising sense of power.

Sociohistorical Background

In the 1870s, the Costa Rican government contracted an American named Minor Keith to build a railroad from the capital, San Jose to the Caribbean coast. His company, Standard Railway, hired tens of thousands of workers from English Creole-speaking Caribbean countries, the vast majority of whom came from Jamaica (Bryce Laporte, 1993). Herzfeld (1978) cites government documentation of the immigration of at least 33,000 Jamaicans by 1921.

Because they were working in a largely uninhabited part of Costa Rica, the Jamaicans set up towns in which an English-based Creole was spoken; Jamaican culture dominated the community's social life (Purcell, 1993; Wright-Murray, 1982). They set up schools for their children and established Anglican churches in which to worship. The community had high levels of what the migrants considered good employment and the settlements were characterized by stable social and family structures in which traditional gender roles prevailed: men worked outside the home and were dominant within it, and women were relegated to working in the home or in low-level jobs traditionally associated with women (e.g., cooking, laundry). According to Herzfeld (1977) the language of women at this time was likely to be more basilectal, as they had lower levels of formal education than the men and were largely consigned to the home.

After the railroad was completed, the migrants remained to work at the United Fruit Company (UFC), which Minor Keith had developed as a way to help feed his employees. Banana plantations were developed along the railroad and Jamaican towns and villages were founded there, many of which still exist today (Winkler, 1998). Immigration from Jamaica continued until the UFC stopped operations in the province of Limón in the 1940s. When an agricultural plague wiped out the bananas, the company decided to relocate to the plague-free west coast (Purcell, 1993). This event was catastrophic for the local Jamaican community because although they had been in Limón for several generations, Costa Rica officially considered them Jamaicans, even those who had been born in the host country. Their legal status denied them certain rights and privileges, including relocation to the west coast to continue working for the UFC. In fact, the Jamaicans were prohibited by law from going past the Turrialba railroad station, as an older woman pointed out. I include her account as Example 1:

Ex. 1: They didn't want us to go to work in Turrialba or Cartago or those places. But they can come here. All the farm, those farms are mostly Guanacastecas and Nicaraguans. Those are working on the banana plantation. But this was 1936. Leon Cortes Castro brought in that law. When he was president of Costa Rica you could go as far as the Tunnel Camp, near to Turrialba. That was as near as you could go.

The government's position economically devastated Black communities, leaving tens of thousands without significant employment. The departure of the UFC meant that decent full-time employment disappeared almost completely from the province (Bryce Laporte, 1993). Therefore, many men sought work outside of Costa Rica for at least part of each year. They took jobs on the Panama Canal, on Caribbean cruise ships, and in the USA, leaving their women and children in Limón. Although the money these men sent back to their families kept the Afro-Costa Rican¹ communities from total ruin, it did leave many of the women on their own, as one Limonese woman describes:

Ex. 2: Umm faada awt a di kuntri, not even on da ship; dey go an werk, an plenti of separated family. Da faada werkin awtsayd. Still da woman av to tiek kier of da uom, is jus laik da kids dem is almos alone.

The situation for the Afro-Costa Ricans began to improve in 1948 when they supported the popular revolution that put José Figueres Ferrer in power. They were declared citizens of Costa Rica and were free to settle in any part of the country. However, the demographics of Limón had changed during the previous decade. Many Spanish-speaking Costa Ricans had bought land once owned by the UFC. As the number of Spanish-speaking Costa Ricans increased, the government began to impose regulations on the province of Limón, including the establishment of Spanish language schools as well as Costa Rican state agencies to replace the infrastructure put in place by the UFC (Herzfeld, 1977). Thus, the ability to speak Spanish became critical for economic and educational success, and many of the Afro-Limonese women became Creole-Spanish bilinguals. Because the women remained in Limón when their men left to find work, they were in a position to acquire Spanish when the demographics shifted to a Spanish-speaking majority. Therefore, they were also able to take advantage of economic opportunities that became available. Women successfully entered the Spanish work domain before men both because they were present in the community and because discrimination by the Spanish-speaking Costa Ricans was less frequent against Black

¹ This term is used by Bryce Laporte and others to refer to the Black community in Costa Rica after the midpoint of the twentieth century when they began to be more integrated into the Costa Rican nation.

women than Black men (Winkler, 1998). This is not particularly surprising. In addition, Black women had been treated as second-class citizens by their own men; they did not necessarily resist the gender norms of the wider Costa Rican culture. Black men, however, expected to be treated as equals.

As a result of these changes, women became the breadwinners for many Afro-Costa Rican families. As the years went by, the shift in traditional gender-based roles continued as women continued to improve their social standing. As already suggested, speaking both Spanish and LC gave them increased educational and employment opportunities. In the 1990s, when I began working in Limón, female-headed households had been the norm for at least couple of decades. There was no perceptible change in this pattern at the time of my last visit in 2008. In fact, a male Limonese professor at a university in San Jose pointed out a rise in the number of “baby daddies” (his term) in the Limonese community. He asserted that successful, well-educated Black women, trying to preserve Creole culture through marriage to Black men, were struggling to find economic equals. Thus, they are opting for temporary liaisons with Black men for the sole purpose of having children, not creating stable, long-term family units. This is a symptom of the economic and educational divide between men and women in the community, a divide that has contributed to some interesting differences in language use.

For example, as women elsewhere are often wont to do (Romaine, 2005), women in Limón began to increase their usage of indicators of linguistic prestige. They used, for example, more acrolectal varieties of English and other indicators of status and politeness, including the use of discourse markers (Winkler, 1998). In addition, I noted an increase in the use of Spanish, the nationally prestigious variety, by Afro-Limonese women. But rather than abandon the Creole, they have successfully managed three varieties—LC, Spanish, and Standard Caribbean English—in the discourse communities in which they operate. This effect has also been noted in other communities where Creoles are spoken.

Belize offers one such example. As Escure notes (1992, p. 118), “In Belize, the English-based creole symbolizes the power of in-group identity whereas English, or some approximation of it, is associated with mainstream power and social privilege, upward mobility, and education.” Escure links this practice to gender and asserts that “women are more likely to use standard or prestige forms, and to upgrade their speech patterns in formal situations

than men of the same age, social class, and educational level" (1991, p. 595). Women are often initially judged, or at least believe that they are being judged, not by their accomplishments but by their appearance and speech. This perception is not limited to communities in which creole languages are spoken (Winkler, 1998).

Herzfeld (1997) asserts that only a generation before her study, when the majority of women were homemakers, women used fewer acrolectal forms than men. However, with their gains in educational accomplishments, economic success, and familial power, Limonese women have intensified their use of acrolectal features, exhibiting speech that includes the increased use of discourse markers. In addition, women are also more likely to borrow from and codeswitch to Spanish (the prestige variety of the wider-community) because they have experienced first-hand the interconnectedness of language and power (Winkler, 1998).

Discourse Markers and Gender in Limonese Creole

Schiffirin defines discourse markers "as sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk" (1987, p. 31). Discourse markers may include pause fillers, conjunctions, hedges, tag questions, affirmations, and place holders. She further asserts that they are best illustrated "by reference to speaker attitude and orientation" (1998, p. 362); for example, *you know* "pertains most to the organization of participation and involvement... [it is] an important means of displaying speaker attitude and subjective orientation toward what is being said and by whom" (p. 362). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) classify *you know* as a discourse particle which serves as a hedge and can "solicit sympathetic interpretation" (p. 183) as well as an attempt to "form a collectivity" with other speakers (2003, p. 185). LC *yu nuo* is a very frequently occurring discourse marker operating in this manner; however, it also serves as an affirmation in which a speaker can acknowledge another's claim or indicate shared knowledge.

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) support Schiffirin's view that discourse markers have more to do with person reference than grammar or meaning, as discourse markers "don't generally contribute to content as much as to positioning" (2003, p. 184), a statement that supports the debatable assertion that women's speech is lacking in authority and more tentative than men's. On the other hand, Cheshire asserts that discourse markers,

which she refers to as pragmatic particles, “function as positive politeness markers” as well as indicate that there “is common ground” between speakers (p. 487). Holmes (1984) points out that the greater focus on women and politeness strategies relates to the fact that women’s speech strategies are often affective in nature; they deal with the needs of the interlocutors which include maintaining positive and negative face (their own and that of their conversation partners, respectively). All of these issues come into play in Limón. Because the traditional roles of men and women have shifted in terms of who has education, employment, and power, the community provides a unique opportunity to study how features of language that have in other settings been markers of gender difference are used among Afro-Limonese. A further complicating factor is the presence of a second prestige language, Spanish.

Since the 1940s the number of Spanish-speaking Costa Ricans in the province has continued to rise, like the numbers of monolingual Spanish-speaking and bilingual Afro-Limonese (Herzfeld, 1997). Thus, the Creole is under assault by both Standard English and Spanish, both of which are taught in the government schools, heard in the media, and published in newspapers and books. Increased bilingualism has made possible the use of Spanish discourse markers in LC speech (Winkler, 1998). They are doubly prestigious in that they are discourse markers, and they are Spanish. Many markers (e.g., *bueno* ‘well’ and *verdad?* ‘right’) have also been borrowed into monolingual Limonese speech. Their integration is demonstrated by both the frequency of their use and their occurrence in the speech of the remaining monolingual LC speakers within the community (Winkler, 1998). Sadly, the number of monolingual LC speakers is diminishing with time as this group ages. Additionally, as access improves to once remote villages, they become increasingly open to contact with the wider community and Spanish-language school systems. Thus, in the future it will become increasingly difficult to contend that features are borrowed rather than codeswitched. However, in the present study, the choice and use of Spanish discourse markers, whether as codeswitching or loans, indicates their prestige value in a particular discourse.

Discourse markers from both LC and Spanish are replete throughout LC conversations. Winkler (1998) shows that discourse markers are frequently borrowed from Spanish into LC; in fact, they were the most borrowed word class. In the 1998 corpus, they made up almost 50% of the words borrowed

into LC. This is not particularly astonishing because discourse markers are syntactically independent and cause few problems for grammar: they generally appear at phrase boundaries where syntactic requirements are limited. They are also easily acquired "because of their discourse prominence" (Myers-Scotton, 1992, p.36). The following example, spoken by a middle-aged urban female, shows that the Spanish marker *bueno* (well) serves as a pause filler.

Ex. 3: Nutin da matter wit becausin your sista is ah, bueno, er faada is a white native man, dat duon mean to se dat she cannot speak English.

Note that the two sections of LC speech can grammatically stand on their own; the connector does not interfere with the anticipated grammatical forms of either clause.

Men and women do, however, differ in their borrowing. Men borrow discourse markers less frequently than women; they constitute only 22% of men's borrowings but 49% of women's (Winkler, 1998). This appears to have changed little in recent years. With the addition of the new 2008 corpus, men not only use discourse markers less frequently than women, but they borrow fewer Spanish tokens of all sorts.

Although it is clear that the difference in language use by gender is an product of the performance of gender roles and not simply biological sex, making deeper claims about how people are "doing gender" is not possible at this juncture as "gender is constructed in a complex array of social practices within communities, practices that in many cases connect to personal attributes and to power relations but that do so in varied, subtle, and changing ways" (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992, p. 484). However, it is clear that men perform one way in conversations with other men where they are expected to be "one of the boys." Their speech reflects a casual disregard for social "niceties" or any attendance to the needs of others (practices traditionally considered to be within the domain of women). Nevertheless, in their conversations with women, they are tentative and use features of language that Cameron would label as "affective" in nature. According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992, p. 469) "variables that women use more than men throughout the different strata of a community signal female identity in that community, and men who rarely use those variables thereby signal their male

identity." In this community people have very little freedom to step outside of the roles that they are expected to play according to their sex.

Methodology

The corpus used for this study comes from interviews and candid recordings made in 1997 for my dissertation and includes data from two subsequent research trips in 2005 and 2008. All of the interviews from the first two trips were recorded by either myself or a female native speaker of LC. Thus, there were only a few candid recordings of male-only groups and a limited number of conversations in which males dominated in terms of number or status. In fact, in the 1997 corpus, the quantity of male speech collected was only 30% of the corpus.

The intent of the 1997 data collection was to document morpho-syntactic changes in LC due to contact with Spanish; therefore, no attempt was made to elicit discourse markers; however, they occur quite naturally in most conversations. The data are naturalistic. Much of the data come from formal interviews in which people were asked to talk about their lives and the history of the community. Many recordings were also made during normal conversations with very tolerant neighbors and friends. Finally, there are completely candid conversations recorded in bus stops, marketplaces, bars, and at domino games in public venues.

The two goals of the 2008 trip were to increase the quantity of male speech and to record conversations where men clearly dominated discourse. The addition of the new corpus increases male speech to 41% of the total.² All transcriptions were performed or verified by a native LC speaker before being included in the total corpus, since as a nonnative speaker of the language the author will certainly miss important insights. A fair distribution of urban and rural speakers and varied levels of education characterize the combined corpus. There is also a balance of middle-aged and older speakers; younger speakers, those under 30, make up only 23% of the total.

² This figure will rise when the transcriptions are complete although I do not expect the additional corpus to deviate from what has already been transcribed.

The Data

This section will focus on a limited set of data. Four classes of discourse markers have been selected for analysis because they show some very interesting differences in use by gender: (i.) affirmations, (ii.) pause fillers and hedges, (iii.) tag questions, and (iv.) emphatic markers. For each, the discussion will be limited to several of the more frequently occurring markers.

Pause fillers and hedges

Five discourse markers are commonly used to fill pauses and to hedge assertions in LC discourse: *yu nuo*, *laik*, *se bueno*,³ its LC counterpart *well*, and *es que* (it's that). These markers are frequently used to hold the floor, as shown in Example 4 when a middle-aged female, is struggling to complete a thought:

Ex. 4: Dat's it! Dat's what we call, I say .. you'd say ... bueno, *ellos* (them)!⁴

In terms of usage, even though *well* is frequently uttered by both men and women, men use it more frequently. However, the borrowed Spanish prestige form, *bueno*, is more often used by women, an indicator of women's appropriation of the prestige variety. This is a pattern we will see throughout the data, as shown below in Table 1.

The expression *es que*, which is used in Example 5, is common in LC speech, especially among young people. It is also used by older members of the community, even those who are not fully bilingual and have few other loans from Spanish in their speech, as shown in Example 6:

Ex. 5: Es que, fa mi no difrence in to Black ar White bekaas to me da color... nobody is more dan... evribody is da siem bekaas Gad mek evribodi laik ow ee meks, so, duon matta di color.

Ex. 6: Wid da cow is cowbuai, es que yu av, wid da harsis yu av este (this) [...]

³ Although *bueno* can also be transcribed as *good* in English, there are no instances of *bueno* being used as an affirmation in this corpus.

⁴ Spanish code-switches will be identified in parentheses after each occurrence.

Grammatically, *es que* appears between two independent clauses. It contributes no additional content to either clause—nor does it mark a relationship between the two independent clauses. It is clearly used to fill a pause or, on occasion, to signal that an explanation will follow.

Although the number of uses of *es que* is not exceedingly frequent in the corpus, I heard it repeatedly in daily life. In fact, some older Black people in Limón refer to *eski people dem* (those “*es que* people”), who are other Blacks, usually students, who have gone off to the capital to study or work and have come back to Limón speaking more Spanish than LC. This group of individuals is said to say *es que* too frequently for their older relatives’ taste. Some older informants find this custom quite irritating, as noted in the following conversation I had with one of my neighbors:

- Ex. 7: E: Do you think you can keep Black culture alive without English?
 B: No, yu kyaan (neg) do witout English. Yu av to to keep wit English, yu kyaan do it wit Spanish. Tell about es que. An dat’s not English. Es que.
 E: I do hear people say “Es que I gotta go.”
 B: Dats wrong. I’m gwain now or so, but es que? No, no, no.
 E: A fi go now.
 B: Dats right. I av to go now. Es que, I think it’s wrong.

Another speaker, a middle-aged female, is also irritated by the use of *es que*, although for a different reason. Her negative reaction stems from the fact that many Spanish-speaking Costa Ricans call the creole *Mek-ay-tel-yu*. This expression, meaning *Let me tell you something* is oft heard when an adult corrects a child’s behavior or when any authority figure corrects someone of lower status. The conversation below makes clear that *es que* is very frequently used in Costa Rican Spanish, a fact that certainly contributes to the high rate of borrowing of this phrase into LC.

- Ex. 8: A: Oh yes, do yu agree to let dey call your language Mek-ay-tel yu?
 B: No bekaas dat nat a niem for a language, bekaas I speak Spanish, an I got dis what dey call a muletilla [Spanish filler word], I say, es que, es que. Dey won’t call Spanish es que. So why should dey call creole Mek-ay-tel yu, right?

Clearly the most frequent LC marker is *laik se*, which may be used to hold the speaker's place in conversation or to hedge a bit about an uncomfortable topic, not dissimilar to the use of *like* by teenagers in the USA, where *like* is frequently used to introduce or hedge statements (Siegel, 2002). In Example 9, the speaker is trying to get a young mixed-race girl to say whether she has close Black friends.

Ex. 9: An if yu go to a party, we *laik se* ders a Black, bueno, a skool paati, an laik se you're white, your companeros dem, your companions from school, an yu are *laik se* see a Black girl ar so, yu all speak, yu all togeda?

Ex. 10: Yeah. But I notice, laik se, di kids are not comin laik se trii, four years [. . .] dey duon spiik no no no English at all! An yu spiik to dem in English an dey ansa in Spanish.

In Example 10 the speaker appears to use the marker to approach what might be a sensitive topic while introducing an aspect of culture that had not been part of the conversation.

The marker *yu nuo* plays a dual role as a discourse marker in LC: it can be used both as a hedge or pause filler and an affirmation. Affirmations will be discussed in a later section. Some of the uses are quite obviously stimulated by the context; for example, *yu nuo* as a hedge comes up with market sellers when they are negotiating a price: "Des cost, yu nuo, seventy." It also appears when troublesome topics like race or politics are being discussed: "I duon laik to go in color question bekaas, yu nuo, it is deep, concerning ryes an stuff laik dat bekaas I'm young an dirty ras dem kyaan cover my needs." It may also be combined with *laik* to create a sort of super-hedge as in this example: "But yesterday I tell yu go an, yu nuo, laik study."

Marker	# (%)	
	Females	Males
bueno	6 (1%)	2 (1.5)
well	93 (15.7)	117 (44.3)
es que	18 (3)	4 (1.5)
laik se	244 (41.4)	3 (1.1)
yu nuo	228 (38.7)	138 (52.3)

Table 1: Pause fillers and hedges

Table 1 illustrates that men are less likely to use Spanish hedges or place holders than women. They do, however, make frequent use of LC *well* and *yu nuo* in conversations with women. In fact, there are very few examples of men using any kind of hedge to soften a statement or to keep the floor in male-dominant conversations. Women's overwhelming ownership of the marker *laik se* reflects a different discourse strategy. They may hedge their assertions rather than making overt statements of fact in conversations with both men and women. For men, on the other hand, one important aspect of masculinity in Limon is being assertive and sure of oneself. Hedging your assertions would lead to ridicule by other males.

Affirmations

A number of the borrowed discourse markers function as affirmations of a preceding assertion. These include *yu nuo*, *exactamente* (exactly), and *alrait*. As with the pause fillers and hedges, these lexemes are not syntactically linked to the rest of the sentence, thus, *exactamente* is easily borrowed from Spanish into LC. However, in my corpus there is not a single attestation of a male using this borrowed Spanish marker.

Ex. 11: M: Girl dem was dem wat build themselves to werk as a slave, ellos siempre (*they always*) all di taym dey been running dey be running, gitanos (*gypsies*)!

F: Exactamente. Ok dat was my granfader parents dat side. An by my maadas side now, mi granny her maada was da Canadian liedy dat kuom down to Nicaragua in dem taym when dey, remember when dem German an all dem people use to come Nicaragua?

The most interesting affirmation is *yu nuo*, which is the most frequently used discourse marker among both men and women. It is often used to assert the truth of some information: "He's my fren, yu nuo." Women's usage of *yu nuo* almost doubles the use of men which can be attributed to the fact that in LC speech, like in the speech of women in middle-class predominantly white Euro-American cultures (Cameron 1992), women use affirmations to signal shared beliefs or simply acknowledge agreement.

Marker	# (%)	
	females	males
yu nuo	167 (91.8)	94 (67.1)
exactamente	9 (4.9)	0 (0)
alrait/rait	6 (3.2)	46 (32.9)

Table 2: Affirmations

Emphatic markers: ya and ras

In my study on the effect of borrowing from Spanish on LC, *ya* was the most frequently borrowed word of any category, making up 25% of all the markers borrowed (Winkler, 1998). That *ya* is borrowed so frequently is not particularly surprising. Although it simply translates to *enough* or *finally*, there is a profound difference in meaning between the English and Spanish lexemes. *Ya* in Spanish carries with it an emotional aspect of frustration or sense of finality that is lacking in the corresponding LC lexemes. According to Butt and Benjamin (1994), "*Ya* also has idiomatic uses, particularly with the non-past tenses. It can indicate impatience, accumulated frustration, fulfilled expectations, resignation, certainty about the future or, in negative sentences, denial of something expected." This may be the one borrowing in LC that can be readily described on a certain level as need filling, since there is no corresponding LC lexeme that carries the same meaning and emotional content. From personal experience, I can attest that this is an attractive lexeme to borrow. It became so common in my own English that a Japanese student picked it up from me and began to use it in English. Note the sense of finality that *ya* gives to these statements:

Ex. 12: But, *ya* evribady big, work, an married.

Ex. 13: I use to do some werk, but *ya* I not doin it enymore, only fa ma family.

In the total corpus, 93.7% of the instances of *ya* are uttered by women. As a Spanish lexeme, it seems to be less attractive to LC males.

The Jamaican word *ras* is a recent import into LC, one integrated as reconnections with Jamaica have lead to renewed immigration and as the

popularity of Jamaican music and culture spread. I have no attestations of use by anyone over about forty years old and all 16 instances of its use were produced by men. I have not found reference to its use in other works on LC. In Example 14, a young man explains the situation of Blacks in Costa Rica:

Ex. 14: Yes but da one who feel muor di arson is di Black. Di Chinese duon mek as much complain about wats gwain on bekaas da Chinese economically an industrially set demself even in a position more strong. Indians dem Indian reservation, but da Négro, di Negro av nutin! Dey av lost, dem av lost de faam. Dem av lost dat economical survival skill. Dem av lost dem God, ras! Dis ting is laik, di Negro, it duon mek no sense, it meks us anymore a ras, bekaas dem come be laik a fool towards civilization in wich da pipl dem are so boasted about stuff.

Ras seems to serve as the all-purpose obscenity marker or emphatic. The frequent and public use of obscenity is certainly a marker of maleness in this culture. The excerpt included in Example 16 comes from a conversation that was recorded at a dominoes game. *Ras* appears in the speech of four of the five men at the table.

Ex. 15: *Juegame esa barra jueputa* ("Play me that tile," plus *obscenity*). I tel yu, yu fucka. I tel yu what to do, but yu duon tel me a ras. Abundancia, duon nuo *tu* (you) ras.

Tag questions

One of the most studied aspects of language and gender is how men and women use questions. Early research on the usage of questions by Lakoff (1975) viewed them as a part of the strategies women employ. The idea was that their submissive status in relation to men allowed them only indirect means of making assertions or criticisms: "instead of simply stating facts and opinions, women construct their propositions in a surface interrogative form, inviting someone else to confirm their validity" (Cameron 1992, p.17). Tag questions differ from yes/no or information questions in that they carry meaning beyond the basic question. Consider, for example, the difference in these two questions. You are coming to the party, aren't you? You aren't coming to the party, are you?

The use of tag questions, however, goes far beyond this simple usage and explanation. Studies by researchers such as Lakoff and Cameron show that men tend to use tags primarily to confirm information about which they are unsure; in fact, they use double the number of these tags as women. Lakoff called these legitimate tags. Women on the other hand, more frequently use tags for a variety of other discourse purposes, usage which Lakoff categorized as illegitimate tags. Holmes made a similar distinction, however, using less pejorative terms for the same phenomenon. She refers to what Lakoff calls legitimate tags as "speaker oriented, [which] serves to confirm information for the speaker" (Cameron, 1992, p. 17). This can be seen in Example 16, in which a speaker verifies a date:

Ex. 16: Six yier now, verdad? Six yiers, nineteen eighty-one.

Illegitimate tags have sometimes been thought of as 'hearer oriented.' This type of tag has not always been interpreted negatively, as done by Lakoff (1974). Holmes believes that these hearer-oriented tags should be seen as attending to the needs and the 'face' of the hearer, rather than expressing the speaker's tentativeness and lack of authority. In Example 17, the speaker is informing me about something I know nothing about; therefore, the tag cannot function as a request for my affirmation of information. By asking a question, the speaker encourages the listener to enter into the conversation.

Ex. 17: She's a hot numba. A person dats always at da 69s, verdad?

In Example 18, the speaker signals to the listener a shared experience, in this case the experience of being Black girls in a predominantly White school.

Ex. 18: But di oder one is dat when we go on di bus dey halways makin mock of us, no?

In these first examples, the tags used are borrowed from Spanish: *verdad?* (truly) and *no?* both of which appear sentence finally in LC and Spanish grammatical constructions. Although this use of *no* as a question looks like English, it can be determined to be Spanish from the intonational contour and the roundness of the vowel. As can be seen in Table 3 below, the Spanish tags are much more frequently used by women than men.

Tags may also be used to mitigate threats to face. The following tag question occurred when an older male responded to a particularly ignorant question I asked about the community:

Ex. 19: Yu duon nuo nutin much about Limon, no?

The most frequent native tag in LC is *rayt* (right). Other native tags, like *ok* and *understand* also occur, but so infrequently as to be statistically insignificant. In the following example, the speaker uses *rayt* in showing that he is tentative about the claim being made:

Ex. 20: Dey duon laik to help Limon bekaas of Black pipl being der, rayt?

Marker	# (%)	
	females	males
rayt?	62 (76.5)	16 (76.1)
no?	9 (11.1)	4 (5.25)
verdad?	10 (12.3)	1 (4.7)

Table 3: Tag Questions

An item-by-item analysis of what the tags are used for provides some interesting results. First, tags are more likely to be used by women than men, and women are more likely to use the Spanish tags than men. In addition, differences in usage depend on the function for which function a tag is used. For example, men were most likely to use tags to mitigate threats to face, but only when they were speaking with women. Data do not reveal even a single instance of a man doing this with another man, as the rules of male comradeship appear not to include soft-soaping one another in this way. Men do use tags to soften assertions in conversations, and are more likely to do so with women than other men. This pattern may have something to do with the fact that women often hold the purse strings. In male-only groups, tags (all sorts) very rarely appeared. Men did not use tags to encourage the participation of others; while Limonese women do, they do less frequently than women in the other studies mentioned. This seems to have something to do with the expectation that in everyday casual conversations, good speakers fend for themselves.

Conclusion

For every discourse marker that was switched from Spanish, women dominated in its usage. According to Cameron (1992), women tend to be more concerned with the production of prestige forms, thus, they are more likely to borrow from or switch to Spanish. The use of a more 'pure' LC by men, on the other hand, may be an example of what is termed *covert prestige* (Trudgill, 1983). Although LC may be viewed as less prestigious than Spanish or Standard varieties of English by the wider Costa Rican community and many Limonese as well, this "purer variety" serves as a marker of ethnic identity and social bonding for males.⁵

The range of native discourse markers available to women is also broader than those used by men. The most basilectal varieties of LC speech for males and females offer few examples of most of these markers. These markers are more likely to be present in the speech of women who have gone beyond elementary education. In general, women use discourse markers most frequently to encourage the participation of others, to hedge an assertion, and to signal a shared belief. They use tag questions to affirm information as well. They do this in conversations with both men and women.

Men, on the other hand, vary in their usage depending on whether they are speaking to women or men. When speaking with women, they only rarely use a tag question to confirm information and were more likely to use them for what Cameron refers to as affective reasons—especially when speaking with women. Male speakers of LC do so much more so than the men in either Lakoff's or Cameron's studies. Nevertheless, in male-dominant conversations, when they appear to be on an equal footing with other conversation participants, the rules change. Apparently men neither perceive much need to provide space or comfort to male speakers nor to hedge their assertions and use fillers to hold the floor.

Females in the community have made important advances in power relationships that have contributed to a shift in their speech patterns. According to Herzfeld,

⁵ This is not a reflection of less competence in Spanish. In the vast majority of cases, I had the opportunity to observe male speakers using Spanish with monolingual Spanish speakers. Only a few of the very oldest males and females did not have communicative competence in Spanish. The men simply saw little need to use it.

In Limón, women's speech has never been powerless, but lately it has gained more power for various reasons: a) as educational and occupational opportunities expand, women are more and more in control of their own finances rather than being dependent on their men; b) in interaction with other adults, women's speech is characterized by wit and smartness, a show of unadulterated strength. (1997, p. 1)

Future research should look at these same women and their use of discourse markers in their Spanish language conversations with non-Creole males. This may provide some interesting results on how women "do gender" with a group of males for whom the traditional gender roles are still in place. Research in this and other Creole communities may well provide us with a different perspective on usage of discourse markers as well as open up avenues for research relating to language use differences linked to relationships among gender, culture, and power.

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