

**Revisiting the sociolinguistic analysis of variable coda /s/ weakening in Spanish:
An instrumental phonetic approach**

Ricardo Otheguy
Graduate Center, City University of New York

Abstract

Variability in the pronunciation of syllable-final /s/ in Spanish (*mismo* ‘same,’ *sabes* ‘you know,’ *buenas* ‘good’) has been central to the study of Spanish and to the field of sociolinguistic variation as a whole. On the basis of the naked ear perception of researchers, previous studies describe /s/ as pronounced in one of three discrete ways: a fully articulated [-s], an under-articulated [h], or as a case of total /s/ deletion. (A word like *mismo* ‘same’ is thus said to be pronounced as either *mismo*, *mihmo*, or *mimo*.) This segmental description obscures systematic patterns of acoustic variation; variable speech phenomena such as /s/ pronunciation are more accurately described and more fully explained by computer-based, instrumental measures that describe speech sounds in continuous, *subsegmental* terms. On the basis of an existing collection of 100 interviews with Spanish speakers from six different countries, this study will provide instrumental phonetic descriptions of 20,000 tokens of syllable-final Spanish /s/, calculating, for each token, a subsegmental description in terms of duration in milliseconds and frequency in hertz. The study will include detailed specifications of potential predictor variables that characterize the linguistic environment of each of these tokens as well as a rich specification of the social-personal characteristics of 100 speakers that produce the tokens. Lastly, the project will take a multivariate approach, discovering the variables that account for the largest amount of variance in speakers’ production of /s/. The analysis will encompass monolingual speakers of Spanish as well as bilinguals living in NYC, thus shedding light not only on /s/ in general, but also on the effects that language contact with English and dialect contact between Spanish speakers of different origins have on this process.