

and how the language may be changing.

His subjects—40 in all for the pilot study—reflect the city’s demographics. They hail from Caribbean countries, including the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and several countries in mainland Latin America, such as Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico. Together these represent the six largest national groups of Boston Spanish speakers, and their time in the city ranges from a few months

need are all at the microlinguistic level.”

The data will come from his analysis of the structure of their speech—how they order their words and what words they use—and its acoustic properties.

Erker worked on similar research at NYU, where he and a team of linguists studied hundreds of hours of speech from more than 200 Spanish speakers—from places like Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Ecu-

contact with English, a word that already exists with one meaning takes on another, different meaning.”

The team also noted more subtle changes. “In English, if I say, ‘I sing,’ I can’t leave out the word ‘I,’” Erker explains. “In Spanish, you can say, ‘Yo canto’ or ‘Canto,’ and the message of both is still ‘I sing.’ The pronoun is optional from the perspective of the syntax. What one might expect is that if English is influencing Spanish, the bilinguals who grow up in New York City will use more of the optional pronouns while speaking Spanish than, say, their grandparents.” And that, he says, is precisely what they found.

The differences are statistically significant, according to Erker, “so much so that we

may just be witnessing the emergence of a new variety of the language, a so-called ‘New York Spanish,’ with its own vocabulary and grammar.”

His pilot study in Boston, which he expects will take six months, may reveal similar trends. “But,” he says, “because of the different populations that are present, they will take different shapes.”

The results will be important not just to the science of linguistics, Erker says, but as a practical matter. Spanish is the most rapidly growing language in the United States in terms of number of speakers, with 150 million by 2050, he says, “so I think that something that linguists can do is help understand how that population uses Spanish. It’s a crucial part of our national identity.”

We may be witnessing the emergence of a new variety of Spanish, a “New York Spanish.”

to an entire lifetime.

Erker interviews subjects in his lab at 718 Commonwealth Ave. and records them talking about a range of subjects: where they grew up, how long they’ve lived here, whether they watch TV in Spanish or English, whether they speak Spanish to their kids, their friends, and their boss.

While the details of their answers are important, they aren’t the primary focus of the study.

“We certainly care to the extent that it helps us understand who they are,” Erker says. “But honestly, if I talk for an hour with someone about baseball, it’s fine, because the data I

dor, and Colombia.

They found that while the Spanish spoken in New York is still much like that spoken in Latin America, there are emerging differences. In some cases, they could track the obvious influences of English on the Spanish language. For example, the Spanish word for “rug” or “carpet” in most of the Spanish-speaking world is *alfombra*. But among many New York City Spanish speakers, the preferred word for rug is *carpeta*.

“However, normative Spanish *has* the word *carpeta*,” Erker says, “but it means folder. What you find is that in varieties of Spanish that are under heavy



Rethinking Red Wine

STUDY LINKS EVEN MODERATE DRINKING TO CANCER RISK

BY RICH BARLOW

For years, we’ve been reading about studies suggesting that drinking red wine in moderation is good for us. Now comes a less agreeable verdict, written by Timothy Naimi, a School of Medicine and School of Public Health associate professor, and others, and published in the *American Journal of Public Health*. The authors attribute 6,000 American deaths annually to cancer from moderate drinking, which they define as a drink and a half a day or less. Add in alcohol consumption at all levels and the total surges to 20,000 cancer deaths a year, or 3.5 percent of all cancer deaths in the country.

The researchers reached their conclusion by analyzing risk estimates from hundreds of other studies. Studies linking alcohol to cancer are based on calculations using three types of data: the numbers of people who drink at different

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levels, the prevalence of various cancers at those various drinking levels, and the number of cancer deaths among people at each level. The American Cancer Society lays out the cancers that have the strongest evidence of an alcohol link, while adding that the precise mechanism for how drinking leads to the disease is not certain. For men, lethal alcohol-caused cancer typically afflicts the mouth, throat, and esophagus, the researchers say. In women, breast cancer is the most common cancer killer linked to alcohol consumption.

Evidence of excessive drinking's role in cancer is much greater than that for the role of modest drinking, says Naimi, an alcohol epidemiologist specializing in binge and youth drinking and alcohol policy. The idea that limited drinking causes cancer "should be interpreted with caution," he says. "I have nothing against alcohol. My background is as a physician, and my interest is in seeing harm from alcohol minimized."

But some doctors say the findings about moderate drinking need to be taken seriously, and Naimi argues that deaths from alcohol "dwarf any small number of people who may derive benefit from low-dose alcohol." Among all people who start drinking, he says, 5 to 10 times as many die from it as are benefited by it.

Nor is he convinced by studies showing heart benefits from moderate drinking. For one thing, he says, those studies have never included the accepted standard in scientific research: a randomized, controlled study comparing moderate drinkers with teetotalers. Also, moderate drinkers tend to come from higher on the socioeconomic ladder, a rung where people tend to be healthier. In other words, moderate drinking may be "a reflection of people's social position and good health."

Peter Blake, a CAS assistant professor of psychology, says that by age eight, most children know and follow cultural norms of sharing.



CYDNEY SCOTT (2)

“I Should but I Won’t”

YOUNG CHILDREN KNOW WHAT'S FAIR, BUT DON'T ALWAYS CARE

BY LESLIE FRIDAY

PARENTS KNOW WHAT A POTENTIAL minefield a playdate can be. Two children could be playing happily together, each with a toy, until they covet the same object. Suddenly, that rocking horse means war.

Most parents stress the importance of sharing early on, whether at home with siblings or at the park with strangers. But that doesn't mean their preschoolers are early adopters.

“The good news,” says Peter Blake, a College of Arts & Sciences assistant professor of psychology and director of the Social Development & Learning Lab, “is that kids do understand these norms of fairness, even from a young age, even if they don't follow them.”

Blake should know. He's a hands-on uncle and the coauthor of a recent paper in *PLOS ONE* called “I Should but I Won't: Why Young Children Endorse Norms of Fair Sharing but Do Not Follow Them.”

Blake and his colleagues recruited

dozens of three- to eight-year-olds visiting the Living Laboratory at the Museum of Science in Boston to play the Dictator Game, which is commonly used in economic studies and has participants divvy up resources between themselves and another person they'll never meet. In this case, the currency was four scratch-and-sniff smiley face stickers in the child's favorite color. That's gold to a five-year-old.

The researchers knew there would be a judgment-behavior gap for the set of younger children—meaning that the children knew they should share equally, but would still favor themselves. The researchers wanted to better understand why that gap exists. They hypothesized that it could be for one of three reasons: children think the norm applies to others, but not to themselves; they think it applies to everyone, but that no one really follows it; they are unable to control their desires, despite knowing what's expected of them.

It turns out that Blake and his colleagues were off the mark. All of the children said they and others should share equally, and they predicted that others would behave the same way.