Variation of the /tr/ cluster in Chilean public speech

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This study provides the first detailed acoustic description of the realizations of /tr/ in Chilean Spanish using spectrographic evidence. Following Bell’s (1984, 2002) Audience Design model, an Accommodation Theory framework, the data will show the extent of /tr/ variation into different genres of public speech (newscasts, formal interviews, sports commentaries, morning show banter) while accounting for the speaker’s accommodation to his/her audience.

Despite its linguistic prevalence, there are no acoustic studies on /tr/ productions for any variety of Spanish; current descriptions are based on impressionistic studies. These studies have generally labeled the variant form as an affricate (or quasi-affricate) [ʧ] or [č], as in the word otro ‘other’ [o.ʧo] (Bobadilla y Bobadilla 1980; Silva-Corvalán 1987; Lipski 2009), and occasionally as a stop consonant [t] followed by an assibilated rhotic [ɾ] (Hualde 2005). The acoustic analysis conducted on this data reveals varying degrees of co-articulation in the variant forms of /tr/, for which spectrographic evidence will be provided.

The affrication of /tr/ has been associated with Andean Spanish, but has been documented for other varieties as well, including peninsular varieties (Lipski 2009, Hualde 2005). In Chilean Spanish, the affricate variant was found to be socially stigmatized at all social class levels (Silva-Corvalán 1987), but not associated to a specific ethnic, sex or age group. No previous study has examined interlocutor relationships regarding variant usage.

The data for this study comes from approximately 60 hours of online Chilean radio programming selected from 12 Santiago-based radio channels. A total of 1200 tokens of /tr/ segments were extracted from the speech of 72 Santiago natives. The contexts of the speech range in formality across four genres (news, sports, interviews, entertainment) and target different types of audiences, which are coded for sex, education level, and age. A logistic regression analysis, using Goldvarb X, will determine which linguistic and extra-linguistic factors contribute to the production of the variant forms.

Preliminary findings suggest that while genre, target audience’s education level and sex, and speaker’s sex are the most influential factors on variant production, linguistic variables such as syllable stress and word frequency are also significant. This study provides a detailed description of the usage of standard /tr/ and variant forms across four genres of speech targeting different audiences. Results from this study extend our phonetic and sociolinguistic knowledge of the affrication process in one variety of Spanish with implications for the variation of /tr/ found across other dialects and even languages.