

## Language ideology in Mexico: The case of *fresa* style in Mexican Spanish<sup>1</sup>

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### 1. Introduction

One of the modern stereotypes in Mexican society is the one of the group known as *fresas* (lit. ‘strawberries’). This group has been perceived as privileged Mexican youth, who have an expensive lifestyle, behave pretentiously and who speak Mexican Spanish very distinctively (Córdova Abundis & Corona Zenil, 2002). Despite the stigmatization the group and its linguistic style have developed in Mexico, the study of *fresas* and the specific linguistic features associated with them has recently begun (Holguín-Mendoza, 2011). The objective of this paper is to describe the linguistic characteristics that Mexicans associate with the *fresa* style, and observe the attitudes towards it, especially to the use of English. Specifically, I will argue that part of the negative attitudes towards *fresa* style in Mexican Spanish come from the implicit and explicit perception of the influence of English and its relation to language ideologies about Spanish in Mexico. In order to do this, I will present a qualitative analysis of the linguistic features Mexicans ascribe to the *fresa* style through their *discussions* and *performances* on the World Wide Web, and of the reactions that the style produces.

The data analyzed in this paper come from a systematic search in the World Wide Web, following work in virtual ethnography (Herring, 2004; Hine, 2000). Two queries in

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Google Mexico were carried out: *los fresas* ('the (pl.) strawberries') and *cómo hablan los fresas* ('how do strawberries speak'). The first search (April 1, 2013) had the objective of providing a general description of the online landscape of the topic and to obtain information about the perception of the group in general. I analyzed the first 50 results of this first search. I categorized the different emerging themes of the description of *fresas* on main blog entries (excluding the comments), entire wikis, or answers from Q&A forums. I excluded comments that were not written by Mexicans (if acknowledged by the person him/herself). In this paper, I will present the results of this query only in regards to the linguistic features described as being part of the style. The second search (April 8, 2013) had the purpose to narrow down results to just descriptions of the linguistic style associated with *fresas*. 14 webpages were selected based on their direct relation to language (i.e., results that would not address this directly were not taken into account). Thus, for the textual analysis I include data taken from the first and the second query. From these two sets of data, all of the content in relation to speech was extracted and categorized in a spreadsheet according to different linguistic levels. Comments showing people's attitudes toward the style were also separated.

For the analysis of performances of the style, two videos taken from the results of the second query, and one video from a separate search were examined. These three videos were ideal to analyze because out-group members perform both the *fresa* style and a contrasting one (i.e., their own personal/natural style). For this analysis, I take videos where *fresa* style is imitated in order to be able to make a comparison between the performances of the *fresa* and a non-*fresa* style in a single speaker. Audio from the video data was analyzed in Praat (Boersma, & Weenink, 2014).

## 2. Linguistic features discussed on webpages

Before discussing the specific results in regards to the linguistic features that people perceive as being part of the style, I will briefly describe the online environment from which all the comments come from. First, the most common formats used to discuss the group are blogs and forums. These two formats include varying information, from specific questions about the group (e.g., *¿Como son los fresas necesito saber?*<sup>2</sup> - Yahoo! México Respuestas 'How are fresas? - I need to know - Yahoo! Mexico Answers') to blogs discussing what they hate about *fresas*. *Fresas* also have an entry in *Friklopedia*, *Wikipedia* and *Incliclopedia*, where a variety of characteristics are included. As far as videos, three of the five results were about *fresas* explained as an "urban tribe" (a group of young individuals that behave similarly), describing their core characteristics and presenting some imitations; another video was music directed to *fresas* and the last video is called *Los fresas también bailan* 'Fresas also dance', which presumably takes on the semantics of a famous Mexican soap opera from the late 70's titled *Los ricos también lloran* 'Rich (people) also cry.' In general, there seems to be an interest in who the *fresas* are, as they are the main topic of pages dedicated to give information or discuss them. On the other hand, some pages used the topic as a prompt for humor. For example, several webpages reproduce almost the exact same list of phrases that are supposedly used by *fresas*.

*Fresas'* linguistic style was one of the three top topics arising among all webpages, besides their opposition to *nacos*, and social class. It is perceived as one core feature that

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<sup>2</sup> All webpages titles and citations are transcribed using the original orthography.

would make a person categorize someone as *fresa*. One person even states that even though *fresas* might have to *salir de su burbuja* ‘go out of their bubble’ their language style, like *tono un tanto agudo y lo rápido que pueden hablar* ‘a somewhat high pitch and how fast they can talk,’ will denounce them as *fresas*.

Table 1. Summary of linguistic features ascribed to *fresa* style by out-group members on webpages.

Category	Example
Use of <i>English</i> words.	<i>o sea, hello!</i> ‘I mean, hello,’ <i>está cool</i> ‘It’s cool.’
Phonetic variation in: -Vowels.  -/s/.  -Intonation.  -Reduction of certain words.	<i>Las vocales suelen alargarse más de lo necesario, especialmente al final de cada frase (fraseeeeeeee), ‘Vowels tend to get lengthened more than necessary, specially at the end of each phrase (phraaaaaaaase).’</i> <i>Las letras S y Z así como la C en ce y ci suelen darles una especial dificultad y parecen ‘arrastrarlas’, ‘They tend to put special difficulty and seem to ‘drag’ the letters S and Z as well as C in ce and ci.’</i> <i>Toda frase se emite con tono de interrogación, ‘All phrase is emitted with interrogation tone.’</i> <i>Güey /wej/ ‘dude’ pronounced as [we].</i> <i>O sea /osea/ ‘I mean’ pronounced as [sa].</i>
Frequent use of certain phrases/prefabs.	<i>No manches wey</i> ‘come on dude.’
Use of specific <i>lexicon</i> , such as: -Excessive use of certain discourse markers. -Naming of products by the brand. -Use of vocative <i>güey</i> at the end of phrases.	<i>O sea</i> ‘I mean’ or others such as <i>tipo de que, así como</i> , ‘be like.’ <i>Liquid Paper</i> instead of <i>corrector</i> . <i>Oseaa nada que ver weee!</i> , ‘I mean, not at all, dude.’
Use of <i>interjections</i> .	<i>Oh, ash, oh my.</i>
Specific conversational topics.	<i>De cosas superficiales y sin sentido. De cosas materiales y sin importancia</i> , ‘Of superficial things and nonsense. Of materialistic things without importance.’
Use of <i>affixes</i> such as: -Diminutives. -Intensifiers.	<i>Besitos</i> ‘little kisses.’ <i>Super, mini.</i>

One of the most representative words for the style is the discourse marker *o sea* ‘I mean,’ which somebody actually takes as a *muestra de cultura pop* ‘an index of pop culture.’ *Fresas* are also perceived as always ending their clauses with a reduced version of the vocative *güey* ‘dude.’ They are described as if they were speaking with *una papa*

*caliente en la boca* ‘a hot potato in their mouths’<sup>3</sup>, which seems to refer to some form of phonetic variation:

*La pronunciación para esta raza es muy importante. Actualmente para hablar con uno de ellos se debe hacer mientras se como [sic] una papa, aunque con un poco de práctica se puede hablar con mucha fluidez. Los fresas light hablan muy parecido a lo normal pero un acento agudo o una variación en su habla los identifica.*

‘Pronunciation to this race is important. Nowadays, to speak like one of them, it is necessary to do it while eating a potato, although with a little bit of practice you can speak more fluently. Light fresas speak very similarly to normal but with a high pitch or a variation in their speech that identifies them.’

(*Fresa (tribu urbana)* - *La Frikipedia*, ‘Fresa (urban tribe) – The frikipedia.’)

From this excerpt, we can say that there is perceived variation within the style (and that being *fresa* is a matter of degree, of course). It is commonplace to say that *fresas* have a different and ‘arrogant’ accent, which indexes socioeconomic position (the second top topic). Also, intonation or lengthening of the last syllable of intonation units is commented. Likewise, it is interesting to see that, on the one hand, the style is perceived as using ‘proper’ vocabulary by avoiding ‘Mexican slang,’ and on the other, as improper because of its constant use of English. When we look at the lists of phrases I previously mentioned as being used to mock the group, we notice immediately that English is perceived as a very common feature. Out-group members who call this practice *Spanglish* or *Espanglés* see it as a deviation of proper Spanish and do not take it positively. In fact, among all of the linguistic characteristics associated with the style, the use of nonce borrowings from English was the most common one. This is very well attested as it is even used when describing the group. As someone says, *su vida es "friends", "scool", "party y money, "shopping" y "GLAMOUR"*, ‘their life is “friends”, “school”, “party and money”, “shopping” and “GLAMOUR”.’

Table 1 summarizes the linguistic features linked to *fresa* style found on the webpages, providing some examples. They are listed from the most frequent category to the least frequent one. The first four categories are by far the most frequently noticed. The rest are also found in the data but not as frequently by any means.

### 3. Linguistic features performed in videos

In this section, I present the analysis of three videos where a single person (or voice) performs a *fresa* and a non-*fresa*. The first video belongs to a series of cartoon videos called *Naco y Fresa*, roughly translated as ‘Redneck and Preppy’. As mentioned earlier, the topic that most frequently surfaced in the webpages was the opposition of *fresas* to the category of *nacos*. According to Moreno de Alba (2001: 42) the noun or adjective *naco* comes from the Portuguese ‘coward, fool’. However, the dictionary of Mexican Spanish (Diccionario del Español de México) provides three different definitions: 1) that (it/he) is indian or indigenous from Mexico, 2) that (it/he) is ignorant and dumb, that lacks education, and 3) that (it/he) has bad taste or no class. According to the humorous wiki Inliclopedia, *fresa es el enemigo y contraevolución natural del naco* ‘*fresa* is the enemy

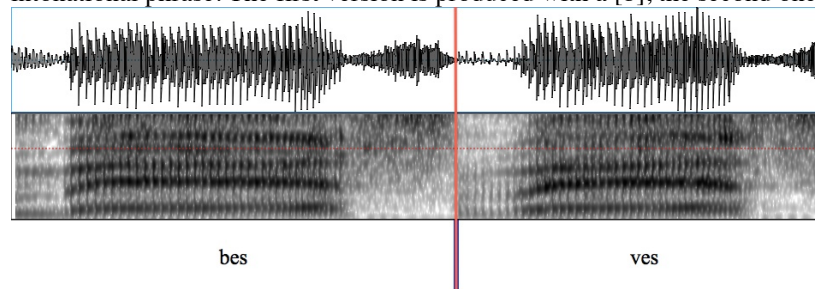
<sup>3</sup> All quotation marks used in the paper are direct translations of Spanish citations.

and natural counter-evolution of the *naco*.’ The title of the video analyzed is *El i-pos* ‘The i-pos,’ which makes reference to the stereotype of the *naco* in Mexico: 1) Not being familiar with high technology (presumably because of lack of economic resources), 2) Not pronouncing word final [ð], and in this case substituted by an [s], making the word resemble a reduced version of the discourse marker *pues* ‘well,’ typically associated with lower class. In the video, the two (cartoon) characters talk about an i-Pod. While the *fresa* character comments how he got rid of his old i-Pod by throwing it into the trash, the *naco* character explains how he found in the trash an artifact which he calls *i-Pos enano* ‘I-pod dwarf.’

In the video, we hear different features used by the *fresa* compared to the *naco* character. For one, the *fresa* frequently uses lexicon such as the discourse marker *o sea* and the tag question *ves* ‘see,’ while the *naco* never uses them. Or, in the opposite direction, the *fresa* never uses the discourse markers *pues* ‘well’ or *entonces* ‘so,’ nor the Mexican colloquial use of *bien* ‘well’ instead of *muy* ‘very’ in the phrase *bien bonito* ‘very pretty’ or the word *chido* ‘cool,’ as the *naco* does. As far as phonetic characteristics, the *fresa* reduces his articulation in a way that either completely deletes entire phones or just blends segments. This observation comes from a comparison between the phone segmentation of both *fresa* and *naco* speech. While the *naco* also presents reduction in his speech, a phenomenon common to natural speech, the *fresa* does it more often, for instance in the words appearing in the same intonational phrase *basura inmediatamente* /basuraj̃nmeðiatamente/ ‘trash immediately’ are pronounced as [basurenm̃eatamente]. Deletion seems to especially affect the approximants [β, ð, ɣ]. Although lenition of /b, d, g/ is well attested in Spanish (and that is how, in the first place, the language gained the approximants, Penny, 2002), the *fresa* style compared to the *naco* seems to be leading in the full deletion of the voiced stops produced as approximants between vowels. This is certainly a topic for further analysis, specially considering that this might be what people has been describing as the ‘hot potato in the mouth’: a lack of closure of the mouth (as when you are eating something hot) in expected instances (i.e., when producing stops). Other phonetic differences are the use of glottal stops (e.g., /iosea/ ‘and I mean’ as [iʔosea]) and creaky voice (e.g., in the phrase *qué oso* ‘how embarrassing.’) Another characteristic is the production of /sC-/ onsets at the beginning of the word by the *fresa*, as in *está* ‘it is’ as [sta], which are not typical of Spanish phonotactics (Hualde, 2005). Although Lipski (1990) mentions that Mexico is one of the few countries in which vowel deletion might occur in the context of /s/, we might wonder up to what point its use in *fresa* style could be related to the influence of English. As it was accounted before in the previous section, the “indiscriminate” use of English in the style was the top one feature associated with it (as shown in Table 1). In this video, English is used for example, in words as *fashion*, *Mickey* (actually referring to the Mexican singer *Luis Miguel*) or the phrase *that’s so yesterday*.

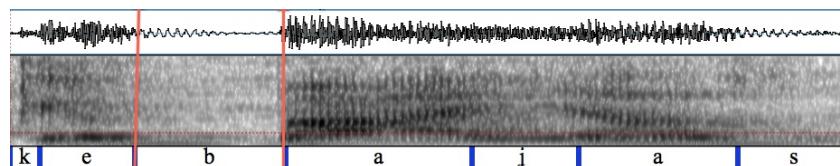
Then the question is, do out-group members implicitly perceive an influence of English at the phonetic level? It turns out that in this and in the following video there are other segmental features that point to the influence of English. In this video, for example, in one of the versions of the question tag *ves*, the word is pronounced using a [v], an non-existent phoneme, at least in Mexican Spanish (see Torres Cacoullos & Ferreira, 2000), instead of a [b], as shown in the second part of Figure 1.

Figure 1. These are two versions of the word *ves* [bes] ‘see’ produced as a single intonational phrase. The first version is produced with a [b], the second one with a [v].



The next video is titled *Frases de fresas* ‘Phrases of *fresas*.’ This one was specifically searched to be comparable to the other two (i.e., two videos came up in the second search query, this one was searched directly in Youtube). This video is part of a series of video-blogs and thus this one is dedicated to how *fresas* talk. The author states that being *fresa* is a lifestyle and performs three types of imitation to mock not only *fresa* style but also how people inaccurately describe it. He mentions the “potato in the mouth” description, and that is his first imitation. The second one is based on how he thinks they sound, as if they were holding a pencil in their mouths while speaking (notice again that it also has to do with jaw closure). The final imitation is the one the performer considers the actual way *fresas* sound and construes it in regards to lexical items (i.e., he performs a phonetic imitation as he uses the words/phrases *fresas* frequently use). Among these lexical items, the author mentions *güey*, *o sea*, *tipo de que*, *Spanglish*, and, evidently as said in the title, the frequent phrases. Regarding phonetic features, this performance shows some of the same characteristics imitated in the first video. There is reduction in general, specially in words such as *o sea* and *güey*, which is also commented in the websites. Also, we find weakening (or complete deletion) again of some approximants. However, the opposite also occurs. In some instances, approximants become full stops, as shown in Figure 2. This could be what someone on a webpage described as *una forma de hablar donde se hace mucho incapié al pronunciar las palabras*, ‘a way of speaking where pronunciation of words is stressed.’ That is, certain segments are fortitioned, yielding different allophones (e.g., [b] instead of [β]) or longer durations (e.g., elongation of /s/, which is mentioned and performed.)

Figure 2. This is the clause *que vayas* ‘that you go (2SG.SUBJV)’ pronounced with a full closure as [ke.ba.jas] instead of the expected approximant [ke.βa.jas] based on the phonological context.



Finally, we also find evidence of the influence of English at the phonetic level. Here is another clear example of a cluster /sC-/ at the beginning of a word and intonational phrase, as shown in Figure 3. However, the most surprising feature is the production of an approximant [ɭ] at the end of the word *confesar* ‘to confess,’ as shown in Figure 4. Based

on these examples, we can infer that although people do not seem to either believe or be explicitly aware of the style being influenced by English at a phonetic level (i.e., that is never explicitly mentioned on the websites), they do appear to perceive it implicitly as they produce it in their performances.

Figure 3. /sC-/ onset at the beginning of the word and of the intonational phrase *es que* [es.ke] ‘it’s just that.’

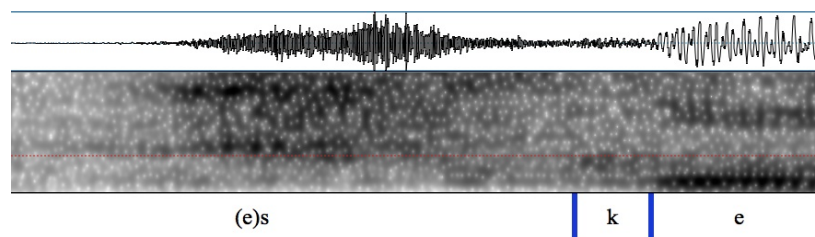
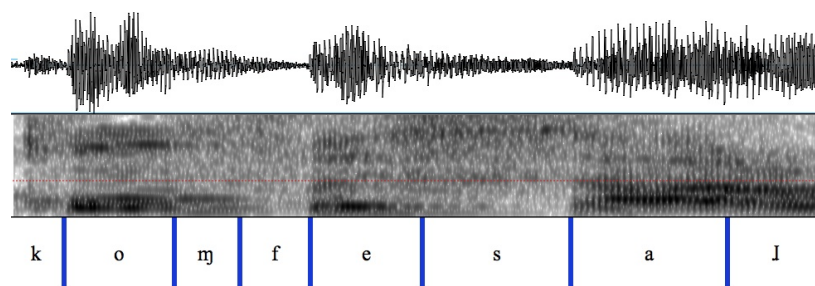


Figure 4. A [ɭ] is produced instead of [r] at the end of the word *confesar* ‘to confess.’



The last video is also part of a series of video blogs that cover different topics and derived as one of the results of the second query. The title of this video is *Niñas fresas* ‘Strawberry girls.’ The presenter mostly describes the group and then in a short performance plays two roles, the *fresa* and the non-*fresa*. In this conversation played by the same person, again the discourse markers *o sea* and *tipo que* appear, as well as affixes in the words *hola* > *Holis* ‘hello,’ *amiga* > *amiguix* ‘friend,’ and *mega* in the phrase *te mega cuidas* ‘take very well of yourself.’ Also, there is a reference to the use of English by *fresas* by using the discourse marker *you know*. At the phonetic level again, reduction of segments, specially approximants, such as in *me acaba de* /meakaβaðe/ pronounced as [meaka:e] ‘(he) just’ occur in the speech by the *fresa*. The short performance ends with the non *fresa* thinking *ay, pinche tipa fresa, ¿no sabe hablar o qué pedo?* ‘ah, fucking *fresa* girl, doesn’t she know how to speak or what the fuck?’ Indeed, this reaction to the style is not an exception but quite a common one. The next section examines the attitudes surrounding the style.

#### 4. Attitudes towards the style and the use of English

Before we look directly at the attitudes towards the style, let us point to the feelings towards the group *fresas* in general. Reactions (especially negative) towards the group are actually found in several webpages as merely comments or as the actual approach to the topic. For instance, five of the twelve forums ask questions about stances toward the group

(e.g., *Porque mucha gente odia a los fresas?* - Yahoo! México Respuestas 'Why do a lot of people hate *fresas*?'). Actually, the only reference found in social media to *fresas* was a Facebook page named *A mi tambien me caen mal los fresas :@!!* 'I dislike *fresas* as well.' This piece of information is important, as we know that attitudes towards the style might be based on the feelings the group creates in general.

The style is described as 'weird,' 'fake,' 'exasperating,' 'ridiculous,' 'stupid,' and 'arrogant.' People who use the style are seen as incapable of having an *original* personality. In some of the Yahoo Q & A, people wonder where this way of speaking comes from: 'is it just something that is in style? What is the reason people speak like that?' Mexicans rationalize it as *fresas* doing it as a way to get noticed by others and to index upper social class. In general, the style seems to cause feelings of exasperation among out-group members even to the point of aggression:

*Los Fresas emplean frases muy estúpidas o palabras que repiten cada tres oraciones tales como: Osea we, tipo de que, like, not like, Ay osea no mames we, etc. El escuchar estas palabras provenir de los Fresas hacen que me encabrone por varias razones: me desespera, me caga, me harta, hacen que me quiera dar un tiro en los huevos (eso seria mejor q oírlos decir tanta mierda). ¿Que no pueden hablar como una pinche persona normal o que pedo?*

'Fresas use very stupid phrases or words that repeat every three sentences such as: osea we, tipo de que, like, not like, ay osea no mames we, etc. When I hear these words coming from the fresas, I get pissed off for various reasons: it gets on my nerves, it annoys me, it feds me up, it makes me feel like shooting myself in my balls (that would be better than listen to them saying so much shit). Can't they talk like a fucking normal person or what the fuck?'

(*10 cosas que odio de los "Fresas"*, 'Ten things I hate about "fresas"')

Furthermore, in the overall analysis of the webpages, we find that *fresas* are seen as consumers of American cultural artifacts through material possessions (e.g., gadgets, clothes, music, etc.) and in their linguistic performance, as we saw in the preceding sections. How do Mexicans react to this accommodating behavior to American culture? People call *fresas* use of English *Espanglés* or *Spanglish* and it is seen as something 'stupid' and as a deficit in speech production. For instance, at the entry for *fresa* at the wiki *Inciclopedia*, we find a clear rejection towards the use of English in the description of a day in the life of a *fresa*:

*Para su desayuno es indispenable su "oranch llus" (orange juice ¿Es tan difícil decir "jugo de naranja"?). Al finalizar se despiden de sus "papis" de la siguiente forma: "Bye daddy, bye mami. Besos". Creen que son las mas "Nice" o las más "Cool" de la escuela [...] Al salir suelen ir de "chopin" (shopping .Si saben inglés ¿por qué no lo dicen bien?) [...] todo el tiempo tratan de usar palabras en inglés solo para que se escuche cool, aunque no las sepan pronunciar. [...] Y aunque los muy Pendejo procuran evitar ser nacos, hablan Spanglish ¡PERO QUE IDIOTAS SE OYEN HABLANDO 2 IDIOMAS A LA VEZ!*

"Oranch llus" is indispensable for their breakfast (orange juice, is it so hard to say "jugo de naranja"?). At the end, they say goodbye in the following way: **bye daddy**,



bye mommy. Kisses”. They think they are the “**nicest**” or the “**coolest**” at school [...] when they go out they tend to go “**chopin**” (**shopping**. If they know English, why don’t they say it right?) [...] they try all the time to use words in English just to sound **cool**, even if they don’t know how to pronounce them [...] And even though these assholes avoid to be *nacos*, they speak **Spanglish**, BUT HOW STUPID THEY SOUND SPEAKING 2 LANGUAGES AT THE SAME TIME!

(*Fresa (México)* - *Inciclopedia, la enciclopedia libre de contenido*. ‘Fresa (Mexico) – Inciclopedia, the encyclopedia free of content.’ Bold added)

This comment is interesting in that people would probably not expect *nacos* to even know English because of their supposed lack of education (as shown in the first video, for example). Thus, this talks more about the language ideology of keeping Spanish pure. In other words, for these Mexicans, it does not matter that you speak a prestigious language (i.e., English); you will still be perceived as “ignorant” if you mix it with Spanish. These visceral reactions towards the influence of English fit the results of other studies concerning explicit language ideologies in Mexico. For instance, Moreno de Alba (2003) in his survey to Mexicans found that 84% believed that Spanish is an important part of national identity, and that 68% held that Spanish should be defended from Anglicism. Also, Hidalgo (1983) and Holguín-Mendoza (2011) found through interviews and an ethnographic study of different social networks, respectively, that at the Mexican/U.S. border (specifically Juárez) many people reject code-switching and the use of nonce borrowings of English as they “violate Mexican traditional identity.” The present study shows that the negative feelings towards the influence of English in Spanish is not exclusive of border cities where identities are contested but applies to a national level. Likewise, it can be argued that the negative reactions towards *fresa* style in part come from this rejection of a global mainstream and imperialism indexed by the use of English. Moreover, the reactions found in this study are surprisingly similar to those seen in Moore (2011) in regards to the D4 accent in Irish English. The author finds that some perceive the D4 style as an imitation of American English, sounding fake, irritating to the ears, and as a threat to the regional dialects.

## 5. Conclusions

In this paper I have reviewed the results of a virtual ethnographic study on the group of *fresas* in Mexico. Specifically, the linguistic features associated with the group discussed and performed on webpages and videos by out-group members, as well as the reactions that the style provokes among Mexicans were examined. The study intends to highlight that *fresas* are not only perceived as being influenced by American culture in the type of life they have but also in their language style. The impact of English in the style is notorious not only by Mexicans detecting nonce borrowing but by phonetic characteristics displayed in performances of the style by out-group members. In this paper, it is argued that the negative attitudes towards the “invasion” of English in Spanish at the Mexican border found in other studies also apply at a national level and is indeed one of the reasons that the *fresa* style is rejected by many.

Finally, it is interesting to see that while some American English native speakers are afraid of Spanish coming to the U.S., (see Wolford & Carter 2012), others in the rest of the world might actually be fearful of English coming to their own language through the embrace of a global mainstream. At the end, as Kiesling (1998:70) put it: “while cultural models are *general* sources from which speakers piece together identities, speakers put

these pieces to use at the *local* level of discourse within a community of practice”. These pieces seem to go cross languages and ignore geographical distances, setting future studies of style and language contact in a different perspective.

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