

# Variation and change in Latin American Spanish and Portuguese

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*Fieldworker:* ¿Que Ud. considera ‘buen español’?  
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Western hemisphere varieties of Spanish and Portuguese show substantial similarity in the patterning of sociolinguistic variation and change. Caribbean and coastal dialects of Latin American Spanish share several variables with Brazilian Portuguese (e.g., deletion of coda *-s*, *-r*). These variables also show similar social distribution in Hispanic and Lusophone communities: formal styles and high status speakers are consonantly conservative, while higher deletion is associated with working class speakers and informal styles. The regions that show these sociolinguistic parallels also share common historical demographic characteristics, notably a significant population of African ancestry and the associated history of extensive contact with African languages into the 19th C. But contemporary changes in progress are also active, further differentiating Latin American language varieties.

**Keywords:** Brazilian Portuguese, Latin American Spanish, coda deletion, variation and change.

## 1. Introduction

The Spanish and Portuguese languages have long been the objects of separate traditions of scholarship that treat each of them in isolation. But this traditional separation is more indicative of political distinctions – Spain and Portugal have been separate nation-states for almost a millennium – than of any marked linguistic differences. In fact, these two Iberian siblings exhibit extensive linguistic resemblance, as well as notably parallel and intertwined social histories in the Americas. As this volume attests, these languages may very fruitfully be examined together, and such a joint and comparative approach permits broader generalizations and deeper insights than may be obtained by considering each of them separately.

This is especially true when we examine the issues and the variables that are prominent in sociolinguistic and dialectological research on Latin American Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese. For both languages, the differences between peninsular and American varieties, the regional differentiation within the Americas, and the social differentiation in the speech of persons of different social status, all show remarkable parallels in the patterning of variability as well as the specific linguistic features involved. In the phonology, both languages show socio-dialectological variability in the treatment of coda consonants, especially lenition of final /s/ and /r/; both show innovative morphological variability in number marking and agreement; and both exhibit other commonalities such as the patterning of pro-drop and of negative constructions. Parallels are also evident in the potential explanations that have been proposed for why these features are present and why they pattern as they do. This chapter will describe some of the common patterns of variation and change in Latin American Spanish and Portuguese, and suggest some common explanation for these patterns in terms of shared social history.

## 2. Dialect regions in Latin American Spanish

Spanish and Portuguese in the Americas are both characterized by significant dialectal differentiation, but the dialect differences in Hispanic America are perhaps more pronounced, and need to be appreciated in order to understand the parallels with Brazilian Portuguese. Scholars such as Zamora and Guitart (1982), Lipski (1994), and others have distinguished several major regions of American Spanish. First, both in time and in degree of divergence from its peninsular origins, is the Hispanic Caribbean. The Spanish dialects of the Antilles (Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic), as well as the dialects spoken along the Caribbean coastlines of Mexico, Panama, Colombia, and Venezuela, share a number of distinctive characteristics. Phonologically, they have several mergers of phonemes that are distinguished in peninsular Castilian Spanish, such as 'yeísmo' (merger of the palatal lateral with the palatal glide), and 'seseo' (merger of the Castilian interdental fricative with the apical fricative /s/). But these traits are shared with most American dialects of Spanish; more distinctively associated with Caribbean Spanish (CS) are a set of consonantal lenitions, mainly involving coda consonants. Spanish has a limited inventory of possible consonants in word-final position – mainly the alveolars and dentals [l,n,r,d,s]. All of these have variable realizations in CS, involving deletion or some form of lenition. Thus coda /r/ has a number of variable realizations, differing somewhat from place to place: it is often deleted, especially in verbal infinitives (e.g., *hablá, comé*), and in some dialects may be merged with /l/, or realized as a palatal glide; /d/ is similarly deleted (e.g., *verdá*); /n/ is often velarized, and is occasionally deleted, sometimes leaving a nasal feature on the preceding vowel. Coda /s/ has the most notorious range of lenited realizations, including glottal articulations (/h/ and glottal stop), and complete deletion (e.g., *estamos ~ ehtamoh ~ e?tamo*

~ *etamo*). This is an iconic variable in the Spanish-speaking world, with a popular term to describe it: 'eating the /s/.'

In the domain of morphosyntax, many Caribbean Spanish (CS) speakers also exhibit variable number agreement, in marked contrast to the historical Spanish norm, going back at least to Latin, of categorical, obligatory agreement across the noun phrase. Thus a CS speaker will vary between utterances like (1a) and (1b), or (2a) and (2b).

- (1) a. las niñas bonitas            'the pretty girls'  
       b. las niña bonita
- (2) a. mis amigos                 'my friends'  
       b. mis amigo

Given the phonological variation just mentioned, it is therefore reasonable to inquire whether this represents mere phonological reduction of the plural markers, which happen to consist of a coda /s/, or is this genuine morphosyntactic variability. The distribution of absent markers strongly suggests the latter. As the examples indicate, realized markers are very likely to occur in the first word of a noun phrase (often a determiner), and become progressively less likely in later words (cf. Cedergren, 1973; Poplack, 1979; *inter alia*). Since phonological processes are, in most theories of grammar, insensitive to syntactic structure (except insofar as that is encoded in prosodic structure, which is not the case here), this indicates that there is a morphosyntactic process at work here: number agreement is variable, not obligatory, in CS.

CS is also characterized by other commonalities, such as disuse of the second person pronoun *vos*, and general realization of the Castilian velar fricative [x] as the glottal fricative [h] (e.g., *gente* 'people' [hente] instead of [xente]). But the constellation of features described above – coda consonant lenitions and deletions, and variable number agreement in the noun phrase, form a distinctive cluster which are also found in some other varieties of Latin American Spanish, and, strikingly, have close parallels in Brazilian Portuguese.

The CS features just described are notable by their almost complete absence in two other major dialect regions of American Spanish: Mexico, and the Andean highlands. Aside from the coastline along the Gulf of Mexico, Mexican Spanish is consonantly quite conservative, generally articulating the coda consonants without any of the Caribbean lenitions. Mexican speakers do not 'eat their esses' (Zamora Munné & Guitart, 1982). Neither do they omit number markers in plural NPs. And the same is true in the highlands regions of South America, extending along the Andean cordillera from Bogotá in Colombia, southwards through Quito (in Ecuador), Cuzco (in Peru), to La Paz (in Bolivia), and onward into the northwestern corner of Argentina (Zamora Munné & Guitart, 1982). The whole Andean region is consonantly conservative, and preserves number agreement. This region does show some internal differentiation; for example, *vos* is used (as a 2sg pronoun) in some of the South American highlands, but is unknown in most of Mexico, and the velar fricative is preserved in Mexican Spanish and the southern Andean region, but has changed to the glottal

fricative fairly generally in Colombia (Zamora Munné & Guitart, 1982). There are also substantial local differences in lexicon, notably in borrowings from indigenous languages. But Mexican Spanish (except for its Caribbean coastline) and the Andean dialects systematically lack the Caribbean characteristics sketched above.

There are three other major dialectal regions of Latin America remaining to be considered: Central America, the Pacific Coast of South America (including the coastline of Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Chile), and the countries of the Rio de la Plata basin (Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay). These areas largely share the Caribbean complex that we have identified, with lenitions or deletions of coda consonants, and variable number marking. They are distinguished on several other characteristics (for example, both Central American and Rio Platense dialects use *vos* as a common second person singular term of address, while the Pacific coastal dialects of South America generally do not). They are also quantitatively different from the Caribbean region: rates of /s/ lenition and deletion, for example, are appreciably lower in Buenos Aires and Lima than in the Dominican Republic. But they stand in marked contradistinction to the Andean regions and Mexico by having the Caribbean complex of features at all.

Given these facts, it is therefore possible to identify two large divisions of Latin American Spanish, both discontinuous: those dialects that have to greater or lesser degree the Caribbean features (coda consonant reductions, and variable nominal agreement), which includes the circum-Caribbean dialects, Central America, plus coastal South America and the Rioplatense dialects, and those that do not have those features – the Mexican interior, and the Andean dialects. These divisions have been the subject of much attention and speculation in Hispanic dialectology. What explains this geographic distribution of linguistic features? We shall return to this question below, after considering sociolinguistic variation, and the Brazilian Portuguese parallels.

### 3. Social variation in Latin American Spanish and Portuguese

Latin America was, in most places for much of its history, a region of extremely high-income inequality and marked stratification of the population, contrasting a tiny upper class (traditionally the large landowners in many countries), and a modest middle class with a large peasantry and working class (in many countries, landless laborers or smallholders). Industrialization, development, democracy, the spread of mass literacy, and other contemporary social changes have done much to change this picture, but the linguistic face of this history of great inequality and extreme social stratification is still evident in the major differences between ‘standard’ varieties – socially favored and spoken by the educated elite – and the vernacular varieties of rural and urban working class speakers. Many readers will have personal experience of these differences; I will illustrate with my own experiences. I learned Spanish and Portuguese in North American classrooms and language laboratories, which, unsurprisingly, sought to teach the ‘standard’ and conveyed little or nothing about social diversity. The result was

that when I first visited Latin America, I found that I could communicate fairly well with the people at the universities I frequented and with my middle and upper class contacts and acquaintances, but when I conversed with ordinary people, I often found them nearly unintelligible. This was my experience with bus-drivers and market vendors in Guatemala, with *campesinos* in the Dominican Republic, with doormen and house-cleaners in Brazil, and with asking people in the street for directions in Paraguay and Venezuela. In one memorable incident in Caracas, I asked a man who was waiting with me at a bus-stop how much the bus fare was; his answer was [dobolía]. I was unable to parse this and, repeated the question and he repeated the same answer. When the bus arrived, it turned out that the fare came to *dos bolívares*, from which my informant's dialect had, in true Caribbean fashion, omitted number agreement in the second word, deleted final /s/ and /r/, and for good measure, deleted intervocalic /b/ (orthographic v).

As this example illustrates, the Caribbean traits that we have identified are included among the major linguistic variables that are implicated in the social stratification of Spanish in Latin America. In every country where they occur, deletion of final /s,n,r,l/, absence of agreement, and other forms of consonant lenition are all found far more often in the speech of working class and rural peasants and much less frequently in the speech of upper class and educated speakers. For example, in the Dominican Republic, Alba (1990) finds that speakers in Santiago with a university education delete non-morphemic coda /s/ at a rate of 40%, while speakers with no more than primary education show 88% deletion. Cedergren's detailed study of Panamanian Spanish (1973) shows this stratification in a large community study, with upper class speakers deleting /s/ at a rate of 27%, the middle classes at 57%, and the working class at 68% (see Table 1).

Table 1 also illustrates the failure of number agreement, in the figures for /s/ absence in determiners and nouns. The omitted /s/ in such words present an analytical problem: they could be deleted by a phonological process, or they could be absent because of non-agreement. But the aggregate difference in rates of /s/ absence between determiners, which are usually NP-initial, and nouns, which are usually NP-medial or final, is strong evidence for the involvement of a morphosyntactic process: plural markers are inserted at the beginning of a noun phrase, and subsequent 'agreement' – that is, copying of the plural feature across the NP – is variable; indeed, these data

**Table 1.** Final /s/ absence in Panamanian Spanish (from Cedergren 1973).

| Social Class      | All words |          | Determiners |          | Nouns |          |
|-------------------|-----------|----------|-------------|----------|-------|----------|
|                   | N         | % absent | N           | % absent | N     | % absent |
| upper (I)         | 613       | 26.8     | 132         | 14.4     | 150   | 38.7     |
| middle (II & III) | 4923      | 57.4     | 781         | 42.3     | 1292  | 68.0     |
| lower (IV)        | 3068      | 67.8     | 466         | 51.5     | 860   | 76.4     |

**Table 2.** Vocalization and deletion of final /l/ and /r/ in Dominican Spanish (from Alba 1990).

| Speaker's educational level | /l/ |                        | /r/ |                        |
|-----------------------------|-----|------------------------|-----|------------------------|
|                             | N   | % vocalized or deleted | N   | % vocalized or deleted |
| university                  | 271 | 1                      | 121 | 7                      |
| secondary                   | 592 | 14                     | 368 | 25                     |
| primary or none             | 356 | 68                     | 145 | 70                     |

suggest that non-agreement in nouns occurs at a fairly regular rate of about 25% among these Panamanian speakers.

The social stratification of coda /l/ and /r/ is even more pronounced in Dominican Spanish, with greater polarization between high and low status speakers. The figures from Alba, 1990 for word-final, non-morphemic /l/ and /r/ are shown in Table 2 (aggregating tokens of complete deletion with those showing vocalization, i.e., realization as /i/). His highest status speakers (here classified by educational level), show these forms of lenition very rarely for /r/ and almost never for /l/, while his lowest status speakers lenite more than two-thirds of all coda liquids.

The patterns of social stratification and variability illustrated in Tables 1–2 for coda /s,l,r/ recur throughout the regions where the Caribbean complex of linguistic features is found, for all the variables we have discussed, as numerous studies attest (cf. for example, Poplack 1979, 1980, López Morales 1983 and Holmquist 2011 for Puerto Rican Spanish, Hoffman 2004 for Salvadoran Spanish, Terrell 1979 for Cuban Spanish). The appropriate generalizations that can be gleaned from such studies are:

1. Coda consonant lenition and number agreement are linguistic variables in these regions.
2. Rates of occurrence of the variants are socially stratified: higher status speakers use more of the higher status variants.
3. The variables are subject to regular linguistic conditioning (i.e., their realizations are affected by linguistic contexts and constraints, as in the differential rates of /s/ absence in determiners and nouns); these linguistic constraints are generally consistent in all dialects that have been studied; thus, for example, there is no dialect of Spanish reported that retains more plural markers on nouns, while omitting them in the determiners.

In Brazil, similar patterns of social stratification obtain for all the major sociolinguistic variables of Portuguese. Absence of plural marking, for example is widespread for working class speakers and those with lower educational levels, but rare among the educated elite; it is also stylistically stratified, i.e., avoided in formal styles, more frequent in casual registers. Other locally stigmatized variants also predominate among those of lower social status. Table 3 shows data from São Paulo that illustrates this

**Table 3.** Social stratification of number agreement and retroflex /r/ in São Paulo Portuguese (from Oushiro, to appear, Oushiro & Mendes, 2013).

| Speaker's educational level | plural marking |          | retroflexion of /r/ |             |
|-----------------------------|----------------|----------|---------------------|-------------|
|                             | N              | % absent | N                   | % retroflex |
| university                  | 17,428         | 4.0      | 4098                | 23.8        |
| secondary                   | 12,736         | 13.8     | 3435                | 39.0        |

point, drawn from current work by Oushiro on variable number agreement (Oushiro, to appear) and the occurrence of retroflex articulations of /r/ (Oushiro & Mendes, 2013). The rate of use of the low-prestige variants by speakers with no more than a high school education is more than triple the rate of use by speakers with the highest educational levels in the syntactic case (absence of number agreement), and almost double in the case of the phonological variable.

Other aspects of social diversity are also reflected in the speech of Latin Americans. Urban/rural differences are prominent in many countries, typically associated with stigmatization of the rural variants. Thus in Peru, Klee and Caravedo (2006) report that speakers from the interior who emigrate to Lima encounter are stigmatized for their use of features like assibilated /r/ and *leísmo* (nonstandard accusative use of *le*), and experience pressure to assimilate to *limeño* Spanish. Also, as in all human societies, gender differences in language use are encountered: thus in the Puerto Rican community studied by Holmquist (2011), for example, male speakers consistently use modestly higher rates of /s/ deletion than females, across age groups, occupational groups, and different speech styles. Similarly, in Rio de Janeiro (Guy 1981), male speakers are considerably more likely than females to use denasalized pronunciations of unstressed final vowels that are nasal in standard Portuguese (e.g. [oxfa] for *orfã* 'orphan, fem.'). In São Paulo, Oushiro (to appear) finds men using more retroflex /r/, and omitting more nominal plural markers than women. This is consistent with the gendered patterns of sociolinguistic variation typically reported in other societies: women tend to use more of a prestige variant than men, when other social variables are controlled for.

Ethnic differences are prominent in many places in Latin America, especially where ongoing language contact is involved between Spanish monolinguals and speakers of indigenous languages. Thus in Guatemala, the most important local ethnic division contrasts *ladinos* (people of European origin or cultural identity), who are usually monolingual Spanish speakers, and people who have an indigenous ethnic identity, most of whom speak some Mayan language in addition to, or instead of, Spanish. Other significant ethnic distinctions reflect recent or ongoing immigration. Thus distinctive linguistic traits are commonly attributed to Italian immigrants in Argentina (Whinnom, 1971), Uruguay (Barrios, 2008) and Southern Brazil (Roveda, 1997). In such language contact situations, the 'ethnic' features may reflect the influence of the

contact language on Spanish or Portuguese. For example, in some Andean regions where Quechua is spoken, local varieties of Spanish associated with speakers of indigenous ethnicity converge on the three-vowel system of Quechua, merging midvowels /e,o/ with the respective high vowels /i,u/ (Lipski 1994).

Another prominent ethnic division of the Latin American population consists of people of African ancestry, who constitute substantial minorities or even majorities in much of the Caribbean region and Brazil, and have been present to some degree throughout the entire hemisphere since the days of Columbus. This long history of Africans in the Americas has produced a complex set of linguistic outcomes. First, there are ample historical references to the distinctive speech of Africans in colonial times, for example, the *habla bozal* of African-born slaves in Cuba (and of Africans in Spain and Portugal; cf. Lipski, this volume). It is also clear that in some – perhaps many – countries, at certain points in history, creole languages emerged from the linguistic contact between Spanish and Portuguese speaking masters and enslaved Africans, just as happened in the erstwhile English and French empires. At least two of these have survived to the present day: Palenquero, spoken in Colombia (cf. Friedemann & Patiño 1983, Schwegler 2002), and Papiamentu, spoken in Aruba and Curaçao (cf. Sanchez 2005). The former involved Spanish as the lexifier language, while the latter likely had significant input from Portuguese. But in contemporary Latin America, the vast majority of people of African descent speak neither a creole nor an African language as their L1; rather, they are native speakers of what are generally considered varieties Spanish and Portuguese. So the question is, are their varieties ethnically distinctive; do we encounter linguistic features typically associated with speakers of color, analogous to African American English in the United States? In most of Latin America, this is not generally the case. There are some exceptions, such as Afro-Bolivian Spanish (cf. Lipski 2008), spoken by people of African ancestry in the Yungas, the steep valleys on the eastern slopes of the Andes, and the quilombola varieties of Portuguese spoken in maroon and ex-slave communities in Brazil (cf. Lucchesi, Baxter & Ribeiro 2009). But broadly speaking, the linguistic characteristics of Latin Americans of color are more clearly associated with their social class and educational background than with their skin tone or physical features. Of course, as elsewhere in the Americas, race and class are correlated: black people are overrepresented among the poor, and underrepresented among the elite. Consequently, many black Brazilians, Cubans, and Dominicans use all the nonstandard features we have identified to a very high degree. But social class (reflected by the usual indicators, such as education, occupation, and income) is generally a better predictor of how someone speaks than race.

In part this state of affairs reflects the history and social construction of race in Latin America. In those countries with significant populations of African descent, race is not typically constructed as a simple binary opposition between black and white; rather, racial identity is seen as a multinomial or continuous function. Thus Brazilians, for example, have scores of words to describe different combinations of physical appearances and racial ancestries. This nuanced perspective is also evident in the social



history: in colonial times, persons of mixed race often occupied intermediate social positions between Europeans and Africans. Long before slavery was abolished, there were substantial populations of free people of color in Brazil and the Caribbean. The binary segregation practiced in the United States, dividing whites from non-whites in schools, housing, and public services, had little equivalent in Latin America. Consequently, the conditions of sociolinguistic segregation of people of color under which African American English arose were uncommon in Latin America. Historically, most black people may have been poor and uneducated, and had very little contact with elite speakers, but they were not segregated from other poor people.

#### 4. Parallels between Spanish and Portuguese

If one views Latin America from a sociolinguistic perspective, the division between Lusophone and Hispanophone regions is not necessarily the most useful approach to partitioning and understanding the hemisphere. The twenty Spanish-speaking countries are, as we have seen, starkly differentiated both with respect to dialectal characteristics and socio-demographic properties. Sociolinguistically, some of them have more in common with Brazil than they do with other corners of Hispanic America. Specifically, this is true of the Hispanic Caribbean region. The linguistic characteristics associated with CS, although absent in Mexican and Andean Spanish, have unusually close parallels in Brazilian Portuguese (cf. Guy 1981, Holm 2003). The sociolinguistic distribution and evaluation of the variables is also very similar in CS and BP: the same variants are stigmatized and similar patterns of social stratification appear. And the socio-demographic and ethnographic characteristics of the populations in these two regions are also quite similar, but different from Mexico and the Andean region: small indigenous populations but large populations of African descent.

Among the linguistic parallels, consider first the set of coda consonant reductions: all possible coda consonants in Spanish are subject to some kind of lenition or deletion in CS. Although the inventory of coda consonants in Portuguese is smaller than in Spanish, in BP they are all subject to lenition or deletion processes comparable to those in CS.

Coda /s/ has a variety of phonetic realizations in Portuguese (e.g., apical or palatal, voiced or voiceless), depending on dialect and phonological context, but in any of its realizations it is frequently deleted in Brazil. Hence one encounters alternations like *menos* ~ *meno*, *mesmo* ~ *memo*, *falamos* ~ *falamo*. The ‘aspirated’ alternant (realization as [h]) which is common in CS also occurs in BP, but less frequently: whereas Terrell (1979) reports Cuban speakers using over 60% of [h] realizations for coda /s/, Guy (1981) finds less than 10%, mainly in the context of a following nasal or sonorant – e.g., *mesmo* [mehmu] (cf. also Erker, 2012; Ferreira, 2001; Mason, 1994). Coda /r/ also has a variety of dialectal realizations (e.g., tap, retroflex, or velar fricative), but as with /s/, it is variably deleted, yielding alternations like *falar* ~ *falá*, *mulher* ~ *mulhê*, *revólver*

~ *revólvi*. Coda /l/ is realized by most Brazilians as a rounded glide [w], rather than with a consonantal lateral articulation; hence it resembles the vocalization of /l/ encountered in Dominican Spanish, but with a different phonetic outcome. In Brazil, *mal* ‘badly (adv.)’ is generally homophonous with *mau* ‘bad (masc., adj.)’, whereas for some Dominicans it rhymes with *hay*.

The other coda consonants that occur in Spanish, /d/ and /n/, do not occur as segmental codas in Portuguese. Words that have final /d/ in Spanish usually show a final epenthetic /e/ or /i/ in the Portuguese cognate, (e.g., *ciudad* – *cidade*, *mitad* – *mitade*). Consequently, the /d/ in the Portuguese words occurs in a syllabic onset, and hence does not fall within the scope of coda reduction processes. Spanish final /n/, however, typically corresponds to a nasal feature on the vowel or diphthong of the final syllable: Spanish *San*, *buen* are cognate with Portuguese *São* [sãw], *bom* [bõ]. But despite not constituting segmental codas, these final nasal elements undergo a variable ‘reduction’ process in Brazilian Portuguese involving loss of the nasal feature. Hence final nasal vowels and diphthongs are variably realized as oral: [ome~omi] for *homem* and [oxfa] for *orfã*. Therefore, the Brazilian Portuguese process results in a simplification of heavy syllable rimes toward simple vowel-final surface forms that is analogous to the lenition and deletion of /-n/ in Spanish.

With respect to number agreement, the pattern of variability that we have seen for Spanish is strongly present in Brazilian Portuguese. Parallel to the Spanish constructions illustrated in (1) and (2) above, we find in BP utterances like (3) and (4), lacking agreement.

- (3) as menina bonita            ‘the pretty girls’  
 (4) meus amigo                 ‘my friends’

As examples (3) and (4) indicate, the initial word in a plural NP is overwhelmingly likely to bear an overt plural marker, but agreement marking is often absent in later positions in the phrase. This is illustrated in Table 4 with data from two corpora that access very different populations from different periods: a corpus of illiterate speakers in Rio, recorded in the 1970s, at a time when social inequality in Brazil was extremely high (from Guy 1981), and a broader cross-section of a better educated population recorded in São Paulo since 2010 (Mendes & Oushiro, 2012; Oushiro, to appear).

**Table 4.** Plural marker absence in Brazilian Portuguese by word position in the NP.

| Position in NP: | Rio, 1970s |                  | São Paulo, 2010s |                  |
|-----------------|------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
|                 | N          | % marker absence | N                | % marker absence |
| first           | 5247       | 5                | 12727            | 0.1              |
| second          | 3947       | 72               | 14786            | 13.7             |
| third           | 552        | 79               | 2418             | 13.3             |

It will be noted that the position effect in Portuguese appears to be stronger than what we saw for Spanish in Table 1. Cedergren (1973) finds lower class Panamanians deleting plural markers from more than half of determiners, but the highest rate of plural marker omission in first position (most of them determiners) in BP shown in Table 4 does not exceed 5%. This difference is likely due to the distinctive morphology of Spanish. The masculine plural article *los* is distinctively plural even when its final /s/ deletes, but the Portuguese articles *o-os*, *a-as* are distinguished in the plural solely by the /s/ suffix.

Finally, the social stratification of these linguistic features also shows substantial parallels between Brazil and Hispanic America: deletion of final /s/ and /r/, denasalization of final vowels, and variable agreement are all socially stigmatized, and are socially stratified, occurring less often in the speech of higher status speakers. Prescriptive standard Brazilian Portuguese decries all of these processes. Nevertheless, the degree of stratification differs somewhat across this set of features. Deletion of final /r/ in verbal infinitives is widespread, even for high-status speakers, but deletion of /r/ in other contexts is highly stigmatized. Deletion of /s/ is encountered in the informal speech of the middle class males, but avoided in formal styles. Absence of plural agreement is strongly avoided by speakers of the highest social status, as Oushiro's figures in Table 3 for university graduates showed. So although these features systematically receive negative social evaluations, only some of them have become prominent linguistic markers.

There are, of course, other linguistic characteristics besides those discussed here that show some parallelism across the language divide between Spanish and Portuguese. Two further morphosyntactic features are particularly noteworthy: variable occurrence of subject personal pronouns (also known as pro-drop), and sentential negation. The variable expression or omission of SPPs is a characteristic of virtually all dialects of Spanish and Portuguese, along with many other languages. But extensive research has documented that the rates of SPP expression vary considerably from region to region in the Luso-Hispanic world (cf. *inter alia*; Cameron, 1993; Otheguy & Zentella, 2012; Erker & Guy, 2012; Holmquist, 2012 for Spanish; and Tarallo, 1983; Duarte, 1993, 2003 for Brazilian Portuguese). In Spanish, the general observation is that the Caribbean basin varieties use appreciably higher rates of overt subject pronouns than do mainland varieties (e.g., Erker and Guy (2013) find 49% overt SPP usage for Dominicans, vs. only 22% for Mexicans.) But rates are much higher still in Brazilian Portuguese: Duarte (2003) reports mean rates of overt SPP expression of 80% among Brazilian speakers in Rio de Janeiro interviewed in 2000. Indeed, historical studies of Brazilian Portuguese show a steady rise in overt SPPs (i.e., a decline in pro-drop) over the last 150 years. Duarte (1993) shows rates of pronoun expression as low as 20–25% in the 19th century, followed by a steady rise across the 20th century.

Negation structures are generally similar in Spanish and Portuguese, but there is one unusual construction found in certain Latin American varieties of both languages, involving a doubled negator, typically one in preverbal position and another post-verbal or clause-final. Thus one encounters sentences like in (5) and (6) below:

- (5) No me gustó esto allá no. 'I didn't like that one there' (Schwegler, 1991a:95)  
 (6) Não suporto mentira não. 'I can't stand lies' (Reimann & Yacovenco, 2011:1)

In Brazil such double negations are found throughout most of the country, at modest rates (22% of all negative constructions in Reimann & Yacovenco, 2011; cf. also Roncarati, 1996). They are found in Hispanic America in the Caribbean (e.g., the Dominican Republic and the Caribbean coast of Colombia), and sporadically elsewhere. Notably, parallel structures are common in Spanish- and Portuguese-based creoles, such as Palenquero and São Tomense (Schwegler, 1991b; Ferraz, 1979), and are reported in *bozal* varieties of Spanish in Cuba and elsewhere.

These two features are not as socially stigmatized and stratified as coda weakening and non-agreement. Overt SPP use is the object of little or no social attention, and in Brazil the diachronic trend is towards ever-expanding rates of usage. Double negation attracts some social opprobrium in some places, but does not receive the level of either popular or puristic attention that the other features do.

## 5. Explanations

The facts presented above raise several questions of explanation. Why are the variables distributed as they are? Why do we find these variables and not others? Why do we find a set of features that are shared between Brazilian Portuguese and Caribbean Spanish, but not with other American dialects of Spanish? Where and when did these patterns of variability originate?

Historical and comparative linguistics provides three general explanations for linguistic similarity and difference between language varieties: ancestry, innovation, and contact. Thus two varieties that share a common feature may do so because (a) they descend from a common ancestral language or dialect, (b) both of them independently innovated this feature, or (c) one or both of them acquired the feature through language contact, either with each other or both with some other language. Likewise, two language varieties may differ because (a) they come from different linguistic ancestries, (b) one innovated something that the other did not, or both innovated in different directions, or (c) they had different histories of language contact and borrowing.

Let us consider the Latin American facts from this perspective. All of these potential explanations are relevant, and indeed, all have been invoked to account for some of the features we have mentioned. First, consider the Spanish-speaking regions: why do certain dialects of the Americas have what we have labeled the Caribbean complex of features (coda consonant reductions and variable number agreement), while others lack them? The ancestry explanation appeals to sources in Peninsular Spanish. It is well known that certain dialects of Castilian, notably those in the south, in Andalucía, have a number of the characteristics that are prominent in American Spanish, including *seseo* (the merger of the interdental and apico-alveolar fricatives of Northern Castilian

Spanish, so that *casa* ‘house’ is homophonous with *caza* ‘hunt’), the use of *ustedes* instead of *vosotros* as the second person plural pronoun, and *yeísmo* (the merger of the palatal lateral with the high front glide, so that *halla* ‘find’ is homophonous with *haya* ‘beech’). Lenition and deletion of coda /s/ is one such characteristic, as well as lenition of some other final consonants (cf. Samper Padilla 2011). Consequently, it is often proposed that the Caribbean features may be attributable to the settlement of these regions in the Americas by colonists from Andalucía. The areas that lack these features, notably the Mexican and Andean interiors, are then explained by settlement from northern Castile, where such coda consonants are rarely reduced.

However, this account of American Spanish dialect features is incomplete, and internally inconsistent. Notably, all of the Americas have *seseo* and the use of *ustedes*, suggesting that all of them must have had a considerable Andalusian presence among their founding populations. Why, then, do only some of them also have coda weakening? If Mexico and the Andean region had founding populations that included both Andalusian and northern Castilian speakers in significant numbers, then the ‘explanation’ offered by this theory amounts to what Dillard (1970) called the ‘cafeteria principle’: daughter dialects got to pick and choose from among the linguistic features of their ancestors.

Similar problems obtain for putative peninsular sources for the morphosyntactic features we have considered. Double negative constructions like those cited above are rare to nonexistent in Spain (although of course Spanish has regular negative concord with quantifiers and polarity items: e.g., *no conozco a nadie*, *no hay ningún caso*). Pro-drop is of course common, but SPP rates are low compared to those reported for the Caribbean. And crucially, Andalusian influence does not explain variable number agreement. The differential rates of plural marking illustrated in Table 1, where plural markers predominate early in an NP, and are less likely to occur towards the end, are not attested in Andalucía, or anywhere in Spain.

Peninsular origins are also lacking for the relevant variables in Portuguese. Coda lenition is not common in European Portuguese; indeed, with its stress timed prosody and associated vocalic reduction and apocope, spoken EP has a tendency to create additional new codas. With rare exceptions, number agreement is overwhelmingly present in EP, and double negation overwhelmingly absent. Rates of SPP expression are much lower in EP than BP.

Finally, from a Pan-American perspective, attributing Caribbean Spanish features to Andalusian sources fails to account for why the same features occur in Brazilian Portuguese. Andalusian Spaniards were certainly rare in the settlement of Brazil, and there are no significant peninsular sources in Portugal for these features. The linguistic similarities between Lusophone Brazil and Caribbean Spanish cannot therefore be attributed to shared ancestry in the ordinary sense, where a cluster of features come from a single common ancestor. Consequently, we may turn to the second general line of explanation: innovation.

Under this approach, the linguistic differences between the various American dialects of Spanish would be attributed to different patterns of innovation. Since Mexico and the Andes are, relatively speaking, more linguistically conservative, the innovative status would logically be attributed to the Caribbean complex. However, since the relevant features are discontinuously distributed in Latin America, occurring in disparate locations like the Caribbean, Brazil, and Rioplatense Spanish, they would presumably have to have been independently innovated in each different region. Given the remarkable parallelism we have already seen, it seems improbable that in each of these places, at approximately the same time, speakers spontaneously innovated all of these features without any common input to account for the similarities. Since the languages involved are very close relatives, with very similar linguistic structures, it might be argued that the particular innovations involved in CS and BP (coda lenition, loss of number agreement, double negation, etc.) were in some sense natural developments, easy to occur in those particular linguistic systems. However, such an account again provides no explanation for why these 'natural' changes occurred in certain particular dialects of Spanish and Portuguese but not others.

The most plausible account of the distribution of these distinctive sociolinguistic variables throughout the Americas therefore falls in the third general category of explanation: language contact. There occurred on a very large scale in much of Latin America a period of massive linguistic contact which affected both Spanish and Portuguese speaking territories, and is consistent with both the linguistic outcomes and the socio-demographic facts. I refer to the contact with African languages that occurred during the four centuries of the Atlantic slave trade (Ortiz Lopez, 1998; Lipski, 2005; Holm, 2009). Both Spain and Portugal relied very heavily on enslaved African labor to build the economies and secure their occupation of lands in the Americas. Africans and their descendants were the principle laborers in commercial agricultural production, such as sugar and cocoa plantations, in construction and mining, as longshoremen and porters in ports and transportations hubs, and in many other occupations, for much of the history of a large area of Latin America. The first generations of these laborers were native speakers of African languages, and acquired some variety of Spanish or Portuguese only under very adverse conditions for language acquisition, involving very limited contact with fluent native speakers of the target language. Throughout the world where such conditions have occurred, the linguistic effects of a population undergoing such abrupt language shift have always been extensive, yielding a variety spoken by the shifting population that reflects both substrate effects (impositions of features from their ancestral L1s on the language being acquired), and L2 learner strategies, such as reduction in morphological complexity and long-distance syntactic operations. This offers a reasonable and explanatory account of the social and geographic distribution of the variables we have been considering in Latin American Spanish and Portuguese.

The geographic distribution of the Caribbean complex of linguistic features is remarkably coincident with the historical and contemporary presence of Africans and

their descendants. The Caribbean region and Brazil both were major destinations of the Atlantic slave trade (Brazil alone absorbed some 40% of that traffic in human misery; Curtin, 1969), and both have substantial populations of people of African descent. Brazil and Cuba, for example, both had substantial black majorities – more than two-thirds of the population – at the end of the slave trade in the mid-19th century. Africans were also historically present along the Pacific coast of Spanish South America, and the Caribbean coasts of Venezuela, Colombia, and Central America. However, in those places where the relevant linguistic features (coda consonant reduction, variable number agreement, etc.) are absent, Africans were rare. Thus in the Mexican interior and the Andean highlands the Spaniards conquered populous indigenous empires and relied on those peoples as their labor force, making very little use of enslaved Africans. Strikingly, the lone sizable African-descended population in the Andes, the Afro-Bolivians described by Lipski (2008), have many of the CS linguistic traits.

The one apparent anomaly in this picture is Argentina, which today has a population of predominantly European ancestry. But in colonial times, Argentina had a large black population, comprising over 30% of the total population in the 1778 census (Wikipedia, 'Censo nacional'), with higher percentages in some areas. Curtin (1969) estimates that the Spanish territories in the Rioplatense region imported some 100,000 Africans during the course of the slave trade. Modern Argentine demography has been greatly altered by several events since independence: huge currents of immigration from Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries, emancipation and the early suppression of the slave trade, and high mortality among Afro-Argentines, as a result of their social marginalization, and other factors like the deployment of black soldiers in the Paraguayan war of 1865–1870, which saw appalling death tolls among the military forces of the Triple Alliance. (Brazil similarly made extensive use of black troops, who likewise perished in great numbers.)

Speakers of African languages were thus in the appropriate places in Latin America in numbers and social circumstances that would account for contact-induced change in Spanish and Portuguese, but what about the specific linguistic effects of the contact? Why coda reduction and variable number agreement? In the case of coda consonant reduction, a substrate effect is highly plausible. The West African languages that contributed substantial numbers of speakers to the Atlantic slave trade – mostly Bantu languages from Angola to Cameroon, and Kwa and other Niger-Congo languages from Nigeria to Senegal, are quite consistent in this feature of their phonology: they overwhelmingly prefer open syllables, and many lack coda consonants entirely (e.g. Kimbundu, KiKongo, Yoruba, Igbo; cf. Chatelaine, 1889:151; Bamgbose, 1966; Emenanjo, 1976). Consequently, the 'foreign accents' of the great majority of enslaved Africans who acquired Spanish or Portuguese would have involved coda reductions and deletions (as Lipski demonstrates in his paper in this volume). Variable number agreement, however, is more likely a residue of the 'interlanguage'. Making words agree in number across the NP requires attaching morphological inflections and spreading or copying syntactic features, precisely the sort of operations that adult L2 learners tend to avoid.

Locating plural markers at the beginning of NPs is a possible calque on West African syntax, where many languages have NP-initial number marking (including all Bantu languages as well as non-Bantu languages like Igbo and Yoruba; see references above.)

This account has the additional virtue of explaining the social stratification of coda weakening and variable agreement. In colonial society, social power and prestige was held by Spaniards and Portuguese, and later by their American-born, but white, descendants. Linguistic characteristics associated with blacks or indigenous peoples would have the same low social status of their speakers. Hence, still today, high status speakers use those features less, and ‘pronouncing the /s/’ is, for the Puerto Rican speaker quoted in our epigraph, the very definition of ‘good Spanish’. The association of race and class (the continuing overrepresentation of blacks among the poor and less educated) is a residue of this history, as is the concomitant overrepresentation of poor people and people of color among the users of these nonstandard features. Indeed, the uniformly ‘nonstandard’ status of the Caribbean features is itself evidence of their social origins. Spontaneous innovations that arise within the socially dominant population are not routinely stigmatized: such innovations often come to be used by speakers of all social classes, and hence incorporated into the standard variety – cf. for example, the uvular /r/ of modern French, the short-a split of Philadelphia English, and the *zheísmo* of Argentine Spanish, none of which are socially stratified or stigmatized, despite being relatively recent innovations. So the universal stigmatization of the Caribbean complex suggests their social origins in a marginal population, in this case, Africans and their descendants.

What about the other morphosyntactic parallels we have noted between CS and BP – double negation and high rates of SPP use? These are consistent with the hypothesis of African influence, but less clear. Double negation is attributed by authors like Schwegler (1991b) and Ferraz (1979) to a West African substrate: numerous West African languages, including those like KiKongo which contributed substantial numbers of speakers to the founding populations of Latin America, have this structure, with negative markers in both preverbal and clause final positions. But the historical emergence of negative reinforcement strategies in a variety of other languages (e.g. French *ne ... pas*) have been used to sustain alternative explanations for the Latin American facts.

The explanations for the observed patterns of pro-drop are also more controversial. The dominant tendency in language contact situations (especially the extreme case of pidgin/creole formation) is to lose inflection and gain or increase the use of overt free morphemes, which implies that the early African acquirers of Spanish and Portuguese in the Americas would likely have used relatively high rates of overt SPPs. But historical change from low to high rates of SPP expression (or from +pro-drop to –pro-drop) is attested in a number of languages, like French and English, that did not have the social histories of massive language shift among enslaved populations that characterized Brazil and the Hispanic Caribbean. The very high rates of overt subject pronouns in contemporary BP are indeed noteworthy, and deserving of explanation, but a full consideration is beyond the scope of the present work.



The well-documented history of language contact that Spanish and Portuguese experienced with African languages in the Americas thus offers a comprehensive and straightforward explanation for the particular features we have been considering. Are there any serious alternatives to this African-influenced account of these features? The principle line of argument that has been advanced in opposition to this account appeals to internal development, in which processes or structures found in Spanish or Portuguese before they were transported to the Americas are extended or expanded in the relevant American dialects. Naro & Scherre (2007) take this position with respect to Brazilian Portuguese, arguing that the Brazilian developments are a 'radicalization' of phenomena that were already incipient in EP; thus rarely occurring structures like zero plural marking EP were simply expanded dramatically in frequency of use in Brazil. In a similar fashion, absence of number agreement in both Spanish and Portuguese has been treated as a consequence of phonological reduction (Poplack 1980, 1982, 1984): variable deletion of coda *-s* and *-n* (and final vowel denasalization in Portuguese) could generate nonagreeing surface structures, while leaving the underlying syntactic agreement unchanged (e.g., coda *-n* deletion could convert underlying *Ellos hablan* to *Ellos habla*, and coda *-s* deletion could convert underlying *cinco amigos* to *cinco amigo*). Likewise, as we have noted, some of the Latin American changes (e.g., doubled negation, elevated rates of overt subject pronouns) have attested parallels in other languages which arose language-internally, without language contact.

Such accounts certainly offer alternative theoretical explanations for certain of the variables we have discussed, but on careful consideration, they are less plausible and more complicated than an explanation based on the manifest historical fact that the ancestors of many contemporary Latin Americans were millions of speakers of African languages who were forcibly obliged to make an abrupt language shift to using Spanish and Portuguese. Consider for example the 'radicalization' hypothesis of Naro and Scherre: this account does not explain why certain rare structures in EP get selected as prominent or dominant in BP, while the far more commonly occurring structures remain dominant in EP. Naro and Scherre ably document the *materia prima* out of which BP was constructed, but the contact explanation motivates the particular outcomes.

Similar problems arise with an internal development account of the constraints on variable number marking. The position constraint on nominal plural marking illustrated above in Tables 1 and 4 shows that Spanish and Portuguese both exhibit preferential occurrence of overt plural /s/ at the beginning of NPs. This is a manifestly syntactic constraint which is unmotivated, indeed unexpected, if variable plural marking originated in a purely phonological process of coda *-s* deletion. Similarly, variable subject verb agreement shows positional constraints (e.g. more agreement with preposed than post-posed subjects) which are unmotivated, and unexpected, if the source of the variation is coda *-n* deletion (or, in Portuguese, final vowel denasalization). So explaining such facts by internal development is both complicated, because it requires stipulating to additional independent innovations, and implausible, because those particular innovations are unmotivated.

The preponderance of evidence therefore leads us to conclude that contemporary varieties of Spanish and Portuguese in the Americas are best understood as the product of multiple linguistic inputs and social forces: their founding populations encompassed speakers of various dialects and languages from Iberia, who upon arriving in the Americas encountered indigenous language speakers, and in many locations, speakers of African languages. The social, political, and military power of the Europeans enabled them to impose Spanish and Portuguese on these other speakers, but the varieties that those 'others' acquired were affected by both the structures of their L1s and the adverse conditions of L2 acquisition. The Caribbean complex is one set of such effects, which is particularly striking because it spans the Spanish-Portuguese divide. But similar processes yielding other effects are found elsewhere in Latin America, such as the vocalic impact of Quechua on Andean Spanish mentioned above, and the Italian influence on *cocoliche* Spanish in Buenos Aires.

## 6. Ongoing change

Contact with other languages continues to be a driver of variation and change in some regions of contemporary Latin America, but the massive linguistic diversity of colonial times is now long past in many countries. So ongoing change in these locations now involves other kinds of motivations. One widespread process is increasing standardization, which has the effect of compressing social stratification, and reducing rates of occurrence of nonstandard features. This is being driven by factors such as industrialization and urbanization (cf. Klee and Caravedo, 2006 for Lima), improvements in literacy and schooling, migration from the countryside to the cities, etc. The figures presented above for variable nominal plural marking in Brazil illustrate this point: illiterate speakers in the 1970s omitted plural markers in three-quarters of words that are non-initial in a noun phrase, but forty years later, a set of speakers with high school or college educations in Brazil's richest and best-educated city, São Paulo, omit plural markers in just 13% of comparable words. The effect of schooling and media exposure in this spreading standardization is demonstrated by Naro & Scherre (2003), using a panel study of Rio de Janeiro speakers interviewed in the 1980s and re-interviewed around 2000. Subjects who had obtained additional years of schooling in the intervening years increased their rates of plural marking by an average of 25 percentage points in noun phrases, and by 22 percentage points in verbs. Subjects who had no additional schooling also increased their use of standard plural markers, but only by half as much. Guy & Zilles (2008) document this process across several variables and communities in Brazil, and studies of non-standard varieties throughout Hispanic America reflect similar tendencies.

But convergence on a static norm is hardly the only story in contemporary Latin American linguistics. Spontaneous innovations are occurring in many locations, involving a variety of linguistic phenomena. One notable development of the last

half-century in Brazilian Portuguese has been the triumphant emergence of a new pronoun – which cross-linguistically, is a rare occurrence. The noun phrase *a gente* ‘the people’ has been grammaticalized and lexicalized in the meaning ‘we’, and is on the verge of driving out the old pronoun *nós*, which dates back to Latin (cf. Zilles, 2005). Spanish and Portuguese had similar developments in the 14th–16th centuries when the second person pronouns *usted* and *você* grammaticalized from NPs (*vuestra merced*, *vossa mercê*) meaning ‘your grace’. But the speed of the spread of *a gente* in late 20th century Brazilian Portuguese is impressive.

Argentine Spanish has a similarly rapid change underway to its palatal fricative. This fricative likely arose before the 20th century, as a fortition of the palatal glide (itself a product of the *yeísmo* merger). This is the distinctive Rioplatense feature known as *zheísmo* (although it varies somewhat in detail across Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay). Until approximately the mid-20th century, this fricative was voiced, but in the last half century it has begun to devoice, making it more consistent with the other Spanish fricatives, /f,s,x/. While such a change may have paradigmatic motivations, it nevertheless appears to have emerged spontaneously within the Buenos Aires speech community (cf. Donni de Mirande, 1992; Rohena-Madrado, 2011).

## 7. Conclusions

The inventory of sociolinguistic and dialectal variables in Latin American Spanish and Portuguese extends, of course, far beyond the few cases we have had space to address in this chapter, in phonology (e.g., vocalic changes and reductions, prosody and timing) as well as morphosyntax (e.g. variable use of verbal forms, use of object marking, expressions of futurity and possession, etc.) The focus here has been on broad currents and general tendencies: consistent patterns of social distribution, historical sources of the regional distribution of linguistic features, and ongoing sources of change and innovation. The commonalities encountered in the sociolinguistics of Latin America are profound, and transcend the division between Spanish and Portuguese. These languages have been transformed by the half-millennium of new social forces and new speakers that they have passed through in the Americas, and these transformations are best understood from a pan-Latin American perspective.

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