

A comparative analysis of Cuban native speech and Cuban-American speakers acquiring Spanish word-final /s/

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The sibilant /s/ weakening, be it aspiration [h] (for example, 'niños' ['ni.no^h] 'boys') or deletion [Ø] (for example, 'niños' ['ni.no]), in any linguistic context is perhaps the most conspicuous variation of the Cuban linguistic system (Terrel, 1977). There is limited literature on comparative studies concerned with the variation of word and syllable final /s/ production in Cuban Spanish between Cubans living in Cuba and heritage speakers residing in Miami. Thus, this paper bridges the gap by conducting a comparative study analyzing the sociolinguistic factors involved in the phonetic production of word and syllable final /s/ between young Cuban content creators living in both Cuba and Miami by using a novel method, YouTube videos. Using semi-spontaneous data, we examined 435 tokens obtained from the first four minutes of YouTube videos on food tasting by eight Cuban content creators, four females and four males. With the intention of capturing a common theme among all participants, we choose the first four minutes. It is important to note that due to the remote observational nature of our study, we are limited by the lack of personal and linguistic information of the participants, for which reason we do not have access to their ages. However, we consider sex and place of residence as social variables. In this study, we use Praat to test the visualization of the aspirated [h] or retained variant [s] of word and syllable final /s/ production. Aspiration and retention were coded in Goldvarb based on social and linguistic variables. The aspirated variant is classified as [h] (for example, 'niños' ['ni.no^h]) and the retained variant as [s] (for example, 'casas' ['ka.sas] 'houses'), both linguistic factors. It is important to note that this study takes into account aspiration and retention and excludes deletion. Results in previous literature show that between the two weakened variants, aspiration is by far the most favored variant among Miami-based Cubans (Terrell, 1977; Terrell, 1979; Lynch, 2009; Heap et al., 2015). Therefore, we aim to conduct a balanced study that takes into account one non-standard variant, which in our case is the aspiration, and the standard variant, the retention. Based on previous literature, the analysis proposed here established that male Cubans residents in Miami would favor sibilant retention more (Lynch, 2009), whereas the male residents in Cuba would favor aspiration of the sibilant (Heap et al., 2015). However, in contrast to our hypothesis, preliminary results show that the male participants of both residence tend to favor aspiration more [.58]. However, male participants living in Miami tend to favor aspiration more than their counterparts living in Cuba [.61]. We find differences in types of words as a linguistic factor which shows that the group residing in Miami has different acquisition patterns compared to the native counterparts. In summary, this paper contributes a more recent analysis to the existing literature on the production of final /s/ in Cuban Spanish. It further employs new research methods using YouTube content creators as participants to compare the variability of the phenomenon among Cubans resident in Cuba and in Miami.

References

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