

Stopping and Flapping across Time, Space and Race: Intervocalic V/d/V variation in Palenquero Spanish

The Spanish voiced dental stop /d/ is one of a series of three voiced stops (/b/, /d/, /g/) in standard Spanish. All three have stopped and lenited variants in complementary distribution.

/d/	[d]	[ún déðo]	‘a finger’
	[ð]	[ése ðéðo]	‘that finger’

The phonological variable /d/ in particular, “...is frequently cited as a straight-forward illustration of allophonic distribution” (Cameron 2005:8x) It is thought to universally be pronounced as either a stop after pause or [n] or [l] or undergoes a process of weakening or lenition (‘frication’) elsewhere. The lenition process is also well documented to reach complete deletion [ø] e.g. [toikansao] < [estoikansaðo] ‘I am tired’ in all varieties of spoken Spanish albeit at differing rates. Linguistic variation of the variable V/d/V over a thousand years in Spain.

Especially fruitful for dialectologists and sociolinguists has been the story of /d/ variation in intervocalic (V/d/V) position across time, and geographic and social space. In intervocalic position, its continuum of lenition is variably sensitive to phonological context, style, socioeconomic class, social evaluation, region, stress, morphological and possibly lexical constraints.

From the perspective of standard Spanish, complete deletion (the zero variant [ø]) has always been considered the “non-standard” variant. Any amount of frication is generally considered ‘standard’. To date, quantitative sociolinguistic studies have exclusively targeted from 2 to 5 lenited variants of VDV as the output of lenition and deletion processes. However, an additional 3 non-lenited variants occur in PSp and related varieties. Non-lenited or “fortis” [d], [r] and [l] variants are particular to the phonetics and phonology of Palenquero Spanish and a small subset of other varieties of Spanish, linked only by their speakers’ common sub-Saharan origins. Lipski considers intervocalic /d/ > [r] to reflect possible African influence on Latin American Spanish pronunciation. African influence “is supported by Afro-Hispanic texts from the sixteenth century to the twentieth... The same pronunciation is currently found in Equatorial Guinea, . . . an officially Spanish-speaking African nation. “ (Lipski 1994:126). Further evidence for this connection is the fact that non-lenited variants characterize the Spanish-based creole (Lengua) with which PSp has been in contact for 250 years. This makes Palenquero Spanish important in terms of the origins and evolution of these variants.

My recent quantitative sociolinguistic investigation of the variable V/d/V in the speech of 40 Palenqueros has revealed PSp to be significantly different from other varieties in ways not fully expected, with up to four times the global deletion rate reported in any previous study. In addition to the extremely high deletion rate, fully 11% of variants are non-lenited. Equally remarkably, [ð] ~ [ø] ~ [r] flourishes in Palenque even among younger speakers.

I provide quantitative evidence demonstrating clear patterns of sociolinguistic variation that distinguish Palenquero Spanish from other Spanish varieties. Given that 1) PSp and Lengua have been in contact for over 250 and 2) these variants are unique to Lengua and other Afro-

Spanish language varieties, I argue that the patterns of deletion illustrate ethnic and linguistic divisions. My findings suggest change and assimilation into the pan-Hispanic linguistic norm. The survival of non-lenited variants however suggests linguistic stability. It is true that the village of Palenquero community shows signs of becoming linguistically divided.