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Introduction

Rioplatense Spanish (RPS) – spoken in the capital regions of Argentina (Buenos Aires) and Uruguay (Montevideo) – is known for its distinctive pronunciation features. One such feature is the pronunciation of sounds represented by the letters ‘y’ or ‘ll’. In Standard American Spanish (SAS), the sound associated with these letters is [j] (as in ‘yellow’), but in RPS the sound has been either the voiced post-alveolar fricative [ʒ] (as in ‘measure’) or, more recently, its voiceless counterpart [ç] (as in ‘shoe’).

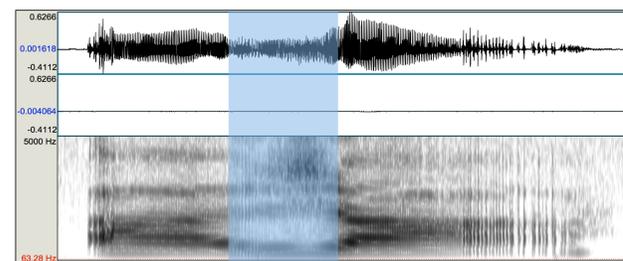
Previous studies have found that the devoicing process ([ʒ]→[ç]) is *complete* in Buenos Aires and *nearly complete* in Montevideo. The change in Uruguay is much more recent and attributed mostly to women of all social classes, and to the younger generation. This study examines RPS speakers’ perception of the progress of this process in Montevideo.

Word	SAS	RPS
‘playa’ (beach)	[plaʝa]	[plaʒa] or [plaʝa]
‘allá’ (there)	[aʝa]	[aʒa] or [aʝa]

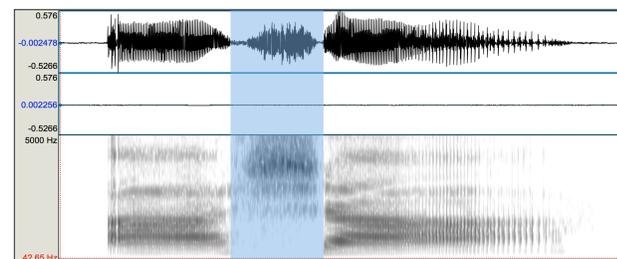


Background

- In Argentina in 1946, Juan Peron was elected president. Peron was known for being an advocate for the working class. As a result, during his time in office this population began to grow quickly in Buenos Aires.
- The working class population brought with them a change in pronunciation from [ʒ]→[ç], therefore, the [ʒ] was thought to be more prestigious – the preferred pronunciation of the middle and upper class.
- In 1965, studies showed that the youth had begun demonstrating a strong transition in pronunciation from [ʒ]→[ç], regardless of their socioeconomic class. This is thought to be due to an increase in media influence during the Peron era and after.
- At the same time that Buenos Aires began seeing this shift in the speech of the younger generation, the [ʒ] pronunciation began spreading to Montevideo.



[aʒa] voiced



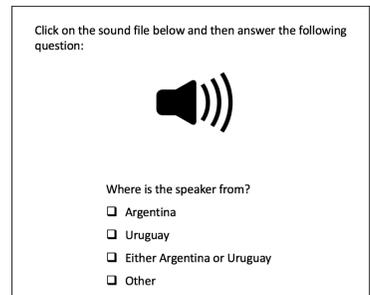
[aʝa] voiceless

- As with most language change, the devoicing in Buenos Aires was being driven by women, and by 1979 it was nearly complete in the speech of both women and the youth (Wolf & Jiménez 1979).
- Montevideo began transitioning toward the devoiced [ç] several decades later. By 2002, it was reported that the change had progressed, and was most notably established in both the younger generation and women (Barrios 2002).
- While Montevideo was still undergoing this change in pronunciation, by 2004 it was determined that the devoicing in Buenos Aires had been completed across all demographics (Temkin Martinez 2004).

Methodology

- Native RPS speakers from both Buenos Aires and Montevideo will be asked to complete an online experiment.
- In the experiment, participants will be presented with audio stimuli of Spanish phrases containing the target sounds. After listening to each audio stimulus, speakers will be asked to determine the country of origin of the speaker.
- The audio stimuli contain speech from a native male Montevideo speaker, a native female Montevideo speaker and a native speaker of Standard American Spanish.
- The audio stimuli from the two RPS speakers will be manipulated to create sound files that contain the voiced [ʒ] in addition to the naturally occurring voiceless sound [ç].
- We expect participants from Buenos Aires will attribute voiced tokens to speakers from Montevideo more frequently than participants from Montevideo will.

Sample screenshot of experiment stimulus



Selected References

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