

# Speaking Spanish with Style:

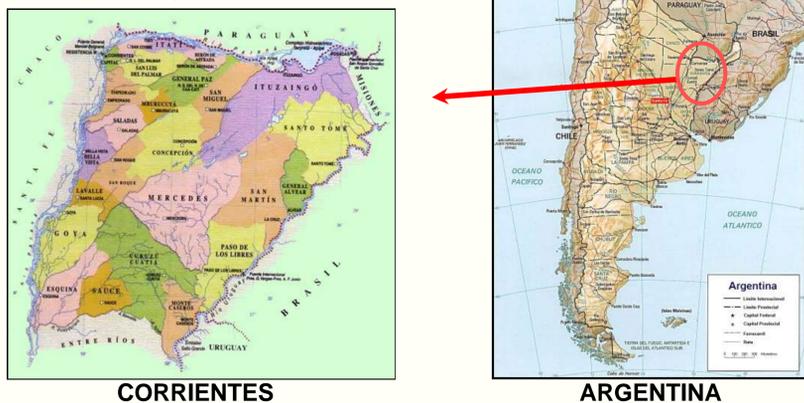
## /s/ Deletion in Argentine Spanish and Labov's Decision Tree



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### 1 Introduction

- Variable aspiration or deletion of word-final /s/ is a stigmatized feature prevalent in most Spanish varieties.
- Previous studies have investigated the stylistic conditioning of /s/ deletion by supplementing sociolinguistic interviews (casual speech) with reading style, word lists and minimal pairs (careful speech).
- Labov (1966, 2001) has developed other methods for identifying stylistic variation (e.g. contextual criteria, channel cues).
- Recently, Labov (2001) has proposed the Decision Tree (DT) as a methodological tool to distinguish *Casual* and *Careful* speech within the same interview.
- This paper examines the effect of style on /s/ deletion in the Spanish of Corrientes, Argentina.



### 5 The analysis of individual categories shows that:

- *Narratives*, which comprises one third of the data, show the least deletion among *Casual* categories.
- *Residual* shows a high rate of deletion, suggesting that it may itself be composed of more *Casual* categories (as Labov (2001) himself noted).

Total N	[Ø]	
	%	N
<b>Contextual Branches</b>		
Pseudo Narratives (CASUAL)	92	82
Joke (CASUAL)	87	36
Group (CASUAL)	79	34
Gossip (CASUAL)	77	59
<b>Residual (CAREFUL)</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>224</b>
Vicarious Exp (CASUAL)	70	84
Tangent (CASUAL)	69	213
Work (CAREFUL)	67	155
<b>Narrative (CASUAL)</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>1335</b>
Response (CAREFUL)	63	514
Language (CAREFUL)	61	279
Future (CAREFUL)	59	67
Beginning (CAREFUL)	55	336
Soap BOX (CAREFUL)	50	453

Table 2: Contribution of individual categories to percentage of /s/ deletion.

### Proposal

To reduce the number of tokens in the *Residual* category, I propose that five categories be added to the DT:

- *Gossip* and *Jokes* (*Casual*)
- *Beginning*, *Work* and *Future* (*Careful*)
- *Gossip* and *Jokes* exhibit high rates of deletion, while *Beginning* and *Future* present considerably low rates of deletion.

### 2 The Goal of the study

To contribute to the development of the DT as a methodological tool for the analysis of style-shifting within the sociolinguistic interview.

#### Data

- Subjects were selected on the basis of their membership in different social categories.
- Over 4,000 tokens of word-final /s/ were extracted from 12 sociolinguistic interviews.

Social Class	Education	
	Low Education	High Education
UMC		Young, Adult and Old
LMC	Young, Adult and Old	Young, Adult and Old
LC	Young, Adult and Old	

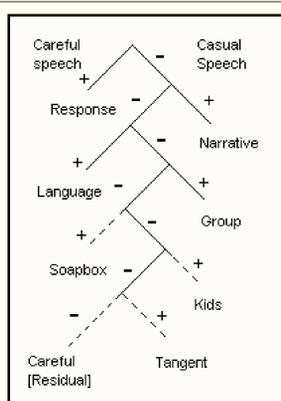
Table 1: Distribution of the sample according to social class, level of education, age and sex

### 3 Analysis

Factor groups coded:

- /s/ retained, aspirated or deleted
- Linguistic and extra-linguistic factors
- Degree of formality according to Labov's Decision Tree.

Figure 1: Labov's Decision Tree for stylistic analysis of spontaneous speech in the sociolinguistic interview.



### 4 Results

- Multivariate analysis using GoldVarb 2001 shows that the degree of formality is selected as significant, with deletion being favoured in *Casual* speech (.52) and disfavoured *Careful* speech (.46).
- However, the range of effect between *Careful* and *Casual* speech is not as wide as we would expect, given the highly stigmatized nature of /s/ deletion.

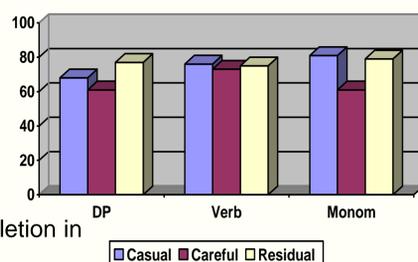


Figure 2: Contribution of style to /s/ deletion in DPs, verbs and monomorphemics

### 6 Conclusion

The proposed categories (*Gossip*, *Jokes*, *Beginning* and *Future*) seem to provide a clear differentiation of *Casual* and *Careful* speech, thus contributing to the analysis of style-shifting within the sociolinguistic interview.

*Narratives* is a wide discourse category that includes various topic-based components (e.g. danger of death, dating, school days), which may themselves be of different stylistic natures. Thus, comparing *Narratives* with other topic-based categories in the DT (such as *Kids*) may be both inappropriate and ineffective.

There is a need to separate:

- 1) Topic (*Language*, *Kids*, etc.), from
- 2) Discourse/genre/interaction (*Response*, *Narrative*, *Group*, *Tangent*).

This mixture of contextual criteria makes it difficult to classify tokens exclusively.

Labov (2001) suggests developing the DT further, rather than changing its configuration. While I agree that the DT needs further development, the results of this analysis call for a finer distinction of subcategories in the DT, which would avoid the aggregation of categories of different stylistic natures. In addition, coding the elements of the DT into two factor groups would help to extricate the effects of topic from those of discourse or interaction.

### Selected References

- Cedergren, H. (1973) *The Interplay of Social and Linguistic Factors in Panama*. Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University.
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- . (2001) The anatomy of style-shifting. In Eckert P. and J. Rickford (eds.) *Style and Sociolinguistic Variation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Robinson, J., Lawrence, H. and S. Tagliamonte (2001) *GoldVarb 2001: A Multivariate Analysis Application for Windows* [computer program].