

Investigating Salience and Ideologies in Greater Boston: a Sociophonetic Analysis of Liquid Variation

In sociolinguistics, studying linguistic variables has been crucial for understanding language variation. Building upon prior research highlighting the importance of salient features [1, 2], this paper explores the covariation and coherence of variables in sociolinguistic research [4, 3, 2]. It expands the investigation to include *liquid variation* and its relationship with five other variables: Filled Pauses, Subject Personal Pronouns, SPP placement, general subject placement, and coda /s/ within the Greater Boston Area, examining how salience influences their usage.

Of these, *liquid variation* and *coda /s/* serve as Labovian stereotypes, representing highly socially aware features with systematic variation and distinct roles in maintaining phonological contrast. This study addresses the question of whether non-salient and salient features exhibit different patterns, particularly in the context of language ideologies and attitudes. It aims to explore potential correlations between language ideologies and attitudes and the observed distribution patterns and intra-linguistic factors of these variables. The prediction is that low salience features may show contact-induced structural convergence, while salient features are treated differently by speakers, with their indexical potential amplified by saliency. By investigating these relationships, this study contributes to understanding how language ideologies and attitudes shape linguistic variation and change within sociocultural contexts.

For the *liquid variation*, the preliminary results in Figure 1 demonstrate a consistent tendency for dialectal persistence, where child arrivals (Donaldo & Priscila) closely mirror the linguistic characteristics of the adult arrivals (David & Pascal). This is consistent with [2]’s findings for *coda /s/* in that the structural pressure of convergence with English, where systematic liquid neutralization is not a generalized feature of the phonology, doesn’t hold salient features. This persistence is further contextualized through participants’ responses regarding language ideologies and attitudes. For instance, when asked if Spanish speakers in Boston should continue speaking Spanish like their countrymen, Priscila, a Mainland US-Born Puerto Rican participant in our study, responded affirmatively, stating, "If you’re Puerto Rican, you should speak Spanish like Puerto Ricans do. I’m going to speak Spanish like a Puerto Rican." This declaration not only reflects Priscila’s personal beliefs but also underscores a commitment to preserving cultural and linguistic authenticity. Moreover, Priscila’s linguistic choices are not merely expressions of ideology but active manifestations of their convictions. Their deliberate usage of features they associate with Puerto Rican identity highlights the profound connection between language and cultural heritage.

By exploring the interplay between language ideologies and linguistic variation, this study contributes to understanding how speakers navigate linguistic choices influenced by their cultural identity and perceptions of linguistic authenticity. These findings underscore the importance of considering not only linguistic variation but also the socio-cultural factors that shape individuals’ language practices and attitudes. Moreover, they highlight the necessity of examining salience and covariation in sociolinguistic research to fully elucidate the complexities of language variation in diverse sociocultural contexts. In doing so, this study not only advances our understanding of language variation but also provides valuable insights into the intricate relationship between language, identity, and society.

Figures

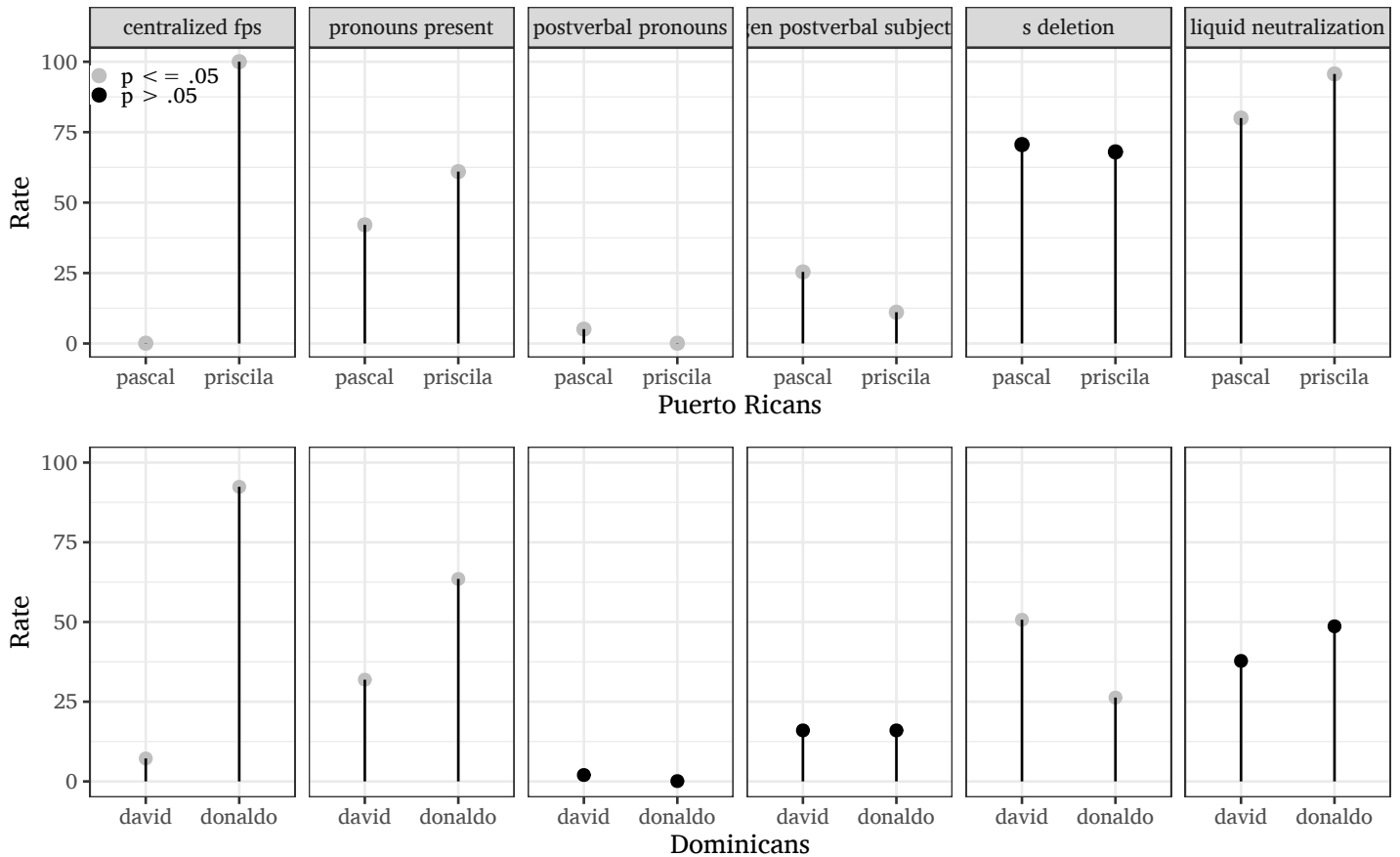


Figure 1: Comparisons of the rates of use of six linguistic variables among Adult and Child Arrival Spanish Speakers from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic

References

- [1] D. Erker. “Contact, Co-Variation, and Sociolinguistic Saliency: What Mister Rogers Knows about Language Change”. In: *University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics (Selected Papers from NWAV45)* 23.2 (2017). [2] D. Erker. “How social saliency can illuminate the outcomes of linguistic contact”. In: *The Coherence of Linguistic Communities*. Ed. by K. V. Beaman and G. R. Guy. 1st. New York: Routledge, 2022. Chap. 8. [3] D. Erker and R. Otheguy. “Contact and coherence: Dialectal leveling and structural convergence in NYC Spanish”. English. In: *Lingua* 172-173 (2016). [4] G. R. Guy and F. Hinskens. “Linguistic coherence: Systems, repertoires and speech communities”. In: *Lingua* 172-173 (2016).