PHONETIC TENDENCIES IN THE PRONUNCIATION OF PRESENT-DAY NATIVE SPANISH SPEAKERS

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Abstract: In the context of the current ease of mobility, people have started to interact in different locations, under any circumstances, at a local, national and international level. In countries in which the dialectal aspect is important at the conversational level, such as Spain, it isn't a surprise to observe that people from different dialectal areas interact and also influence one another when they speak. Thus, native Spanish speakers tend to share certain pronunciation features in a relaxed, informal context.

This paper aims to present and attempts to explain certain phonetic features which appear in the current pronunciation of native Spanish speakers from several areas of Spain.

Key-words: phonetic tendency, dialect, pronunciation, context, interaction.

1. INTRODUCTION

Languages nowadays are constantly changing, whether we are referring to pronunciation, morphology, syntax or semantics, and it is very difficult or almost impossible to follow every phase and to identify the factors that lead to all the changes, without mentioning the way in which they are perceived by language users.

Just like other countries, Spain is linguistically configured into areas in which specific rules of pronunciation have been imposed through time. However, currently, the population dynamics is very different due to the recent freedom of movement. The inhabitants of a region do not remain in their native city anymore, they move towards other areas, without considering whether these are located in the same region. The subsequent effect is dialectal diversity in the entire country, and therefore, a higher degree of contact between different linguistic varieties and changes conditioned by simplification processes or social elements.

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The aim of this paper is to present some of the *phonetictendencies* identified in the pronunciation of native Spanish speakers from Spain and to attempt to explain them by drawing upon both the sociological variables and the linguistic context. There will only be cited a few examples as the present paper is part of a more extensive research.

In the context of the current state of languages, there are certain aspects that need to be discussed, keeping in mind the following question: How are people speaking nowadays?

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The previous question cannot be answered without discussing the concepts of *norm*, *standard language* and *phonetic variation*. The norms are the rules and patterns that define the correct use of language, and they also indicate whether a form can be used in a specific context, as well as whether the contexts are grammatically correct. In the case of Spanish, the Royal Spanish Academy[1] is the institution that elaborates and approves the introduction of such norms. Therefore, the norms are introduced by the Academy in standard Spanish, whereas the other registers are configured by the users themselves.

In the case of phonetics, the rules of pronunciation are imposed by grammar, but in the end all users have the freedom of interpreting the notion of *correct pronunciation* however they like and apply it according to the communicative context, the register and the region in which they are located. Then, what is the importance of the standard language nowadays, if the users can pronounce according to their own will? According to Navarro Tomás (1921:155), the concept of *correct pronunciation* is relative, due to the geographical and educational background diversity of the users. In relation to this idea, he underlines the fame of Castilla for being the region of Spain where people pronounce correctly, but at the same time he states that only the people in the upper class pronounce correctly. Nowadays, most of the people with higher education pronounce correctly. In the end, Navarro Tomás (1921:155) admits that there are also other regions in Spain where the pronunciation is correct.

Borrego Nieto (2001) brings into discussion some ideas belonging to Milroy and Milroy (1991), according to whom the *standard language* cannot coexist with the variation because the former tends to neutralize the latter. Borrego Nieto argues that the *standard language* is absolutely necessary because it is an objective way of expressing only the important aspects.

[1] *In Spanish the name of the institution is Real Academia Española:* www.rae.es

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The linguistic variation refers to the existence of some elements in the idiolect or sociolect of specific groups which differentiates them from other groups, such as location, culture and historical period. Thus, the *phonetic variation* deals only with the phenomena that occur in one or several specific locations. Having mentioned this fact, the concept of *phonetic tendency* refers to a phonetic phenomenon that occurs frequently in several areas spanning a specific period of time during which it can develop or draw back. Therefore, a linguistic tendency can be regarded as variation in the speech of a specific region and its correctness is relative because it depends on the norms imposed by the academy and on the attitude of the speaker toward it. In this case, the phonetic tendency does not enlist in the norms imposed by the academy, rather being an implicit rule imposed by speakers depending on their location.

3. COLLECTING DATA

The study has been performed on the data obtained from recorded interviews of native Spanish speakers during the year of 2015, in three different locations: Valladolid, located in the north-central part of Spain, Alicante, located in the south, and Granada, located in the south-western part of the country. All of the cities belong to different dialectal areas, thus the people in each city being represented by a set of dialectal features. The aim of the interviews was to obtain genuine examples of speech from individuals born in Spain, in the before mentioned cities or in the immediate proximity of them in order to gain perspective upon the matter of the following question: How important is the dialectal factor in the assessment of the tendencies that occur at the level of pronunciation?

There is another aspect to the previous question and that is the sociological factor. It is well known that the sociological factor has a big impact on the spread of the linguistic changes, thus the variables age, gender, ethnicity, social class, educational background, occupation are representative in this case.

The interview consists of asking questions that are related to different subjects, therefore aiming to achieve an informal setting so that the person interviewed could feel relaxed and willing to speak freely.

The subjects have been adapted according to the interviewee, depending on the age, gender, professional and educational background, although the subjects of conversation are the same for all interviews. The first questions are related to the social context, namely the age, the city of birth, the city of residence and if there is any difference between the former and the latter. The following questions refer to the

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educational background, if it is the case, and the subjects extend upon the occupation, the professional expectations for the future, the wish to visit other countries, personal interests and opinions on the city of residence. There has been also brought to discussion the linguistic subject, the way in which people speak in that specific area or in other areas, the use of other linguistic varieties or even possible linguistic issues that they have encountered. It is true that some of the people interviewed are more conscious about the way that they use language, but this depends on the educational background and on personal features.

4. RESULTS

After recording the speakers, the text of the interviews has been transcribed and furthermore, in the recordings there were identified the most salient cases of *phonetic tendencies* and these were compared to the examples extracted from other interviews. In the selection of the identified examples there has been taken into the consideration the dialectal area to which the speaker belongs, so that the specific features of the spoken linguistic variety could not overlap with the occurrence of the examples.

One of the most frequent examples is the pronunciation of the group of consonants /-kt-/, which has been the object of analysis of several researchers. Quilis (1966) proves that the realization of the velar voiceless stop as interdental fricative occurred in the speech of young individuals, while González Ferrero (1990) states that the individuals who pronounce it in this way are seniors who have a very poor educational background.

According to Tomičková (2009), the phenomenon occurs in medial word position and its justification is extralinguistic. The same author concludes that there are at least 4 realizations of this specific group, namely: the standard realization, with the velar stop [kt], the realization of the velar voiceless stop as a velar voiced fricative [γt], the realization of the velar voiceless stop as an interdental fricative [θt] and the realization of the velar voiceless as a geminated stop [tt-t].

González (2008:176-177) suggests two reasons that explain the realization of /k/ as interdental fricative, the dissimilation of the manner of articulation of a syllable final stop and the assimilation of the place of articulation of the next consonant. According to González (2008:175), Lapesa[2] suggests that it may be a case of hypercorrection, given the fact that the consonant should be in a syllable final position and however, it is pronounced

[2] *In Historia de la lengua española (1981).*

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in this way only for the sake of not eliding it. Another explanation is offered by Hualde[3], who claims that the reason is the orthography, since both [k] in intervocalic position and [θ] when it is followed by e or i can correspond to the grapheme c.

In most of the interviews there have been identified all the realizations found by Tomičková (2009), including one other realization that the researcher did not find, the elision of the velar stop, [Øt] in the following context:

(1) estaba haciendo prácticas[4] en una empresa ['pra.ti.kas]

(2) voy a hacer las prácticas…a lo mejor ['pra.ti.kas]

In the first example, the speaker is a woman with the age between 23 and 30 years old, an undergraduate student in Chemistry, the place of birth corresponds with the place of residence, it is a village called Ibi, located in the mountains, not very far from Alicante. The word has three syllables and the velar stop would have been in a syllable final position, hence its elision. The sociological data indicates that the person interviewed does not study a career even remotely linked or related to Philology.

The second example was uttered by a man with the age between 22 and 25 years old, who is an undergraduate student in Mechanical Engineering. The context is identical to the one in example 1. Both examples could be explained from the perspective of the speaker's motivation. In the first example, the speaker was explaining that in the company in which she worked as an intern the number of women was greater than the number of men employed. This is an example of a subject that makes the interviewee comfortable and relaxed in order to express herself freely. In the second example, the speaker was also talking about a company in which he was going to work as an intern, and it is probably a professional experience that he expects to accomplish successfully, without any problems.

(3) es que en Elche es los exámenes son en septiembre [e.'sa.me.nes]

Another example in which a group of consonants is involved, the group /-ks-/ contains a voiceless velar stop and a voiceless alveolar fricative that in the standard pronunciation are located in different syllables, the fricative being in the stressed syllable. The utterance of the speaker is an example of a stop loss.

(4) y además ahora mismo en acabar la carrera me voy ['a.ra]

(5) sí que es verdad….ya, ya ahora de hecho [j'ara]

(6) mirar ahora un trabajo ['a.ra]

[3] *The work quoted by González is Procesos consonánticos y estructuras geométricas en español (1989).*
[4] *The pronunciation of the speaker has been rendered in the phonetic transcription between the brackets.*

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In the previous three examples, 4, 5 and 6, the latter two belonging to the same speaker, there is a clear example of syllable loss in **ahora**, namely the second one which also would enable a hiatus in a standard pronunciation. In 5 there is also a vowel fusion motivated by the contact of the vowels. The speaker who uttered example 4 is also the utterer of example 1 and the speaker who uttered examples 5 and 6 is a woman with the age between 22 and 25 years old, who is an undergraduate student in Journalism. The location of the university is outside Alicante, and is close to the neighbouring dialectal area called Murcia, which is characterized by some particular phonetic features. This may explain her pronunciation in both examples.

(7) hay gente que me ha comentado [ma]

(8) mi trabajo, entonces voy cogiendo ['toɲ.θes]

(9) sí, te ayuda también [ta'.ju.ða]

(10) y claro para aquí [pa.'ki]

Examples 7, 9 and 10 indicate vowel fusion and example 8 indicates apheresis of the first syllable of the word **entonces**. Examples 7, 8 and 9 were produced by the same speaker, a woman with the age of 37 years, at the moment of the interview she was an undergraduate student in History. Her parents have different geographical origin; her mother is from Melilla and her father from Murcia, which indicates a very strong influence on the speaker. The cases of vowel fusion are similar and are motivated by the existence of the same vowels in example 10, and by the proximity in degree of aperture in examples 7 and 9. The speaker who uttered example 10 is a man with the age over 80 years, with a low intercultural level, who has been born in Palencia and has lived in Basque, in the north of Spain, and in Alicante.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The elements that condition the occurrence of the examples are both linguistic and sociological. The linguistic side refers to the position within the word, the position within the syllable, the proximity regarding other sounds, the stress pattern and the phonological features. The sociological side, as previously mentioned, is characterized by social features, such as age, gender, educational background, occupation. To these two we can add the geographical and the dialectal elements, which refer to elements that have to do with spatial mobility, namely, place of birth, current place of residence, former places of residence, which altogether could form the geographical pathway of an individual, and the common denominator for these elements is the fact that each area is marked linguistically

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with a set of features, therefore the individual who has a complex pathway during life is under the direct influence of each and every one of the dialectal areas.

The result depends on the individual: he or she either adapts in a certain degree to one, several or all of the dialectal features, or refuses to adapt and maintains the linguistic variety acquired after being born. These two attitudes depend on the objectives of the individual, on his or her need of being part of a social group and communicating by its own linguistic means.

As time passes and technology advances, people will have increasing ways to communicate, nevertheless, the direct communication is the only one that can trigger linguistic exchanges at the phonetic level and oral speech is where they occur.

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