

Riding the Waves of Saliency: Exploring Spanish Liquid Variation among Boston Spanish speakers

In sociolinguistics, studying linguistic variables has been crucial for understanding language variation. While previous research focused on individual variables, recent advancements highlight the importance of exploring the relationships between multiple variables within a speech community [4, 3, 2]. This paper presents preliminary findings from a study on *liquid variation* in Spanish dialectal variation, examining its relationship with five other variables: Filled Pauses, Subject Personal Pronouns, SPP placement, general subject placement, and coda /s/.

The study explores the covariation and coherence of these variables, examining the influence of saliency on their usage. I build upon prior research and emphasize the inclusion of multiple salient variables in sociolinguistic studies. In [1] & [2], covariation is observed among four non-salient features (Filled Pauses, Subject Personal Pronouns, SPP placement, general subject placement), indicating structural convergence. However, the salient feature, coda /s/, demonstrates a distinct pattern of persistence. The author suggests saliency as an explanatory factor for complex sociolinguistic variation and recommends the incorporation of additional salient features in future research. This study expands the investigation to include liquid variation.

Liquid variation and coda /s/ are Labovian stereotypes, representing highly socially aware features with systematic variation, distinct variants, phonetic differences, and a role in maintaining phonological contrast. *Liquid variation*, including laterals and rhotics, is the main focus, exploring its distribution and intra-linguistic factors influencing its usage. The study also aims to determine whether there is covariation between *liquid variation* and the other variables.

This study addresses the question of whether non-salient and salient features exhibit different patterns. The prediction is that low saliency features show contact-induced structural convergence, while salient features are treated differently by speakers, with their indexical potential amplified by saliency.

My objectives include examining distribution patterns and intra-linguistic factors of *liquid variation* among Spanish speakers in the Greater Boston Area, as well as investigating its potential covariation with the other five variables. This study contributes to understanding variable linguistic coherence within Spanish dialectal variation, particularly in the context of dialectal and linguistic contact.

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 adults arrivals (David & Pascal) on the far right column. This is consistent to [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. In other words, these features demonstrate a tendency towards persistence rather than convergence in the context of dialectal and linguistic contact driven by their saliency. These results emphasize the importance of considering saliency and covariation in sociolinguistic research to advance our understanding of variable linguistic coherence in dialectal and linguistic contact contexts.

- [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).

Figures

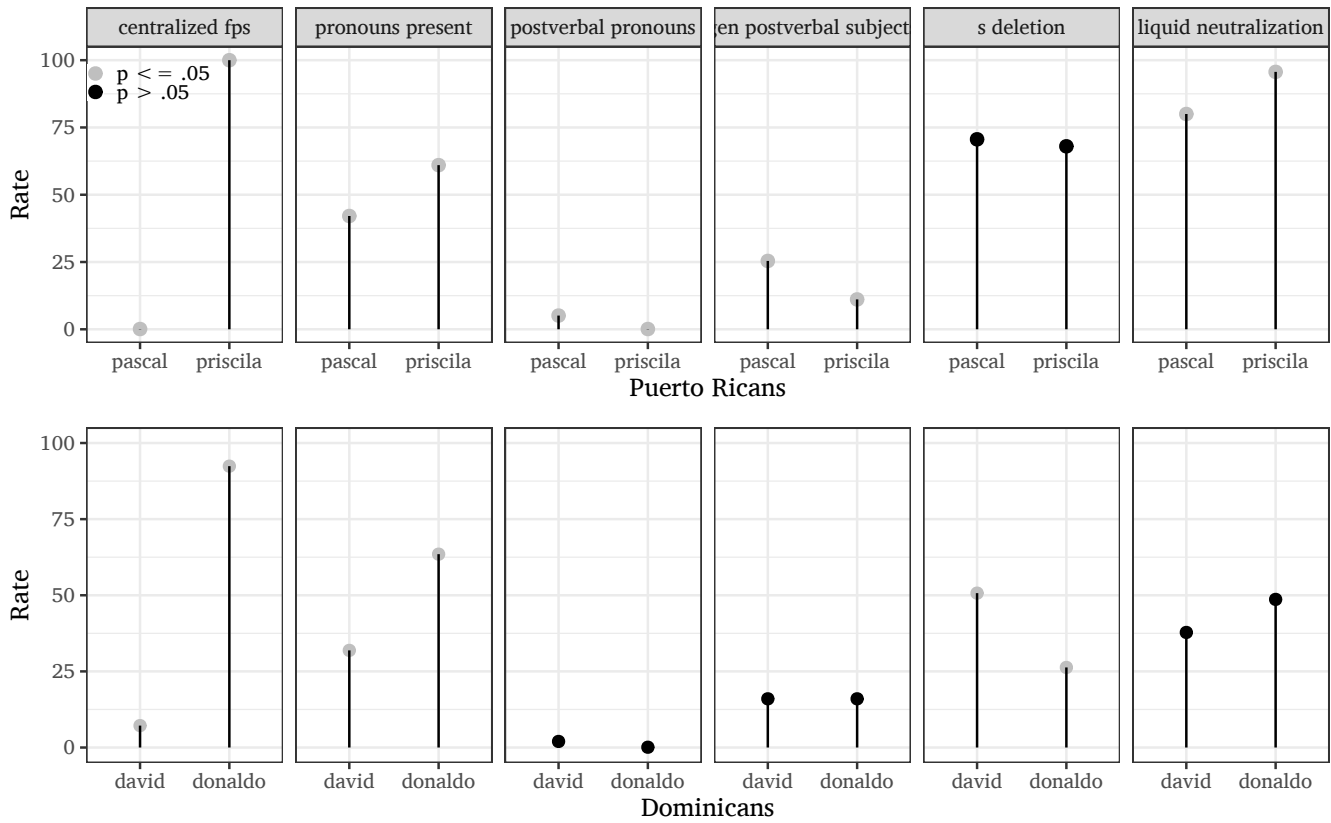


Figure 1: Comparisons of the rates of use of six linguistic variables among Adult and Child Arrival Spanish Speakers from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic