

A secondary voicing of stops in Spanish?

Studies on the historical phonology of Spanish reveal that, in the evolution from Latin to Spanish, the simplification of geminate consonants gave way to a series of changes, among which the voicing of intervocalic voiceless stops. There is empirical evidence that a second similar wave of voicing is going on at present in the whole Spanish-speaking area. References to such tendency may be found in Henríquez Ureña (1938), Flórez (1964), Salvador (1968), Torreblanca (1976), Alvar (1965), Almeida y Díaz (1988), Trujillo (1980), Oftedal (1985), Machuca (1997), Lewis (2001), Martínez Celdrán (2009). In some cases the process does not result merely in the voicing of stops, but it even gives way to the production of approximants. In this paper we focus on this phenomenon with the aim, first of all, of defining an acoustic categorization of its variants (partial voicing, voicing, approximantization), which occur along with the “expected” realization (i.e. the voiceless stop). Secondly, we aim at measuring the effects of such weakening. Finally, we carry out a perception test (with Barcelona listeners) to investigate whether such acoustic differences have any perceptive correlate. The corpus analysed consists of words containing intervocalic voiceless stops pronounced by native peninsular Spanish speakers from a variety of places (Granada, Caravaca (Murcia), Jaca (Huesca) among others) during spontaneous conversations or map tasks. The acoustic results show a high percentage of some variant of voicing in all localities. This demonstrates that such phenomenon exists and is widespread. The study concludes with a perception test which highlights the confusion of informants between minimal pairs of voiceless-voiced sounds. Listeners strongly favoured the voiced phoneme when the words appeared in isolation whilst there was a noted lack of confusion when they appeared in phrases. It is suggested that since there is a neutralization of the features of voicing and duration, it is the context which is important for the final interpretation of the phrase.

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