

acordando.

Una vez más parece probado que Ayala no fraguó información ni falseó la que poseía, pero sí se permitió componerla al servicio de una obra cuyo carácter oficial no le permitía sustraerse a la concepción histórica de la casa reinante ni a la susceptibilidad de sus personas.

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## DISTANCING AS A CAUSAL FACTOR IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF /θ/ AND /x/ IN SPANISH<sup>1</sup>

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THE EVOLUTION of the Spanish sibilant system has been an object of study since the late nineteenth century. Since that time, a myriad of books and articles have been published on the subject whose major focus has been to determine the exact nature of the sibilant changes and the chronology of each change. As is the case in most historical work, the question of why phonological systems evolve usually takes on only secondary importance. Among those theories proposed in order to explain why phonetic changes occur is the functionalist idea that there needs to be an optimal acoustic distance between the realizations of any two phonemes that must be maintained. If the distance between two phonemes draws too near the phonemes will either merge, or put some "distance" between each other in order to maintain their distinctiveness (Alarcos, "Esbozo" 11).

The development of /x/ and /θ/ in contemporary Spanish has been thought to be the result of the distancing of phonetically close realizations. Although a functionalist notion such as distancing is not commonly applied in contemporary phonological analyses, it has been offered as an explanation for the emergence of these two phonemes in works as recent as Paul Lloyd's book from 1987 entitled *From Latin to Spanish*. For this reason a more detailed treatment of the process is in order.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the causative role distancing may have played in the emergence of /x/ and /θ/. In particular, I will argue that distancing seems a plausible explanation for the development of /x/ and /θ/ in Castile, but that it cannot explain the emergence of /x/ in Andalusian Spanish. Furthermore, I will argue that the dialectal variations in the realization of /x/ between Castilian and Andalusian Spanish cannot

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be accounted for in terms of phonetic distancing.

A few terms need to be defined before I continue. For the purposes of this paper, Andalusian Spanish refers to those Andalusian dialects in which 'ceceo' or 'seseo' is the norm, but not to those that practice distinction as is the norm in Castile. It will also be necessary to distinguish between two classes of {s} sounds; for simplicity's sake I will refer to the voiceless apico-alveolar fricative as concave in contrast to the other non-concave articulations (i.e. dorso-alveolar, apico-dental) in which the tongue is convex in shape, or at least flat and not concave. Such a classification is acoustically motivated in that concave articulations show considerably lower frequencies of median noise than do convex ones. /s/ represents the concave, and /s/ the convex sibilants.

Before the emergence of /x/ and /θ/ the seven medieval sibilants had been reduced to /s/, /s̄/, /š/ and /tš/ in Castilian Spanish. It is thought that the close acoustic and articulatory proximity between the phonetic realizations of /s/, /s̄/ and /š/ pressured the phonemes to put more distance between themselves. It must be remembered that articulatory distancing does not refer to the position of the tongue per se, but rather, the distancing of the point of friction and the acoustic changes accompanying such a change. Lapesa and Alarcos have argued that /s/ was dangerously close to /s̄/, but when /s/ adopted an interdental point of articulation it effectively increased the articulatory and acoustic margin between itself and /s̄/ (*Fonología* 274-75; "Andaluces" 90). In like manner, the proximity between /š/ and /s̄/ has been thought to have pressured the former to distance itself from /s̄/ by adopting a velar point of articulation (García 103-13; Alarcos, *Fonología* 274-75). The development of /x/ and /θ/ does not only effectively separate the phonemes whose phonetic manifestations have a narrow margin of security, it also gives symmetry to the phonological system by filling in the dental and velar regions which previously contained no sibilants (Anderson 125-29). According to this model, both /θ/ and /x/ owe their present existence to the fact that their previous articulations moved away from /s̄/.

The difficulty in maintaining such acoustically and articulatorily similar phonemes as /s/ and /s̄/ is evident in other languages also. While most dialects of Basque have words in which these phonemes serve to distinguish minimal pairs, there is a growing tendency in some dialects to merge the two (Michelena 282). Galmés de Fuentes' work on the development of the sibilants in the Romance languages further demonstrates the instability that exists in a between /s/ and /s̄/ when they coexist in a phonological system. He provides evidence to establish that Latin {s} was apico-alveolar in nature, and goes on to show that the general historical process in Romance languages was to get rid of /s̄/ by merging it with /s/, as soon as /s/ emerged, as a result of deaffrication.

While distancing appears to be a plausible explanation for the development of /x/ and /θ/ in Castile, it cannot explain the emergence of /x/ in

Andalusia since the sibilant system there differed in several fundamental ways from that of Castile. As we know, /θ/ never developed in contrast to /s̄/ in Andalusia. This is due to the fact that /s̄/ and /s/ merged into one phoneme starting in the fourteenth and culminating in the sixteenth century. The speech of those dialects that merged these phonemes into /s/ is known as 'seseo' and the speech of those dialects that merged them into /θ/ is known as 'ceceo.' As a result of this merger, and prior to the emergence of /x/, Andalusian Spanish had three sibilant phonemes: /š/, /tš/, and either /s/ or /θ/. Therefore, the main difference between the sibilant systems of Castile and the dialects of Andalusia was the existence of /s̄/ in Castile and its absence in Andalusia.

I maintain that the lack of /s̄/ in Andalusia is the reason that /x/ cannot be considered the result of distancing in Andalusia as it can in Castile. You will remember that in Castile, the small margin of security between /s/ and /š/ was what necessitated that the latter move away from the former to a velar place of articulation in order to widen their margin of security. In like manner, /s/ also moved to an interdental place of articulation in order to put some distance between itself and /s̄/. It appears then, that in both cases /s̄/ was the element away from which the other phonemes moved, yet in Andalusia /s̄/ had been an unstable element in the system for quite some time and was finally eliminated before /x/ emerged so it could not have pressured /š/ to velarize.

The work of Lapesa shows that the stability of /s̄/ came into jeopardy as early as the fourteenth century when speakers started to confuse the concave and convex sibilants. By the end of the sixteenth century even the educated grammarians and orthoepists had accepted the elimination of /s̄/ ("Andaluces" 72-76; "Hispanoamérica" 410), even though it most likely didn't make up part of the common person's speech since the beginning of the sixteenth century (Catalán 317-19; Mondéjar 277). The testimonies of grammarians and orthoepists concerning the speech of Andalusia compiled by Kiddle show that velarization of /s̄/ did not become the norm until after the beginning of the seventeenth century (73-100). As a general rule then, /s̄/ was not around in Andalusia to pressure /š/ to velarize as it was in Castile. This is not to say that in the interim between the total loss of /s̄/ in the late sixteenth century, and the total evolution of /s̄/ into /x/ in the beginning of the seventeenth century, there were not some regions or speakers in Andalusia that had both /s̄/ and /š/ in their speech. What can be said in these cases is that /s̄/ was unstable in that it was rapidly merging with /s/, while for Castilian speakers /s̄/ was a stable phoneme that wasn't about to change.

Given what I've said so far, in order to assume distancing to be responsible for the development of /x/ in Andalusia, one must assume that the phoneme /š/ was too acoustically close to /s/, (or in the case of the 'θeθeo' dialects, too close to /θ/). It hardly seems conceivable that there is a small margin of security between such acoustically disparate elements as /θ/ and

/š/ as would have existed in the 'θεθεante' dialects. It would be almost as surprising to assert that /s/ and /š/ existed in a state of instability that warranted an acoustic distancing. The harmonious existence of /s/ alongside /š/ in other languages attests to their stability; they are to be found in the sibilants systems of most Romance languages, for example. What is more, Maddieson's recent study of the phonological systems of 317 languages from different language families found that the two most common fricative sibilants in these languages are precisely /š/ and /s/ (44).

Since distancing cannot account for the emergence of /x/ in Andalusia, it would be logical to consider it to have been a simple matter of dialect borrowing. It is possible that in Castile, /š/ developed into /x/ by distancing, and this newly formed phoneme then spread southward and found its way into the Andalusian dialects. The evidence, however, does not back this hypothesis up.

In fact, just the opposite appears to have happened; evidence compiled by Frago and Kiddle show that velarization first occurred in Andalusia, and only later appeared in Castile. In Andalusian documents from 1479 and 1491, the letters {x} and {j} are written in place of the letter {h} which would indicate that the authors felt an acoustic similarity between the sounds represented by {x, j} and the glottal fricative written with an {h} (Frago, "Reajuste" 224-29). Similarly in 1492 the letter {g} was used to transcribe Arabic /h/, and in Andalusian documents between 1547-1569, {j} was used to transcribe Arabic /h/ (Frago, "Reajuste" 229). In a document from Murcia, dated 1569, 'Juan' is spelled with both {h} and {j} (Frago, "Nueva" 63-64). Around that same year the 'sevillano' Aguilar confused {g} and {h} in his writings (Boyd-Bowman 2).

While there is some early evidence of velarization in Andalusia, evidence of velarization in Castile does not show up until the late sixteenth century. In 1582, the Castilian Juan López de Velasco gives the first description of the pronunciation of the letters {x, j, gi, ge} which can clearly be interpreted as indicative of a velar pronunciation (Kiddle 80-81; Quilis 447). This is over a century later than the date of first evidence of velarization in Andalusia.

The most compelling argument, however, is not the fact that evidence for velarization in Andalusia predates evidence from Castile by over a century, but the fact that we have a testimony regarding the regional differences in the pronunciation of {x, j}. In 1623, the English orthoepist John Minsheu described the general pronunciation of the letters {x, j} in Spain as being /š/ while noting that they received a velar pronunciation in Seville (Cuervo 58, 60). What all of this boils down to is that the velarization of /š/ was originally an Andalusian innovation. Therefore, if any dialect borrowing occurred, it was Castile that borrowed the newly created phoneme from Andalusia, and not the other way around.

The other possible explanation for the existence of /x/ in Castile is to consider it to have arisen independently from the Andalusian development,

as the result of a process such as distancing. The disadvantage of the former argument comes when attempting to explain how the lax almost aspirate Andalusian 'jota' became a tense fricative 'jota' once it was adopted into Castilian.

To summarize so far, what is important to remember is that it is highly unlikely that the development of the velar fricative in Andalusia could be due to the force of distancing, and also unlikely that it was an innovation imported from Castile. If any borrowing occurred at all Castile was the borrower and not vice-versa.

The concept of distancing has also been employed in an attempt to explain the reason for the dialectal differences in the modern Andalusian and Castilian pronunciations of {j, gi, ge}. Erica García notes that: "En Castilla donde la /s/ es más posterior que la /š/, la jota también es más posterior. O sea: la diferencia entre /s/ y /š/ es la misma, tanto en la articulación como en el efecto acústico, que en la distancia entre /x/ y /X/. En otras palabras: *ambos fonemas castellanos (/š/ y /X/) son más posteriores...que los correspondientes fonemas latinoamericanos, /s/ y /x/*" (110).

While the idea that distancing may be able to explain dialectal differences in the pronunciation of {j} has intuitive appeal, it is not without problems. In the first place, such an interpretation assumes that /š/ distanced itself from /s/ in Andalusian in the same way that it moved away from /š/ in Castilian. I have already argued that while the coexistence of /š/ and /s/, as was the case in Castile, was unstable and could have provoked velarization, the mutual coexistence of /s/ with /š/, as in Andalusia, is stable and would not be likely to pressure velarization of /š/. García on the other hand, assumes that /š/ could have actually distanced itself from /s/, a move that I find hard to fathom.

Another problem with this theory is that it assumes that all Andalusian pronunciations of {j} are more anterior than all the corresponding Castilian pronunciations. As a general rule, Andalusian Spanish has post-palatal and mediopalatal pronunciations which are more anterior than the Castilian post-velar. There are, however, Andalusian and American dialects that give {j} a pharyngeal articulation, which is even more posterior than the Castilian post-velar (Lapesa, *Historia* 297-98). Another argument that can be made here is that the actual difference between the Castilian and Andalusian pronunciations is probably not so much a difference in the point of articulation as it is in the manner of articulation. As Lloyd points out, the velar fricative in Castile is articulated with a smaller, tighter aperture in the mouth; in Andalusia, on the other hand, there is less constriction at the point of articulation (343-344).

The basic question, however, still remains—what caused velarization in Andalusia? Further research is needed in order to fully answer that inquiry, but allow me to briefly suggest some possible directions for such research. We know, for example, that for some 800 years Andalusia was inhabited by Arabic speakers, and that there were a great deal of bilingual

speakers. The possibility that the Arabic guttural fricatives applied an adstrate influence on the Andalusian sibilant system could be investigated. At any rate, the evolution of 'jota' in Andalusia should not be considered a closed chapter in the history of Spanish phonology.

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