

## How Salience Influences Dialectal Persistence and Covariation: Insights from Boston's Spanish-Speaking Community

Recent sociolinguistic research has shifted towards examining the relationship between multiple variables, emphasizing the concepts of *covariation* – the statistical relationships between multiple variables – and *coherence*, where linguistic features systematically align within a speech community such that the use of variable X aligns with the use of variable Y (Guy 2013; Guy and Hinskens 2016; Cole 2020). This study investigates the themes of covariation and coherence within the Spanish-speaking community of Greater Boston, focusing on six variable features: coda /s/, liquids, filled pauses (FPs), subject pronouns (SPPs), pronoun placement, and general subject placement. While all six variables are sites of structured variability in Spanish, the first two are much more prominent in folk linguistic awareness than the latter four, which are less socially salient. We hypothesize that this difference in salience bears on the extent to which the variables covary.

This study analyzes 25172 tokens. The data comes from Spanish sociolinguistic interviews with 22 speakers (ages 18 to 73) from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. Additionally, the speakers completed a questionnaire providing demographic, social, and linguistic background information. The methodology utilizes multivariate regression analyses to understand the linguistic, acoustic, social, and language contact variables influencing variation.

The findings indicate that less salient variables tend to exhibit more covariation, forming cohesive patterns of variation through structural convergence with grammatical norms of English, whereas highly salient features, such as coda /s/ and liquid variation, show more independent trajectories. This pattern aligns with previous research by Oushiro and Guy (2015) and Erker (2022), which found covariation among low-salience features while the salient features remained independent. This distinction underscores the role of salience in linguistic variation and highlights the influence of speakers' awareness and metalinguistic commentary on their treatment of certain features.

Structural pressure towards convergence with English affects less salient features, as in Figure 1, where higher Percent Life in the US correlates with increased use of centralized FPs, pronouns, preverbal pronouns and preverbal general subjects. In contrast, the highly salient features coda /s/ and liquid variation do not follow these patterns. If these features converged with English, we would expect a downward slope for both coda /s/ weakening (less weakening) and liquid variation (less variation). In other words, in the context of dialectal and linguistic contact, these features demonstrate a tendency towards persistence rather than convergence driven by their salience.

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of covariation and coherence by demonstrating that these concepts are only part of a more complex picture. By bridging individual variable studies and broader sociolinguistic patterns, this research provides valuable insights into the complexity of language variation in a multilingual urban environment. It also offers empirical evidence on the sociolinguistic dynamics of a community characterized by language and dialect contact. By examining a range of sociolinguistic variables that vary in their salience, we can better understand the role of salience in the tendency towards convergence versus persistence.

# Bibliography

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## Figures

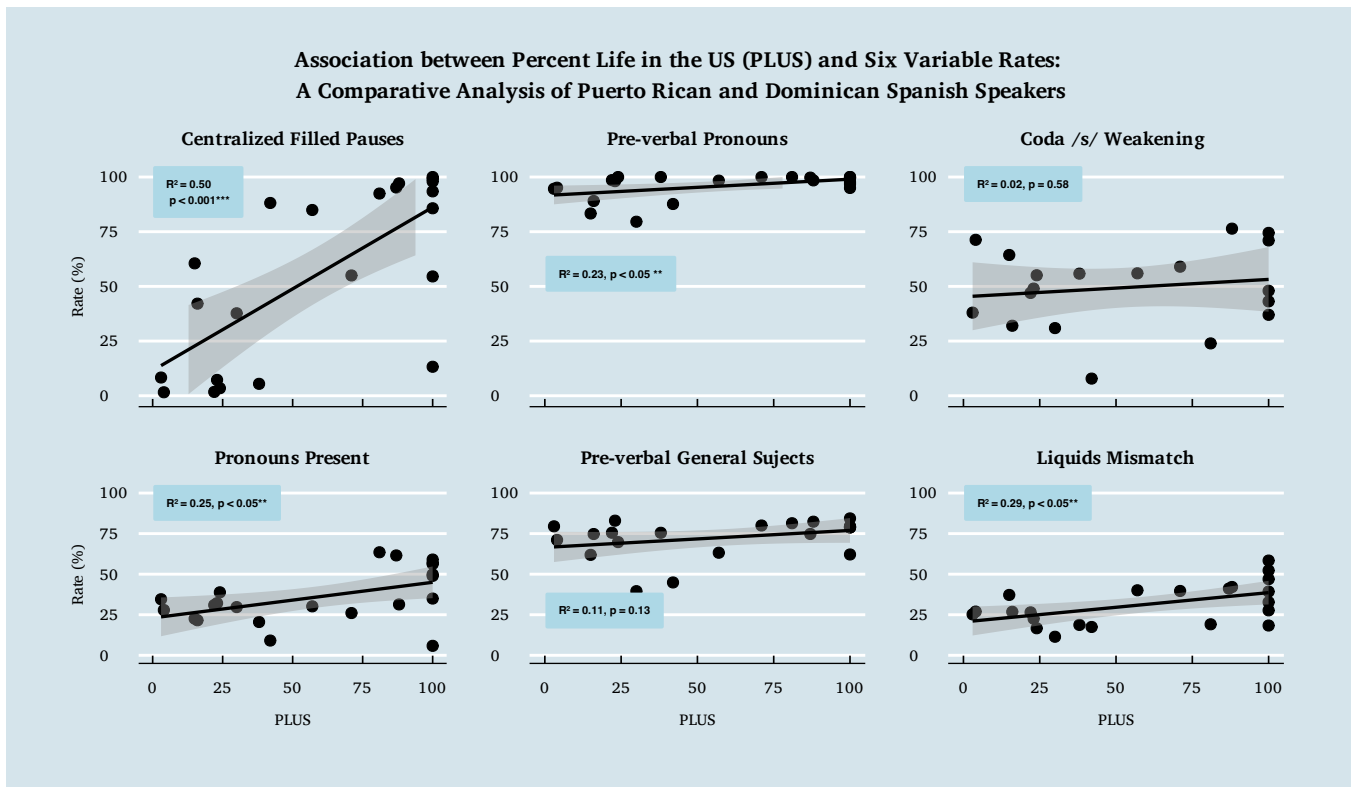


Figure 1: