

Who is promoting the glottal stop as an allophone of /s/ in Puerto Rican Spanish? Women or men?

The particularities of Caribbean Spanish have received much attention by linguists and one of the most studied is the Spanish of Puerto Rico. This variety of Spanish is well known for the aspiration of /s/ at the end of syllables and words. Numerous studies present one of three allophones for /s/ at the end of a syllabic string: the sibilant [s], the aspirated variant [h], or the phonetic zero. The most common articulation for the sibilant variety is the predorso-dental [ɣ]. New studies have found another sound that has been recently heard in place of the well exanimated allophones, and is the glottal stop [ʔ]. The analysis reveals the glottal stop occurring at the end of the CVC string followed by a vowel. For example, between the plural determiners and a vowel initial noun: [laʔúnikah] “las únicas” and [treʔáñoø] “tres años”. As the spectrograms have shown, the fact that the glottal stop can also be produced before a non-tonic vowel (as in “las abejas” [laʔaβéxah]) lead us to a hypothetical rule generalization which can be presented as a rule [s] → [ʔ]/__σ (this includes CVC + __V strings).

Valentín-Márquez’ study suggests that this allophone is more popular with women than with men Nevertheless, can the sex be the only factor to determine who is promoting this pronunciation? A wide selection of studies has shown that women take the lead in linguistic change; however, others show that men can take the leading role too. Therefore, taking only gender “as a factor typically does not act alone but rather in association with other social factors such as age, class, and ethnic or network groupings”. In fact, it is latter factors that give the tools to describe a pattern or regional mark. We are going to see in this study if gender as a unique factor can be considered as an agent of linguistic change by comparing and analyzing the speech of men and women in a same social context, in this case the strike of the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras campus in 2010.

According to the principles given by William Labov, women are more conservative yet favor the “variants with overt social prestige”; on the other hand, men are the more conservative and are women who use the innovative forms and are stigmatized when they are publicly recognized. However, the social context that we are analyzing involves men and women from different ages and social status. Therefore, the factor that can be considered as an agent of linguistic change is the context where the enunciation is made, over the sex or the social stratum of the community.

Keywords: linguistic change; social context; gender; ethnic groupings; glottal stops.