Hypercorrection and phonotactic leveling: revisiting Spanish word-medial coda stops.

In many dialects of Spanish, a word such as *aceptar* /aseptáɾ/ 'to accept' may be variably produced as [asektáɾ]. Brown (2006) analyzed the labial>velar substitution as the result of higher type and token frequency of velars in the coda. Given that analyses of unscripted speech showed that dentals seldom velarize (e.g. *administrar* 'to administer' as [akministɾáɾ], e.g. Mora de González 1989), Bongiovanni (2016) reoperationalized the repeating unit from a single segment to a consonant group (bigrams) and argued that the favorable context to apply velarization was determined by the frequency of bigrams, and not individual segments –dentals did not velarize because labials and velars shared phonotactic patterns. In this paper, we revisit the same dataset and complement our previous analysis with an examination of speakers' sensitivity to phonotactic frequency by looking for evidence of hypercorrection. We are using hypercorrection as a proxy for pattern generalization (Labov 1973, Janda & Auger 1992). Certain speaker groups (usually, non-elite groups) will hypercorrect, either by overshooting the use of a variant in a certain environment (quantitative hypercorrection) or by incorrectly overgeneralizing a pattern (qualitative hypercorrection).

Speech from 54 speakers of the Mérida-Venezuela PRESEEA corpus evenly distributed by educational attaintment (elementary, high school, university), age (20-34, 35-54, 55+), and sex (male, female; Briseño et al 2010) was analyzed. The dependent variable under study is realization of /p b t d/ in word-internal coda position and has three levels: retention ([aseptáɾ]), velarization ([asektáɾ]) and deletion ([asetáɾ]). A total of 2002 bigrams were extracted. Since previous findings showed only 3 of velarized dentals, only consonant groups with labial consonants are considered, for a total of 226 observations. Given the low number of tokens, we constructed a Confidence Interval Tree (CART), as well as a random forest, with the dependent variable and educational attainment, age group and sex as independent variables.

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate CART and random forest for the realization of the word-internal coda stop realization. Age surfaces as the most important factor: velarization is favored by speakers in older age groups. Among the younger participants, educational attainment plays a role. Younger speakers in the higher and intermediate education groups preserve the consonant in the coda primarily by retaining it. Speakers in the lower educational attainment group, show sparring instances of retention and instead resort to velarization. The generational split is explained as social reanalysis: whereas velarization constitutes a social marker among the younger generations (as reflected in education attainment level), it is not the case among the older speakers.

The analysis of hypercorrection adds a further interpretive layer to phonological reanalysis, which provides evidence that speakers are sensitive to phonotactic patterns. Speakers with a preference for velarization probably grew up speaking a dialect that resolves consonant groups by deleting the consonant in the coda. They acquired the coda-retention pattern long after their speech patterns had been established, probably with increased literacy. When they approximate the more prestigious variant, they fall short of consistency. Thus, in restoring a consonant in the coda, since the linguistic standard is not within their reach, speakers default to the most frequent pattern: a velar.

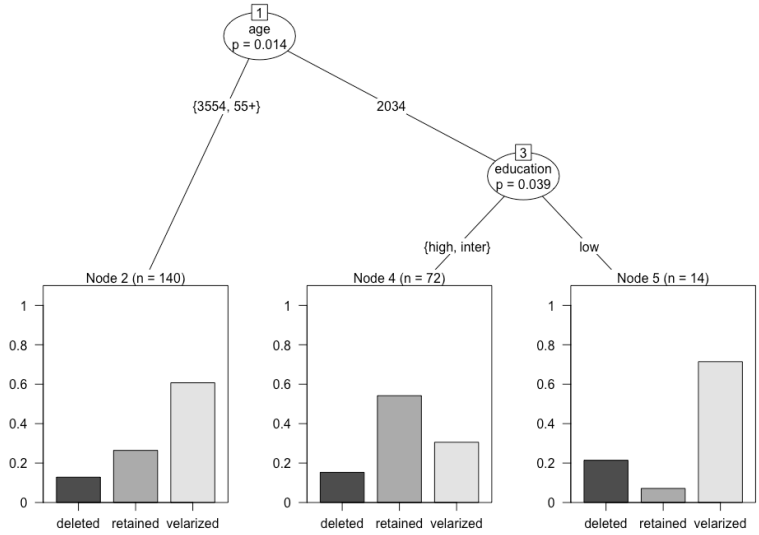

Figure 1 – CART analysis of the realization of word-internal coda stops.

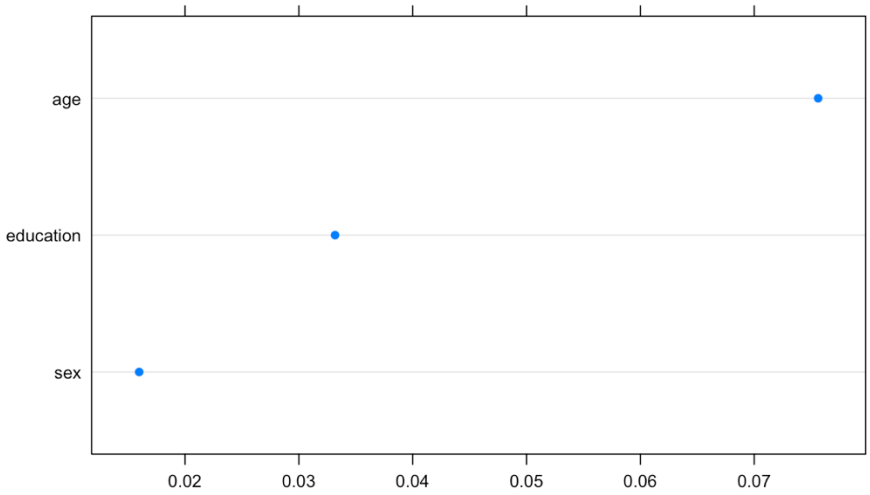

Figure 2 – Conditional permutation variable importance for the random forest for all predictors of the realization of word-internal coda stops.

References

Bongiovanni, S. (2016). Variation and frequency effects: Asymmetry in the velarization of Spanish word-internal coda stops. Talk given at 90th Annual Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America. Washington DC. January 7-10.

Briceño, D. L., Fernández, M. F., Maldonado, J., Velazco, J. & Palm, P. (2010). Un nuevo corpus sociolingüístico del habla de Mérida: PRESEEA-MÉRIDA-VE. *Lengua y Habla*, 14(1), 1-11

Brown, E. (2006) Velarization of labial, coda stops in Spanish: A frequency account. *Revista de Lingüística Teórica y Aplicada*, 44(2), 47-58

Janda, R. D., & Auger, J. (1992). Quantitative evidence, qualitative hypercorrection, sociolinguistic variables—and French speakers' headhaches with English h/Ø. *Language & Communication*, *12*(3-4), 195-236.

Labov, W. (1973). Hypercorrection by the Lower Middle Class as a Factor in Linguistic Change. In W. Labov (Ed.), *Sociolinguistic patterns* (pp. 122–142). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Mora de González, E. (1989). Las obstruyentes implosivas: un proceso de variabilidad. *Revue de Phonetique Appliquee*, 91-93, 161-175.