

## Seville Pronunciation: The Phonetics and Phonology of 'Aspirated S'

Herbert J. Izzo  
Department of Linguistics  
University of Calgary

It is generally assumed that the phonology of Andalusian (and therefore of Sevillian) Spanish is readily derivable from that of standard Castilian by the application of a few simple rules:<sup>1</sup>

- (1) the distinction between /s/ and /θ/ is lost: /θ/ → /s/ 'seseo'  
's-using' or, in part of the region, /s/ → /θ/ 'ceceo', 'θ-using';
- (2) the distinction between /y/ and /ʎ/ is lost: /ʎ/ → /y/;
- (3) final /s/ is 'aspirated': /s/ → /h/ / \_\_ [+cons]  
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My investigations in the Province of Seville, carried out in 1981 and 1983, have shown not only that the above rules are oversimplifications, but also that there are additional differences that cannot be accounted for by strictly phonological rules.

As a basis of comparison, so that it can be seen how deviant the consonant system of Seville Spanish really is, I should like to review briefly the consonants of Standard Spanish, i.e., the upper-class urban speech of Old and New Castile.<sup>2</sup>

Standard Spanish has three voiceless stops: /p, t, k/, which are normally unaspirated. /t/ is dental or interdental, not alveolar. The point of articulation of /k/ varies, like the /k/ of English, German and many other languages, according to the following vowel. /p, t, k/ occur initially, between vowels, after liquids, after /s/, /θ/, and after nasals, but not in the same syllable. They do not occur word-finally or syllable-finally. They are in tautosyllabic clusters only with /l/ and /r/. There is one voiceless affricate /tʃ/, which is usually not considered to be in the same set with /p, t, k/ though its distribution is similar, the only difference being that /tʃ/ does not form clusters with /l/ and /r/.

Corresponding in point of articulation to the voiceless stops are /b, d, g/, voiced fricatives with stop allophones. The stop allophones occur only

after silence and after nasals. It is customary to consider the stop allophones primary, but in reality, the fricative allophones have less restricted distribution, and in connected speech (as contrasted with citation forms) the fricative allophones occur more than four times as frequently as the stops.

Slightly different from /b, d, g/ are two other voiced fricatives that are sometimes mistakenly treated as semivowels. The palatal /y/ and the labiovelar /w/ are regularly stops ([j] and [g<sup>w</sup>]) only after nasals. Utterance-initially they may be either fricative or occlusive. /y/ is roughly to /ç/ as /b, d, g/ are to /p, t, k/, but /w/ has no voiceless counterpart. English-speaking linguists often consider /y/ and /w/ to be the same as the non-syllabic /i/ and /u/ of the diphthongs in bien and puerta, which I believe is erroneous.<sup>3</sup>

There are three nasals, which contrast word-initially and between vowels. They occur after /s, θ, l, r/ of a preceding syllable, and before all consonants, but assimilate completely to the point of articulation of a following consonant so that there is no contrast among nasals in syllable-final position. Word boundaries are not obstacles to this assimilation (except in some dialects, eg. Riomba, Ecuador, where all word-final nasals are velar.)

There are four voiceless fricatives /f, θ, s, x/, all of which occur initially and intervocally. /f/ alone forms tautosyllabic clusters with /l, r/. In many parts of the Spanish-speaking world /f/ is bilabial. The /s/ of Std. Peninsular Spanish is not lamino-alveolar like the /s/ of English and South American Spanish, but apical and somewhat retroflexed. It is usually called "cacuminal s". Those unfamiliar with the sound often mistake it for [ʃ]. /θ/ and /s/ can occur syllable-finally. They both assimilate to the voicing of a following voiced consonant, as in desde [dézde], mismo [mízmo], razgo [fæðgo], whereas /f/ and /x/ do not. /l/ occurs initially, medially, finally, and in the clusters already mentioned. There is an apical trill /R/ and an apical flap /r/, which contrast only between vowels. Elsewhere the contrast is neutralized. Only /R/ can occur word-finally, e.g. andar, parte. /R/ occurs regularly in some regions, while /r/ occurs in others. I shall say nothing about /ʎ/ at this point, because in the real language it has merged completely with /y/. It is alive only in textbooks, on the stage, and in regional (non-standard) dialects.<sup>4</sup>

Between the standard Spanish of Spain, which I have been dealing with up to now, and standard Latin American varieties, the principal phonological difference is supposed to be that /θ/ and /s/ are merged as

lamino-alveolar /s/. In the lowland or coastal regions of Latin America and in the South of Spain (the region of Andalusia) there is, in addition to the merging of /θ/ and /s/, the so-called "aspiration" of this merged sound in word-final and syllable-final positions. That is, /s/ is converted to [h] so that Estos hombres hablan español 'these men speak Spanish', sounds [éhtonómbreháblanehpañól]; the voiced velar fricative [x] is replaced by the same glottal or pharyngeal spirant [h], and final /l/ and /r/ are weakened and confused. In non-S-aspirating varieties of Spanish, e.g. Mexico City, word boundaries generally count for nothing phonologically. For example, all of the following pairs or triples are absolutely homophonous in normal speech:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 4 a) es puerta /espuérta/<br>espuerta          | b) es tamal /estamál/<br>está mal           |
| c) con padre /kompádre/<br>compadre            | d) es de aquí /ézdeaki/<br>(d)esde aquí     |
| e) la sabes<br>las aves /lasábes/<br>las sabes | f) el hecho<br>el lecho /elécho/<br>helecho |
| g) el hado<br>el lado /eládo/<br>helado        | h) son hombres /sonómbres/<br>son nombres   |

In most S-aspirating varieties, however, word-final /s/ is treated as syllable-final even when it is followed by an initial vowel, and so it is converted to /h/. Therefore la zebra [lasébra] 'the zebra' and las hebras [lahébra] 'the fibres' do not sound alike, but la junta [lahúnta] 'the group' and las unta [lahúnta] 'he greases them' do. This merger of /x/ with part of the distribution of /s/ is a considerable deviation from the standard sound system, but is trivial compared to what else happens in the Spanish of Seville.

Before speaking of what happens to /s/ in Seville, I would like to say a few words about some other supposed differences between Andalusian and Castilian.

First, the non-distinction of /s/ and /θ/. It is widely supposed that all of Andalusia, like Spanish America, has lost the distinction by shifting /θ/ to /s/, and it is chiefly for this reason that it is generally believed that

American Spanish comes from Andalusia (cf. Izzo, 1984). But way back in the 1930's Espinosa and Rodríguez-Castellano, who were then fieldworkers for the never-published Spanish dialect atlas, found that almost all of eastern Andalusia -- Almería, Jaén, Córdoba, and N.E. Granada -- have the Castilian distinction between /s/ and /θ/. Of the area where the distinction does not exist, about two-thirds has shifted /s/ to /θ/ rather than /θ/ to /s/. That is, much more of Andalusia is ceceosa than seseosa. Strangely, the ceceo area includes all of the province of Seville excepting the capital city itself, which is seseosa.

Another misconception about Andalusia<sup>5</sup> is that it is all yeista ('y-using') while the rest of Spanish distinguishes /ɾ/ from /y/. In fact, in all of East Andalusia (where /s/ and /θ/ are distinct) this merger occurs; but this is also true of most of New Castile and much of Old Castile. On the other hand, in many places in West Andalusia<sup>6</sup> /ɾ/ still exists. In fact, there are three towns within ten km. of the city of Seville where /ɾ/ still exists. This, in my opinion, casts considerable doubt on the belief that yeísmo originated in Andalusia and spread from there.

Another interesting and important point is that in approximately the same region of East Andalusia where the /s/ ~ /θ/ distinction exists, the sound corresponding to standard /x/ is in fact [x], whereas in Western Andalusia it is [h]. This would seem to be an unimportant phonetic variation, but it is not, for it is in exactly the same area where [x] exists that the old [h], which came from Latin /f/, is also lost. In all places where standard /x/ is [h], the old [h] from Latin /f/ is preserved, and is merged with it (and also with the [h] which comes from the aspiration of intervocalic /s/). This means that East and West Andalusia have significantly different phonological systems. It also appears to mean that West Andalusia was a backwater at the time the rest of Spain was giving up [h] under the influence of Old Castile (starting around 1400), so that when the change of Old Spanish /š/ to Modern Spanish /x/ finally arrived (after 1500), it simply put the still retained [h] in place of /š/, instead of adopting the new sound [x].

Strange things happen to /l/ and /r/ word-finally and syllable-finally. Word-finally, they both drop, except in the article el Std. [el] 'the' and the demonstrative aquel Std. [akél] 'that'. The /l/ of these two words is retained as such only if the following noun begins with a vowel: aquel hombre [akelóm-bre] 'that man'; el animal [elanimá] 'the animal'. Before a consonant, /l/ changes to /r/, as does every /l/ before a consonant within words; so we have er policía [érpolisía] 'the policeman'; aquer papé

[akérpapé] *'that paper.'* Otherwise, they are dropped in word-final position. Hence we have singular versus plural nouns like piná [piná] (Standard pinar [pinár]) *'pine grove'*, perá [perá] (Std. peral [perál]) *'pear tree'*, vs. pinare [pináre] *'pine grove'* and perale [perále] *'pear trees'*, where superficially /l/ and /r/ appear to be part of the plural endings, i.e. á + le/re. Final /l/ and /r/ are not preserved in liaison. Unlike the other kinds of Spanish I have encountered, Seville Spanish has no horror of hiatus. Two examples I caught on the fly were "Eso no puede ir ahí" [ésonopwedeíai] *'that can't go there'* --four vowels in a sequence -- said by a woman whose husband was trying to put too big a package into the trunk of their small car; and "Usted lo puede corregir a él" [uthélopwédekórehiaé] *'you can correct him'* --three full vowels in a sequence-- said to me regarding a supposed mistake in Spanish made by an Argentinian friend.

Within words there is also no syllable-final /l/. It is not dropped, but is replaced by /r/; so carta *'letter'* is [kártá] but caldo *'broth'* is [kárdó], which in Standard Spanish means *'thistle'*. A further complication is that infinitives, which normally drop final /r/ like other words, keep it before the enclitic pronouns te, se, nos and os, and assimilate it, with distinctive lengthening, before me, le, and lo. So *'to say'* is /desi/ (Std. /deſir/), *'to say that'* is /desi éso/ but *'to say to you'* is /desirte/, and *'to say to him'* is /desile/ (Std. /deſirle/).

Returning now to /s/: since /s/ in the standard language can occur at the end of words (and very frequently does, since it makes nouns and adjectives plural, and verb forms 2nd singular) and since all the sounds can occur word initially, /s/ can, in principle, occur before all the sounds of Spanish, including itself. Since in Standard Spanish, and practically all other varieties, /s/ disappears before /t/: los romanos [lořomános] *'the Romans'*, etc., there is nothing very remarkable about the fact that it also disappears in Seville. /s/ before nasals and before /l/ in Seville (and other /s/-aspirating areas) becomes a voiceless anticipation of the nasal or /l/, so mismo *'same'*, las manos *'the hands'*, asno *'donkey'*, isla *'island'*, etc., are [mĩmpmól], [lařmpmáno], [áño], [ĩlla], etc. These voiceless sounds are usually considered to be phonologically /h/ and are transcribed [h]. I do not quarrel with this, but phonetically they are not glottal spirants but voiceless nasals and voiceless laterals.

When final /s/ comes before pause, it is lost entirely in Seville and many other s-aspirating regions. In some part of Eastern Andalusia, and possibly in parts of the Carribbean, the former presence of final /s/ is

indicated by a difference in vowel quality (cf. Navarro 1939), but in Seville the lost /s/ has left no trace whatsoever: parque [párke] 'park' and parques 'parks'; loco [loko] 'crazy' and locos 'crazy, pl'; gente [hente] 'people' and gentes 'peoples', sound exactly alike.

Word-final /s/ in Seville is also lost when it precedes /č, s, f, h/. There are examples of this in Table 2. La(s) choza(s) 'the hut(s)'; la(s) sábana(s) 'the sheet(s)'; la(s) fuente(s) 'the fountain(s)'; la(s) gente(s) 'the people(s)'; all sound the same in singular and plural - unless the speaker is being very careful, in which case [h] or even [s] may appear, just as in English horseshoe and clothes are normally [hóršu] and [kloz], but can be [hórřšu] and [klotz] in hypercorrect speech.

When /s/ comes before voiced fricatives /b, d, g/ the result is voiceless fricatives [ɸ, θ, x]. What I think is important, and what has not been recognized, is that these voiceless fricatives are distinctive sounds (taxonomic phonemes) in contrast with the other sounds in the dialect. I did not at first realize this, and was lead to the realization indirectly. In many speakers, both in Spain and Spanish America, /f/ is bilabial rather than labio-dental; but in Seville I could get no one to say or even to accept my pronunciations of fuego 'fire', fuentes 'fountain', defiende 'defends', with [ɸ] for /f/. I attributed their rejection to purism. I was sure they used bilabial /f/ when I was not around. It was only when I began trying to find out what happened when /b/ came after /s/ that I realized that in Seville /ɸ/ was a separate phoneme and not the one that occurred in fuego, etc. The same thing happened with /x/. One of my informants often corrected my repetition of his pronunciation of words like gente 'people', José 'Joseph', insisting I say [hente] instead of my normal [xente]. Only when I asked him how to refer to all the members of the Gómez family, and he answered los Gómez [loxóme], did I understand why he didn't want me to say [x] in gente, gemelo 'twin', hijo 'son', etc. Likewise, s + ʒ → θ, for example, a las doce 'at twelve o'clock', is [alaθóse]. So, the combinations of /s + b, s + g/ and /s + y/ do not merely give a [h] allophone of /s/, but result in the creation of the sound contrasts /ɸ/ vs. /f/, /x/ and /č/ vs. /h/ that the other varieties of Spanish do not have, while the combination of /s + ʒ/ creates a θ/s contrast, which does exist in Standard Spanish, but with a completely different distribution in the lexicon.

**Table 1**  
**Consonants of Standard European Spanish**  
 Principle phonemes, allophones and examples

/p/	[p]	pan, plan, campo, mapa, España, prado	/m/	[m]	mamá, San Pedro, samba, campo
/t/	[t̟]	tanto, hasta, tres, gato, otro		[ɲ]	enfermo, en frente
/k/	[k]	coco, pisca, clima, crema, banco	/n/	[n]	no, Ana, pan, canto
/č/	[č]	mucho, chico, rancho		[ɲ]	banco, San Jose, pongo
/b/	[θ]	cabo, cabra, cable, desbastar, dos veces	/ñ/	[ɲ]	caña, ancho
	[b]	Vamos! cambio, bronco	/f/	[f]	fuerte, flaco,
/d/	[ð]	nada, desde, madre		[p]	café
	[d̟]	Dónde?, caldo	/θ/	[θ]	cinco, vez veces
/g/	[ɣ]	soga, una gata, desgranar, algo		[ʒ]	juzgar, luz verde
	[g]	Gómez, mango, un gato	/s/	[ʃ]	solo, misa, más. esto
/ʎ/	[ʎ]	(obsolescent ) calle		[z]	desde, mismo, más blanco
/y/	[j]	ayer, calle	/x/	[x]	jota, ojo, monje
	[j̟]	inyectar, un lleno	/l/	[l]	Lalo, alma, peral, claro
/w/	[ɣ]	agua, dos guantes	/r/	[r]	caro, grado
	[g]	un huarache, guante	/R/	[r̄]	carro (parte, amar)

**N.B.:** [t̟, d̟, ð] are apico-dentals; [ʃ, ʒ] are slightly retroflexed (concave tongue) apico-alveolars, [r̄] indicates an apico-alveolar trill.

**Table 2**

**Modification of Consonants by /s/ in Seville**

<b>/s/ + consonant</b>		
sp, st, sk → p <sup>h</sup> , t <sup>h</sup> , k <sup>h</sup>	sθ, sð, sɣ, sy → θ, ð, x, ɣ	s ---> zero/ {c,s,f,h*} (pause)
España [ep <sup>h</sup> aña] hasta [át <sup>h</sup> a] estos casos [ét <sup>h</sup> ok <sup>h</sup> áso] busca [búk <sup>h</sup> a]	las vacas [lapáka] desde [déðe] a las doce [alaðóse] disgusto [dixút <sup>h</sup> o] los gómez [loxóme] los Yuste [loɣút <sup>h</sup> e]	las chozas [laçósa] las sábanas [lasáðana] las fuentes [lafwénte] los gemelos [lohemélo]  *Std. /x/ = Seville [h] Seville also has [h] from Latin /f/ where Std. Spanish has 0.
<b>Word-final /s/ before initial vowel</b>		
s --> h / ____ * V		
los obreros [loho <b>ð</b> réro] vas a venir? [báha <b>ð</b> ení] qué te has hecho? [kéta <b>h</b> éçho]**  **but: tú vas a venir? [túb <b>a</b> bení], vamos a ver [bamo <b>a</b> bé]; and: mis hijos [misí <b>h</b> o], los ojos [losó <b>h</b> o].		



The last context for syllable-final /s/, which is first in Table 2, is before voiceless stops. Inexplicably it has never before been noticed that this results in aspirated voiceless stops. Everyone "knew" that /s/ became [h], so that is what everyone heard: aspiration followed by voiceless stops instead of voiceless stops followed by aspiration. *Pasta* is [pa<sup>h</sup>ta], *caspa* is [ka<sup>h</sup>pa], *búsc*a is [bu<sup>h</sup>ka]. Such words are transcribed [pahta] etc. in the linguistic atlas of Andalusia. Here are some minimal pairs: *pata* 'leg', *pasta* 'dough', *capa* 'cape', *caspa* 'dandruff', *ata* 'he tries', *hasta* 'until', *pica* 'it stings', *pisca* 'a pinch'. I have transcribed aspirated [t] with a dot under it. It is not actually retroflex, but it is alveolar, whereas unaspirated /t/ is dental.

I shall attempt an explanation of these strange goings-on in terms of articulation. If we simply neglect to articulate any voiceless consonant while continuing to make it voiceless, the automatic result is merely expiration, i.e. [h] or aspiration. In the beginning of the shift of a consonant to [h] there is probably at first only relaxation of the articulation, then an articulatory gesture toward the articulation that has little or no acoustic effect, then finally, no articulation at all. This is what appears to have happened in the Old Spanish change of [f] to [h], the Florentine change of [k] to [h], the Proto-Greek change of [s] to [h], etc. If syllable-final /s/ ceased to be articulated in Seville Spanish, the result must have been a chunk of voiceless breath preceding the next sound, which is approximately what there still is in some American dialects. But the chunk of voicelessness could easily combine with the next segment, making it partly or fully voiceless. Or, put another way, the following segment could be articulated too soon, while the voicelessness was still there. What was formerly the following segment is now simultaneous with the voiceless breath, and is therefore a voiceless segment. The voicelessness of the former /s/ is added to whatever used to follow the /s/. So [m] becomes [m̥], θ → p̥, d → t̥, etc. In the case of the voiceless stops, since they are already voiceless, they become aspirated, which is merely *extra*-devoiced because of increased delay in voice-onset time. (An aspirated voiceless sound is merely more thoroughly voiceless than an unaspirated one.)

But I would like to emphasize that, although the phonetic explanation of these changes is simple, their effect on the phonological system is profound. The number of consonant phonemes is nearly doubled; and there is a contrast between /h/ and /x/, between /f/ and /p/, and between aspirated and unaspirated voiceless stops - phenomena which do not occur, so far as is known, in any other Neo-Latin dialect.

There are two things about Seville /s/ that I have not yet mentioned although they are both illustrated in Table 2. The simpler one is on the very last line of the Table. When a word which begins with a vowel has its second syllable beginning with /h/, the final /s/ of a preceding word is retained, so that mis hijos 'my sons' and los ojos 'the eyes' are not [mihího] and [lohóho] but [misiho] and [losóho]. The other is that final /s/ is dropped from verbs where its presence does not distinguish one form from another. In ¿Vas a venir? 'Are you going to come?' [báhábēni] the presence of /h/ signals second person and distinguishes 'Are you going to come?' from 'Is he going to come?' ¿Va a venir? [bábēni]. But in [túbábēni] (Std. [túbaʃabēnir]) the presence of the subject pronoun tú signals second person, and [h] is generally omitted. Likewise, the first person plural ending -mos, which is unambiguously first person plural whether the s is there or not, is generally reduced to [-mo], no matter what follows it. So, instead of [bámohabé] (Std. [bámoʃabèr]) we have [bámoabé] for 'let's see'. Unfortunately, everything I have mentioned is further complicated by the fact that Sevillanos know that their way of speaking is "incorrect", and on different levels of formality they make varying degrees of effort to conform to the standard, so therefore there is considerable variation, and there are many exceptions to that which has been presented here.

## Notes

1. Cf. for example, Castro 1924, García de Diego 1959: 350-352, Llorente 1962
2. Probably still the most thorough treatment of standard European Spanish phonetics is Navarro 1918 (with new editions and reprintings up to the 1960's), cf. also Alarcos Llorach 1961.
3. There was considerable controversy concerning the phonological status of Spanish non-syllabic /i/ and /u/ in the 1950's. A typical specimen is Stockwell 1955.
4. Although /ɰ/ > /y/ is considered to be characteristically Andalusian (and American), as noted at the beginning of this paper, parts of Andalusia and America preserve the  $\lambda \sim y$  contrast while most of Castilla la Nueva has lost it.
5. And, incidentally, about Spanish America, and therefore another mistaken reason for thinking that American Spanish is Andalusian.
6. Especially in the province of Huelva, but also in the province of Seville.

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