

Sociophonetic Perception of Intervocalic [z] in Costa Rican Spanish

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Recent studies on sociophonetic perception have determined that listeners tend to rely on certain salient variables as they evaluate speakers' social qualities (Clopper & Pisoni, 2004), namely vowel shifts in American English (Fridland, Bartlett, & Kreuz, 2004) and /s/ aspiration in the Spanish-speaking world (Walker et al., 2014). While /s/ aspiration is commonly considered the most widespread and salient /s/ process in Spanish, non-standard intervocalic /s/ voicing, e.g., [paza] for *pasa* 'raisin,' has also been observed in multiple dialects, including Peninsular, Ecuadorian, Costa Rican, Mexican, and Argentinian Spanish (García, 2015). Unlike /s/ aspiration, intervocalic [z] is not a salient marker of dialect or social class (Author, forthcoming), but several studies conclude that men are significantly more likely to voice intervocalic /s/ than women (García, 2015; McKinnon, 2012). Based on intervocalic [z]'s relationship with social factors like gender, I seek to determine for the first time what, if any, social meaning is indexed by this less salient /s/ variant in Costa Rican Spanish.

To answer this question, six Costa Rican Spanish speakers from the Central Valley were recorded performing a map task designed to elicit intervocalic /s/. Two utterances containing multiple tokens of intervocalic /s/ were extracted for each speaker and were digitally manipulated to vary only in intervocalic [s] vs. [z], resulting in 24 short sound files. The manipulated recordings were organized as a pseudorandom matched-guise test (Lambert et al., 1960) in SurveyGizmo (Vanek & McDaniel, 2006), and listeners were asked to pay attention to each recording and evaluate the speaker on a scalar set of social characteristics including class, education, confidence, pleasantness, heterosexuality, masculinity/femininity, Costa Rican-ness, and age. 106 Costa Rican listeners participated in the evaluation task, and their scores were centered and standardized to create comparable scales across categories. A factor analysis was then conducted using the Kaiser rule, which determined the three most important dimensions for analysis: a 'social status' dimension comprised of class and education evaluations, a 'positive social attributes' category including evaluations of niceness, confidence, and localness, and a 'gendered' factor involving evaluations of masculinity/femininity. Separate linear mixed models were fitted to listeners' evaluations for each dimension with speaker and listener as random effects, and treatment contrasts were used for the categorical fixed effects.

The results of these models show that intervocalic [z] indexes a lower social status for all speakers ($p < 0.001$) but also yields higher ratings of confidence, niceness, localness, and masculinity for male speakers ($p < 0.01$). Female speakers' evaluations of confidence, niceness, localness, and femininity were not significantly changed by intervocalic [z], which suggests that only male speakers are able to enjoy covert prestige when they produce nonstandard [z]. Given female speakers' limited ability to evoke positive social meanings associated with [z], I argue that accessibility to the indexical field (Eckert, 2008) conditions men's and women's differential treatment of variation. Offering a satisfying explanation for the gender paradox (Labov, 2001: 261-293), this work concludes that women agentively eschew nonstandard variants that result in no positive social gains but lead linguistic innovation when their access to the indexical field is unobstructed.

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