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To cite this version:

Yliana Rodríguez. Vestiges of an Amerindian-European language contact: Guarani loanwords in Uruguayan Spanish. 18e Rencontres Jeunes Chercheurs en Sciences du Langage, Jun 2015, Paris, France. hal-01495095

HAL Id: hal-01495095

https://univ-sorbonne-nouvelle.hal.science/hal-01495095

Submitted on 24 Mar 2017

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Vestiges of an Amerindian-European language contact: Guarani loanwords in Uruguayan Spanish

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ABSTRACT

Although no indigenous language is spoken in Uruguay today, linguistic interaction between native peoples and Europeans must have been intense given the historical circumstances under which Europeans arrived in this area (Bertolotti and Coll, 2006). In the present work, we have studied 29 Guarani loanwords, looking into their propagation, adaptation and availability in the variety of Spanish spoken in Uruguay. We conclude that Guarani loanwords have propagated and adapted to the recipient language to the point that many of them present high lexical availability in the speech community.

Keywords*: language contact, loanwords, Guarani, Uruguayan Spanish, indigenous language.*

Mots-clés*: contact de langues, emprunts, Guarani, espagnol uruguayen, langue indigène.*

INTRODUCTION

No indigenous language is spoken in Uruguay at present; this marks a clear difference with the rest of South America. Today, Guarani is still spoken in other parts of the continent, but it was also used in Uruguay until the beginning of the 19th century (Bertolotti and Coll, 2013). Testimonies about the existence of interpreters evidence that Guarani-speaking indigenous peoples have inhabited Uruguay since the 17th century (Alonso Araguás, 2010). The indigenous linguistic contribution to the Spanish variety spoken in Uruguay can be observed today mainly in place-names and names for local flora and fauna, *i.e.* loanwords.

In the present work, I start by outlining the sociohistorical circumstances under which the Guarani loanwords might have become part of the Spanish spoken in Uruguay. Secondly, I visit some of the most well know definitons of a loanword, look into three of their characteristics, *i.e.* propagation, adaptation and availability, and point out some of the most salient typological differences between both languages. In section two I explain how the list of words was produced and describe the characteristics of both the sample and the interview. Finally I present and analize my results.

Sociohistorical context

The Tupi-Guarani-speaking peoples were originally from central Amazonia. Their dialects extended throughout a vast area in South America and, during the past 1 500 to 2 000 years, have evolved independently from one another (Ganson, 2003). To the north, the Tupi remained along the Atlantic while the Guarani occupied the south (Meliá, 1992), settling along the Paraná, Uruguay, and Paraguay Rivers and their tributaries, reaching the subtropical forests, hills, and grasslands of Guairá, Tape, and the area of Lagoa dos Patos in southern Brazil, as well as the island of Martín García and the east of the Tigre River delta in Río de la Plata (Ganson, 2003) (see figure 1). Together, the various Guarani communities may have reached approximately 1.5 million in 1500 A.D. By the time of the first contact with Europeans in the 16th century, te whole Brazilian coast was occupied by indigenous peoples who spoke these dialects. In the last third of the century, missionaries, mainly Jesuits, began to cultivate it (Tovar, 1961). Both Spanish and Portuguese missionaries and discoverers immediately noticed the characteristics of Tupi-Guarani and considered it a “general language”.

Figure 1: Map of Tupi-Guarani languages expansion[1]

Even though we find few indigenous features in the Spanish spoken in Uruguay today, the considerable amount of place names bearing Guarani origin (e.g. Batoví hill, Cuñapirú creek, river Arapey and sierra Carapé) can be considered proof of an initial cultural Guarani predominance. Place names function like fossils in biology (Ilievski, 1988 in Jordan, 2014): they allow reconstructing the language spoken at a certain place and time and identifying the community who used this language (Jordan, 2014). Apart from place names, we also find an important number of autochthonous flora and fauna with indigenous names (e.g. tatú, yacaré, mangangá, ananá and ombú).

Furthermore, one of the strongest proofs is the existence of missionary farms – one of the economic engines of the Jesuit reductions – in the north of Uruguay. In those farms, Guarani Indians were the main workforce, but when the Jesuits were expelled from America (in 1767) many of the Indians who had learnt livestock skills were hired in local farms (Jochims, 2006 in da Rosa, 2008). At this point start the early contacts between Spanish-speaking and Guarani-speaking populations. The Guarani became part of the colonial population, settling down in the lands of what would later become Uruguay. Moreover, there are documents that attest to the existence of Guarani-Spanish interpreters in Uruguay since the 18th century. Letters dating from 1730 mention the presence of a "lenguaraz", who worked as an interpreter of the Tapes, who spoke a Tupi-Guarani dialect (Barrios Pintos, 2001, p. 338). What is more, starting in 1780, many church archives contain the term "natural indian" (González and Rodríguez, 1990).

[1] Map creator: David Liuzzo, via Wikimedia Commons. The rectangle (of my authorship) shows the Tupi-Guarani languages expansion according to A. Dall'Igna Rodrigues (in Tovar, 1961).

Besides direct Guarani-Spanish contact, it is very probable that Portuguese, also in contact with Guarani, played a part in the introduction of some Guarani terms into Spanish. There is indeed a strong Spanish-Portuguese contact along the northeastern border of Uruguay. Therefore, many loanwords should also be acknowledged to that phenomenon (Elizaincín, personal communication, November, 2013).[2] In addition, contact among American Spanish varieties of the region, for instance Corrientes Spanish, can be another source for loanwords (Dietrich, personal communication, March 22, 2015).

1. LOANWORDS

Loanwords are a particular case among the studies of languages in contact. A loanword is generally defined as a word that was transferred from a donor language to a recipient language. One of the first definitions was provided by Haugen, who defined a loanword as "the attempted reproduction in one language of patterns previously found in another" (1950, p. 212). Loanwords are always words (*i.e.* lexemes) in the narrow sense, not lexical phrases, and they are generally unanalyzable units in the recipient language (Haspelmath, 2009).

The term "borrowing", however, has been used in two different senses (Haspelmath, 2009):

as a general term for all kinds of transfer or copying processes (e.g. native speakers adopting elements from another language, non-native speakers imposing properties of their native language onto a recipient language)

"to refer to the incorporation of foreign elements into the speaker's native language" (Thomason and Kaufman, 1988, p. 21). Thomason and Kaufman use the cover term "interference" to refer both to "substratum interference" (meaning imposition) and "borrowing" (the adoption of a foreign element).

1.1. Propagation, adaptation and availability

Language changes start as innovations in speech. Their propagation is then gradual. The propagation of a novel linguistic variant consists essentially in the adoption of a new linguistic convention by a speech community (Croft, 2000). Usually, a propagated word will be highly frequent in corpora and will be found in normative linguistic descriptions (*i.e.* dictionaries). Notwithstanding, languages have a great number of words with very concrete semantic content, whose frequency in a corpus is not always representative of their vitality. Lopez Morales (1996) explains that one's mental lexicon has a series of terms which are not used unless one needs to communicate very specific information. Hence, in order to analyze those words, it is necessary to resort to other techniques, such as studying speakers' lexical availability.

As they propagate, words undergo a series of adaptive changes. A source word (*i.e.* the word that serves as a model for the loanword) often has phonological, orthographic, morphological and syntactic properties in its original language, but those properties may not fit into the recipient language system. Therefore, loanwords suffer adaptations to fit into the recipient language. These

[2] One example is *ananá*. According to Corominas & Pascual (1984), it is more than clear that Spanish did not borrow this word directly from Guarani. They provide a thorough explanation of how the word made its course through Portuguese.

adaptations, *i.e.* the transformations that apply to words when they are borrowed from a foreign language (Peperkamp, 2005), are generally a requisite for integration to take place.

1.2. Typological differences between Guarani and Spanish

Guarani and Spanish are typologically different languages. Guarani is part of the Tupi language family, more specifically of the Tupi-Guarani branch, named after the two most common language groups at the time of colonization in Brazil, *i.e.* Tupinamba and Guarani (Jensen, 1999). Spanish, on the other hand, is part of the Indo-European family of languages, among which Spanish can be further classified as a Romance language. Guarani is agglutinative, meaning that complex words are formed by stringing together morphemes. The indigenous languages of lowland South America are generally classified as polysynthetic (Payne, 1990) and Guarani is no exception. In contrast, Spanish is an inflectional language: verbs are conjugated while adjectives and nouns carry gender and number information.

There are six vowels in Guarani. Each of them exists both in a nasal and in an oral series (Lustig, 1996) (see table 1), while there are no nasalized vowels in Spanish. With regards to the consonant system, some of the most noteworthy differences with the Romance language (and the most relevant for the present study) are the alveolar /ᵈj/ and glottal stop /ʔ/ called *puso*.[3] With respects to its accent, Clopper and Tonhouser (2011) explain that the canonic accent in Guarani falls on the last syllable of a word, whereas in Spanish, primary stress occurs in the penultimate syllable in most cases (Lleó, 2003).

How much do these typological differences affect the permeability of loanwords? According to Thomason (2006), linguistic factors are easily overridden by social factors. She explains that typological distance between the source language and the receiving language affects the likelihood that structure will be borrowed – since the more similar the systems are, the easier it is for a feature to diffuse from one to the other – but, with intense enough contact, any feature can be transferred from any language to any other language, in spite of their typological differences. Hence, as Spanish and Guarani are very different languages in terms of their structure, the borrowing process is probably a consequence of strong interaction in a context of direct contact.

Table 1: Guarani vowel system.

	oral			**nasal**		
	front	*central*	*back*	*front*	*central*	*back*
close	i	ɨ	u	ĩ	ɨ̃	ũ
mid	e		o	ẽ		õ
open		a			ã	

2. METHOD

First, a Uruguayan vocabulary database (DICUR)[4] as well as dictionaries[5] were studied in order to analyze the propagation of Guarani loanwords. During this stage, a list of 29 nouns (excluding

[3] The name *puso* is Guarani: "pu" means *sound* and "so" means *split*.

[4] A database of Uruguayan literature glossaries consulted at Academia Nacional de Letras del Uruguay (2011).

place names) was established. Only the words with recognized Guarani origin – in the majority of the dictionaries – and attested in the database were included in the list. The words were organized in three semantic fields: “flora”, “fauna” and a third one called “other” (see appendix). In a second phase, these loanwords' integration into Spanish was studied by looking into their phonological adaptation; we looked for the presence or absence of the most salient phonetic features of Guarani (cf. supra). Finally, the lexical availability was measured by conducting interviews with Uruguayan Spanish native speakers.

The informants were 48 Uruguayans (24 females and 24 males), from 18 to 82 years old (divided into three equal age groups). All informants had lived at least the first 16 years of their lives in the same region of the country. All regions were represented with a minimum of two informants, following in this case, the geolinguistics methodology. Age stratification of linguistic variables is considered the primary correlate of real time language change (Chambers, 2002 ; Eckert, 1997). Therefore, by considering informants from a wide range of ages, we should be able to see signs of a real time language change. We believe that using a combination of both static (*i.e.* gender and origin) and dynamic variables (age), might help to enlighten the study of loanwords.

During the interview, informants were presented with pictures of the loanwords' referents (e.g. a picture of the animal tatú) and were asked to name what they saw.[6] The visual and oral stimuli were identical for all informants. A protocol was established in case informants reported not remembering or not knowing the signifier of the referent; namely, the interviewer pronounced the first syllable of the word meant to work as a cue. Three levels of availability were set on the grounds that the words that come first to our memory – as the result of a reaction to a stimulus – are those that are most available (Lopez Morales, 1996) (see table 2).

[5] Guarani, Portuguese and Spanish dictionaries were studied, namely: Diccionario de la lengua española (Real Academia Española, 2001), Diccionario de americanismos (Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española, 2010), Nuevo tesoro lexicográfico de la lengua española (Real Academia Española, 2001), Diccionario del Español del Uruguay (Academia Nacional de Letras del Uruguay, 2011), Dicionário Houaiss da Língua Portuguesa (2001) and the bilingual Guarani-Spanish diccionaries from Guasch and Ortiz (1986) and Peralta & Osuna (1950). For more etymological insight, I consulted Corominas & Pascual's Diccionario Crítico Etimológico Castellano e Hispánico (1984).

[6] All interviews were recorded.

Table 2: Availability levels of Guarani words.

Availability level	Informants' answers
High	The Guarani word.
Low	Another word in Spanish, but when asked if they know another word, they give the Guarani word. OR Report not knowing the word/another word, but when they listen to the first syllable, they say the Guarani word.
Null or Passive	Report not knowing the Guarani word.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Propagation

Guarani loanwords started appearing in dictionaries at the beginning of the 18th century. The first of these words were documented in an English-Spanish dictionary written by John Stevens in 1706 (Real Academia Española, 2001b).

It is well documented that nouns are borrowed more easily than other parts of speech (e.g. Whitney, 1881; Myers-Scotton, 2002). Therefore, it is no surprise that all the Guarani words attested are nouns. According to Myers-Scotton (2002), nouns are borrowed preferentially because they are not disruptive of predicate-argument since they receive thematic roles, but do not assign them. Moreover, the loanwords found are all clear 'cultural borrowings' (*i.e.* new concepts coming from outside), as opposed to 'core borrowings' which duplicate meanings for words that already exist (Myers-Scotton, 2002, p. 239).

Most of the referents were animals and plants. However, nine words that do not belong to those categories were found (see appendix). We find this particularly relevant since specialized literature explains that Guarani loanwords are reduced to the semantic field of fauna and flora (e. g. Bertolotti and Coll, 2006).

3.2. Phonological adaptation

We also studied the loanwords' phonological adaptation to Spanish. We observed that Guarani loanwords present a simplified pronunciation, which lacks Guarani typical features like the glottal stop and the nasalized vowels. Words have been fully adapted to Uruguayan Spanish phonology. In particular, this involves the use of the voiceless palatal continuant, which is characteristic of the Río de la Plata Spanish variety's phonological inventory. Consequently, words like yatay, yacaré, yaguareté and yarará present that sound in initial position, instead of /ᵈj/ (see table 3). Moreover, most loanwords appear to have kept the prototypical Guarani stress on the last syllable.

Table 3: Guarani and Spanish transcriptions.

Guarani		Spanish	
jata'i	/ᵈjataʔɨ/	yataí/yatay	/ʃa'tai/
jakare	/ᵈjaka'ɾe/	yacaré	/ʃaka'ɾe/
jaguarete	/ᵈjawaɾe'te/	yaguareté	/ʃawaɾe'te/
jarara	/ᵈjara'ɾa/	yarará	/ʃaɾa'ɾa/

3.3. Lexical availability

Regarding lexical availability, we observed that 14 of the words presented a high lexical availability (*i.e.* non assisted utterance of the loanword by the informant). The words were: ñandú, tatú, yacaré, mangangá, yarará, apereá (fauna), ananá, ombú, burucuyá (flora), tapera, pororó, tacuara, caracú and guaraná (other). The rest of the words showed low lexical availability level but no words had an average of null availability (see figure 2 and table 4).

Figure 2: Overall availability.

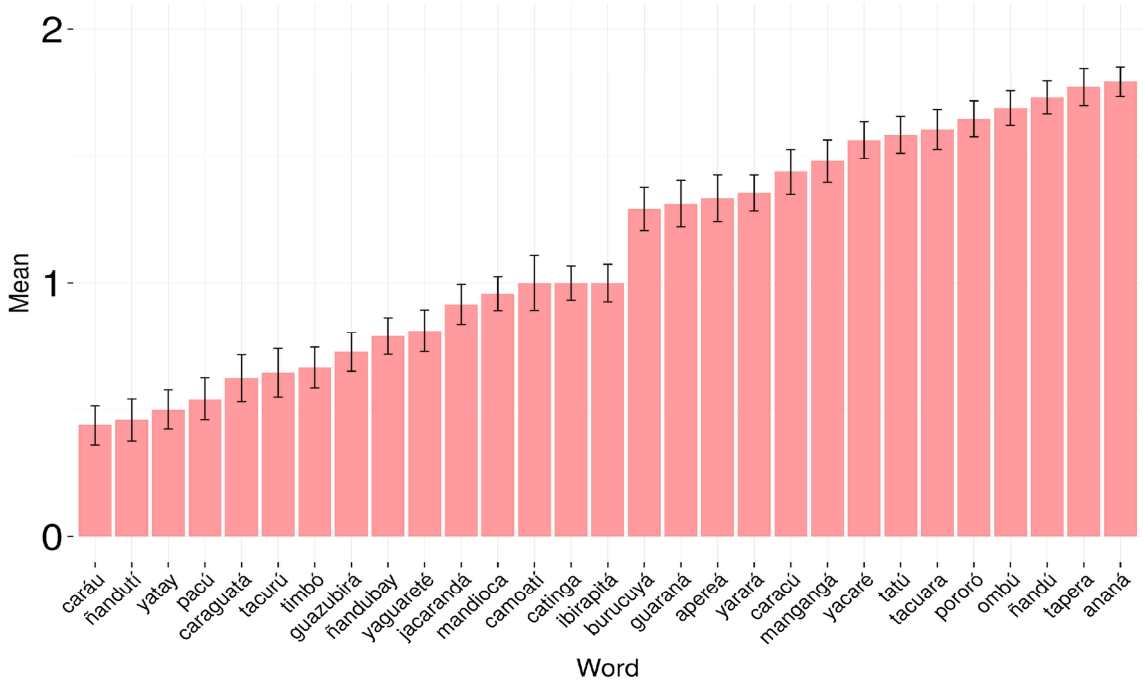
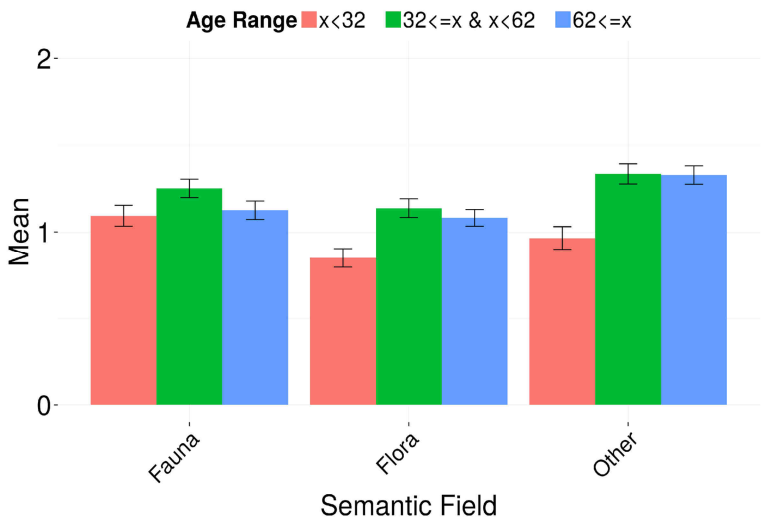


Table 4: Availability by semantic field.

		Semantic field		
		Fauna	**Flora**	**Other**
Lexical availability	**High**	ñandú, tatú, yacaré, mangangá, yarará, apereá	ananá, ombú, burucuyá	tapera, pororó, tacuara, caracú and guaraná
	Low	camoatí, yaguareté, guazubirá, pacú, caráu	ibirapitá, jacarandá, ñandubay, timbó, caraguatá, yatay	catinga, mandioca, tacurú and ñandutí
	Null or passive[7]			

With regards to age, we noticed that the youngest age group (<32) was the one who performed most poorly, followed by the eldest (>62) (see figure 3). In the case of the latter, the slight reduction in performance could be due to the fact that, for healthy aging people, naming difficulty is situated at the label retrieval stage (Nicholas et al., 1985) and that aging impacts cognitive function, including speed of processing, working memory, long-term memory, and inhibition or cognitive control (Park & Reuter-Lorenz, 2009). However, the more significant poor performance of the youngest age group needs a different explanation. Some might argue that these words are beginning to lose their vitality. On the other hand, it could also be the case that, since these words present a low frequency in terms of their use, this group of speakers has not had the chances, yet, to encode them.

Figure 3: Availability by age.



Male respondents outperformed women in all three semantic categories (see figure 4), particularly in the fauna vocabulary where words like apereá, caráu, mangangá, pacú and yaguareté showed significant higher levels of availability in men (see figure 5). One might argue that this could

[7] No words had an average of this level.

be a consequence of men's type of work, since – at least in the countryside – men tend to be in the fields more than women.

Figure 4: Availability by semantic field and gender.

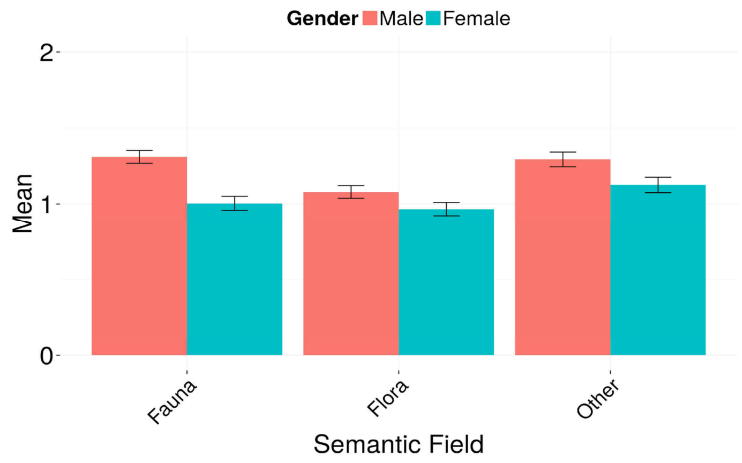
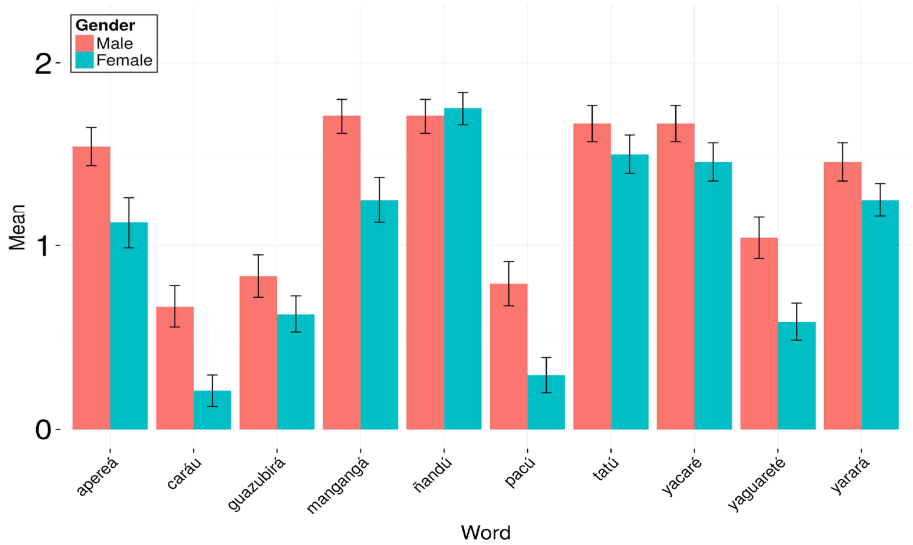


Figure 5: Fauna availability by gender.



We did not find any significant correlation between availability and semantic field (see figure 6). In other words, no semantic field was more available to speakers than another. However, only a few flora loanwords were observed at higher levels – only ananá, ombú and burucuyá (see figure 7). We believe a limitation of the study turned out to be the use of pictures to elicit names of plants and trees, since these are hard to recognize through images. It could also be that the semantic category "flora" in general presents less availability than the others, not only when it comes to these particular words.

Figure 6: Availability by semantic field (independently).

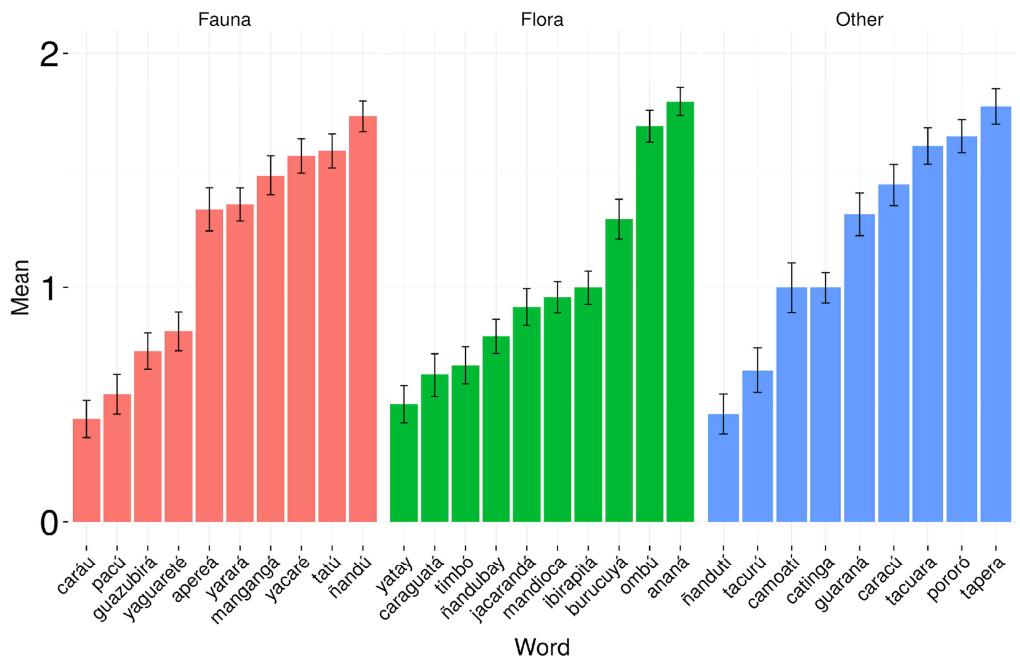
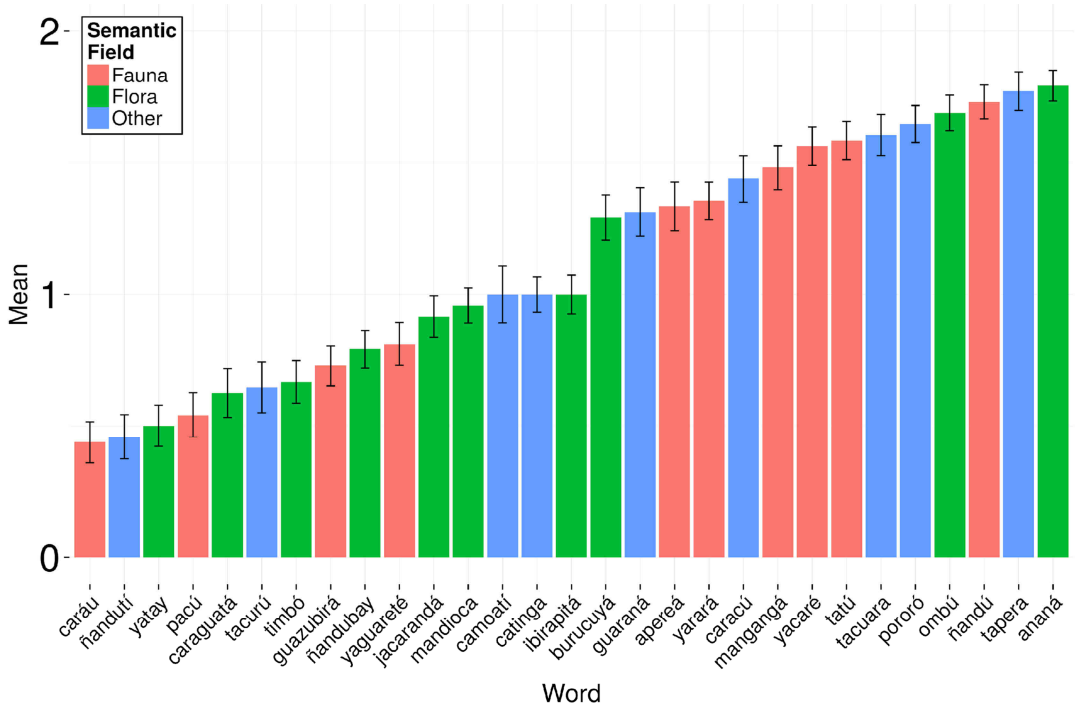


Figure 7: Availability by semantic field (altogether).



4. Conclusions

Our findings provide evidence of a language contact, either between Spanish and Guarani or between Spanish and Portuguese, since the latter could have played a part in the introduction of the Guarani loanwords into Spanish. However, judging by the degree of propagation and adaptation of the loanwords, and by the fact that most of them present a high level of availability (and none present null or passive availability), we believe the hypothesis of a strong linguistic interaction with the

original peoples should be taken into consideration, especially when we take into account the historical documents that attest the presence of Guarani Indians in the colonial population.

With regards to the future directions of this work, we will continue to analyze the regionality index as an independent variable, since one might expect Guarani lexical loanwords to show a higher level of vitality in areas where historical documents attest to the presence of Guarani speakers and in places with intense Spanish-Portuguese contact.

5. APPENDIX: VOCABULARY

Flora

1. ananá – pineapple
2. burucuyá – passion fruit
3. caraguatá – a plant with leaves that yield a long silky fiber
4. ibirapitá – a type of tree
5. jacarandá – a type of tree
6. mandioca – a type of nutritious roots
7. ñandubay – a type of tree
8. ombú – a type of tree
9. timbó – a type of tree
10. yatay – a type of palm tree

Fauna

1. apereá – a wild Guinea pig
2. caráu – a type of heron
3. guazubirá – a type of deer
4. mangangá – an insect similar to a big bee
5. ñandú – the American ostrich
6. pacú – a type of fish
7. tatú – a type of armadillo
8. yacaré – a crocodilian resembling the alligator in size and habit
9. yaguareté – a big cat
10. yarará – a type of serpent

Other

1. camoatí – a type of insect nest
2. caracú – marrow bone
3. catinga – strong smell
4. guaraná – a soft drink with the taste of guaraná fruit
5. ñandutí – a mat with a pattern similar to crochet
6. pororó – pop-corn
7. tacuara – a type of cane
8. tacurú – a tall anthill
9. tapera – an abandoned house in the countryside

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