

Me como las eses hasta en la sopa (I eat my esses even in the soup). Sociolinguistic dimensions of /s/-weakening in the Guayaquil Spanish and how to study them

Although the word „sopa” is not an example of this process, /s/-weakening in syllable-coda position is indeed one of the most extended ongoing phonetic changes in Spanish. The weakening is performed by the shift of the place of articulation from alveolar (*diez cosas* ['djeʃ 'ko.ʃas] or ['djeθ 'ko.ʃas]) to a variety of laryngeal possibilities (*diez cosas* ['dʒeh 'ko.sas] or ['dʒeh 'ko.sah]) and, in its extreme stadium, by deletion (['dje 'ko.sa]). Furthermore, deletion can be compensated by gemination [*escuchar* [e.k:u.'ʃar]). In some varieties, /s/-weakening affects the preceding vowel, resulting in phonemic consequences (*gato – gatos* ['ga.to] – ['ga.t̪]). In most studies, these complex processes are simplified to three discrete allophonic categories: sibilant, aspiration (a widely accepted term for /s/-debuccalization in Hispanic linguistics) and elision. It is also the case of the study presented in this talk.

While /s/-weakening is reported from majority of Spanish-speaking areas, there are quantitative and style differences that allow grouping these areas roughly into two categories: conservative varieties (e.g. Castilian Spanish), where sibilant is the norm, and innovative varieties (e.g. Caribbean Spanish), where /s/-weakening is the most prestigious option and the sibilant is a marked or even stigmatized form. As the present study shows, Guayaquil Spanish, one of the two leading linguistic norms in Ecuador, is an intermediate variety, where the preference for sibilant is clear in formal style and it decreases along with the style formality, and, at the same time, it is not overtly accepted by the speakers.

In this talk I will comment on my PhD dissertation dedicated to the /s/-weakening in the speech of Guayaquil radio anchors. I will focus on data collection – quite a challenge due to the scarcity of spoken corpora of American Spanish – and stratification of my corpus (total duration: 17 hours). I will also explain the acoustic and statistical procedure for semi-automatized classification of /s/ allophones, the factors that turned out to contribute to /s/-weakening in Guayaquil Spanish and, finally, I will present the results of the language attitude survey I carried out among over 80 speakers of the dialect in question.

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