

Instability and Reduction of /s/ in the Spanish of Honduras

Este ensayo ofrece un panorama lingüístico de la realización del fonema /s/ en el español hondureño. Presenta los resultados de una investigación realizada en la República de Honduras, que dan a conocer por primera vez algunos pormenores de este dialecto, apenas conocido dentro del ambiente dialectológico hispanoamericano. Los primeros datos son de índole descriptiva, y ponen de manifiesto las realizaciones fonéticas del fonema /s/ en las distintas capas sociales de Honduras. Después, se ofrece una breve discusión teórica, en la cual se pretende caracterizar los varios aspectos de la reducción de la /s/ como la aplicación de dos procesos fonológicos, uno de tipo estrictamente fonético, y otro con motivación morfo-analógica. De especial interés es la aspiración de la /s/ en posición intervocálica interior e inicial de palabra, extensión en vías de generalizarse en el español hondureño. Finalmente, se presenta un panorama geográfico, para mostrar la gran variación regional que muestra la realización de la /s/ dentro de los límites de la diminuta república. Esta variación geográfica parece reflejar la historia sociocultural del país, y constituye más evidencia para la formulación de una síntesis dialectológica de Hispanoamérica.

Of all the major dialect regions of Spanish America, the Central American area is the least known. Within Central America, the least studied area has been Honduras, with only a single major lexicographic work to its credit,¹ and no recent phonological or sociolinguistic works. Most accounts of Central American Spanish have lumped Honduras together with Nicaragua and El Salvador as regards phonetic tendencies, without noting any significant differences among the three nations.² One general observation is that syllable- and word-final /s/ is unstable and is aspirated or lost in informal speech. Closer investigation reveals this observation to be more or less correct, but the details and percentages differ widely among the countries and even within them, and differences among social classes are equally noteworthy.³ It is therefore necessary to study each country individually in order to integrate the regional portrayals into a unified paradigm of Central American dialectology.

With the aim of offering a first step in this direction, a preliminary study was undertaken of the Spanish of Honduras.⁴ During a period of several weeks, interviews and observations were made throughout the country, utilizing informants from a wide range of social classes, backgrounds and age groupings. In addition to the formal interviews, numerous informal conversations were studied and/or taped, and additional observations were made based on interactions which, by virtue of their spontaneous nature, could not be taped. This article will report on one aspect of the study: the behavior of /s/ in Honduran Spanish.

The visitor's first impression of Honduran Spanish is that the /s/ is weak in all environments and tends to be easily aspirated or lost. Since the aspiration is geographically endemic to all but a few peripheral areas of Honduras, the traveller will nearly always be in the midst of speakers who pronounce syllable- and word-final /s/ weakly. Moreover, since the weakening of /s/ reaches its greatest extent among the lower social strata, who form the overwhelming bulk of the Honduran population, contact with this linguistic process is enhanced during most normal activities, which require contact with speakers from all walks of life. Needless to say, there are individuals, nearly always university educated, who make a distinct effort to pronounce the /s/ clearly in all environments, and the spoken style typical of radio and television broadcasting and solemn public speeches conserves the /s/ to a much greater extent than in normal conversation, although the discrepancy is not as great as has been observed in some other Latin American nations.⁵

Interestingly enough, despite the high rate of aspiration and deletion of /s/ in Honduras, popular literature does not accurately reflect the unstable pronunciation of /s/. In a survey conducted on Honduran novels and stories written between the last decades of the previous century and the present time, no indication was observed of the aspiration or deletion of /s/, other than in the single lexical item *pué* for *pues* (also represented in popular Salvadoran literature), despite the fact that many of the works manifested other popular phonetic tendencies.⁶ One might be tempted to conclude that weakening of /s/ in Honduras is a relatively recent phenomenon, or at least that its spread to large segments of the population has occurred within the last generation or two. However, available evidence tends to counteract this supposition, since there is no significant difference in rates of weakening of /s/ among speakers of widely varying ages, ranging from pre-school to well over ninety years old. Moreover, a glance at the historical events which have affected Honduras since the earliest periods reveals no significant factors which would separate this Central American region from the areas of the Caribbean and coastal South America which exhibit high rates of weak-

ening of /s/ and which also have a literary tradition of at least a century in which this phonological process is represented in imitations of popular speech.⁷ Originally part of the Captaincy General of Guatemala in the Viceroyalty of Nueva España, Honduras (including the area originally termed Higuera) was settled early in the sixteenth century,⁸ and although the colonial capital, Comayagua⁹ (moved to Tegucigalpa in 1880) was inland in a remote location and thus isolated from tendencies affecting more accessible coastal regions, the country was never as culturally isolated as Costa Rica or parts of Guatemala. The Atlantic ports of Trujillo and Puerto Caballos (modern Puerto Cortés) and the fortress of Omoa were early established and played an important role during the heyday of the Spanish Main. In fact, Trujillo rivaled Cartagena in importance. The Pacific port of Amapala, on the Gulf of Fonseca, was also of importance during the colonial era although the port facilities themselves were not developed until later. One of the most substantiated theories for the spread of aspiration of /s/ and other Andalusian phonetic characteristics throughout Latin America deals with the accessibility of major seaports in constant contact with Spanish merchant and treasure fleets,¹⁰ and Honduras presented the requisite conditions for assimilation of southern Spanish phonetic innovations.

Extensive African influence, in the form of a large slave population, has also been cited as a factor contributing to high rates of weakening of /s/ in Latin American Spanish,¹¹ and such influence was prominent along the Atlantic coast of Honduras. In addition to the predominantly black population of the Bay Islands, which were long under British domination and whose inhabitants were brought not from Africa but from the British West Indies, the mainland ports of Trujillo and Puerto Caballos saw early importation of African slaves, which in some areas came to represent a significant portion of the entire population.¹² Currently, weakening of /s/ in Honduras reaches its greatest dimensions precisely in the northern coastal region.

In view of the above observations, if any explanation is to be offered as to the relative scarcity of indications of weakening of /s/ in Honduran literature, it must come from other directions. One possible avenue of approach might be the lack of a well-defined minority group who could be belittled or mocked in literary documents. A survey of phonetic imitations found in popular Latin American literature indicates that to an overwhelming extent, many phonetic properties, including weakening of /s/, are normally ascribed only to the socially most underprivileged classes, including blacks, Indians and sometimes ignorant peasants regardless of racial background. The majority of such literary attestations comes from countries which have easily recognized racial minorities.¹³ In

each case, the literary documents ascribe weakening of /s/ nearly exclusively to these socially marginalized groups, despite the fact that nearly all of the population participates in the process. On the other hand, it is probably not coincidental that Honduras, El Salvador and to a lesser extent Nicaragua, whose populations are more racially homogeneous (being nearly 90% mestizo), cannot so easily point to a certain racial group as the object of literary ridicule. Honduras does have a noticeable black population, but it is concentrated in areas removed from the major cultural centers which are the source of most literary production; the same is true of Nicaragua. As noted earlier, the one representation of weakening of /s/ in popular Honduran literature comes in an imitation of black speech, written by a *ladino* (white/mestizo) author.

Another possible explanation may stem from the extremely small percentage of the population which has become educated to the point where perception of this pronunciation as in any way substandard, undesirable or indeed even subject to alternatives, is quite limited. The rate of functional literacy in Honduras is quite low, estimated to be between 40% and 50%,¹⁴ and awareness of linguistic details and sociolinguistic connotations of other Hispanic dialects is almost nonexistent in the population. Nearly all public figures, regardless of stature, exhibit a high rate of weakening of /s/, even in formal speeches, to the point where it becomes impossible to identify this pronunciation exclusively with socially unacceptable individuals or circumstances.

A final possibility is that while the rate of aspiration of /s/ is very high in many environments, the rate of deletion is relatively low when compared to the dialects of the Antilles, Nicaragua, Panama and Venezuela. As a result, the presence of some sound to represent the phoneme /s/ may preclude literary recognition of the phonetic weakening process. For example, although implosive /s/ is usually aspirated in Chile, Uruguay and Argentina, it is not as often deleted, and popular literature from these nations rarely reflects the aspiration process.

The Honduran sibilant /s/, when it appears, is the voiceless coronal fricative [s] most frequent in Latin America. Very few cases of an apical [ʃ] or of the interdental [θ] are heard,¹⁵ although among uneducated rural speakers a nasalized variant is sometimes found. With respect to the phonological weakening of /s/, the two stages are aspiration [h] (which may be voiced or voiceless depending upon the following segment) and deletion Ø, where no sound occurs and where even the space where /s/ once existed may disappear. Most typically, /s/ is weakened in syllable-final environments, that is before a consonant or, to a lesser degree, before a pause. In addition, /s/ is frequently weakened word-finally when the following word begins with a vowel, more often before

unstressed vowels (*los amigos* [loh amigos]) than before stressed vowels (*los otros* [los otros]).¹⁶

In addition to the above environments, which have figured in other recent treatments of /s/ in Latin American Spanish dialects, in Honduran Spanish there is frequent aspiration (and occasionally loss) of /s/ in word-internal intervocalic environments (*presidente* [prehidente]) and word-initially in intervocalic contexts (*la semana* [la hemana]). In other dialects of American Spanish, this phenomenon has been signalled, but never as common and usually for only a few lexical items.¹⁷ It is also found sporadically in Spain, again among lower class speakers.¹⁸ A common exception to this tendency is the word *nosotros*, which has become effectively lexicalized as [nohotros] for speakers in many Spanish dialects, including that of Honduras. In the latter country, aspiration of word-initial and word-internal intervocalic /s/ is quite common even in the speech of well-educated and socially prestigious individuals, during public speeches and interviews, and in other formal contexts. Among the lower social classes the weakening of intervocalic /s/ reaches greater proportions, and in certain words it is lexicalized as [h] for many speakers.

In Table 1 data are presented for the capital city of Tegucigalpa, in the department of Francisco Morazán, based on recorded interviews. The capital represents the major cultural influence of the country, as well as the principal population center and focus of demographic influx. In each social category, data were utilized from ten informants, each of which provided approximately one-half hour of transcribed linguistic material, which was tabulated and analyzed by the present writer. Individuals listed as "high degree of education" were members of the intellectual community, including professors, engineers, and distinguished civil servants and businessmen. Moderately educated individuals were engaged in travel agencies, banks, stores, hotels and restaurants, airline offices, and so forth. Individuals with a low level of education represent the lowest social strata and most were nearly or totally illiterate. Typical activities included bus and taxi drivers, ticket takers, waiter and busboys, street vendors, shoeshine boys, domestic servants, rural farm workers, and many individuals had no current employment, except perhaps for begging. Ages varied between 17 and approximately 75.

Also analyzed were radio news broadcasts, to demonstrate the rather artificial nature of radio diction as compared with normal conversational styles. The broadcasts were taped from HRN and Radio América, the two largest stations in the country, and approximately 3 hours of taped material was analyzed and tabulated.

Comparing the data regarding syllable-final /s/, it may be seen that

Table 1: realization of /s/ in Tegucigalpa (expressed in percentages)

	sC			s#C			s##			s#V̇			s#V̇		
	s	h	ϕ	s	h	ϕ	s	h	ϕ	s	h	ϕ	s	h	ϕ
high	77.6	21.2	1.2	21.8	67.2	10.9	80.0	16.7	3.3	66.7	33.3	0	34.1	58.5	7.3
mid	60.2	33.2	6.6	14.0	71.3	14.7	63.7	24.6	11.7	60.3	39.7	0	29.9	60.5	9.6
low	37.9	40.2	21.8	11.2	52.0	36.7	53.3	35.6	11.1	57.1	28.6	14.3	25.9	50.0	24.1
radio	70	28	2	35	65	0	98	2	0	96	4	0	83	17	0

	V#sV̇			V#sV̇			VsV̇			VsV̇		
	s	h	ϕ	s	h	ϕ	s	h	ϕ	s	h	ϕ
high	100	0	0	90.2	9.8	0	100	0	0	96.6	3.4	0
mid	100	0	0	82.3	17.7	0	93.4	6.6	0	95.2	4.8	0
low	100	0	0	74.3	25.7	0	90.9	9.1	0	95.4	4.6	0
radio	100	0	0	96	4	0	97	3	0	96	4	0

legend: C = consonant; # = word boundary; ## = pause; V̇ = stressed vowel; V̇ = unstressed vowel

word-final /s/ is significantly weaker than word-internal implosive /s/. However, when comparing the behavior of word-final /s/ with respect to grammatical status, no significant differences were observed.¹⁹ Since Honduran Spanish uses *vos* almost exclusively instead of *tú*, syllabic stress (as well as the lack of diphthong in stem-changing verbs) distinguishes second-person and third-person forms; thus there is no particular grammatical pressure on the final /s/ of second-person singular forms and this /s/ is regularly weakened. At the same time, use of the subject pronoun *vos* is considerably reduced when compared with the use of *tú* as subject in the Antilles,²⁰ presumably reflecting the greater morphological differentiation of the *vos* forms.

Word-final /s/ is also frequently weakened when the following word begins with a vowel, thereby indicating that a purely phonotactic process of weakening in implosive position is no longer the sole basis for aspiration. Rather, the overall tendency may be toward a morphological restructuring of word-final /s/, constrained only partially by phonetic variables: for example there is still a significant differential depending upon whether the following word begins with a stressed or unstressed vowel.²¹

The most interesting data are those relating to word-initial and word-internal intervocalic /s/, for in Honduras aspiration occurs in these environments with a higher frequency than in most other Latin American Spanish dialects. Word-initial /s/ is particularly unstable before an

unstressed vowel, indicating that the morphological extension of aspiration of word-final /s/ is being generalized to both sides of the word boundary. Aspiration of syllable-final /s/ may be dated at least as far back as the sixteenth century,²² but for a long time it depended upon the presence of implosive positions. Some dialects of South American Spanish, such as those of Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and parts of Bolivia and Peru, still embody this constraint to a large degree, while in other countries, such as in the Caribbean region, the aspiration has been attached to word-final /s/ in a quasi-permanent fashion, with the result that aspiration may occur even when the /s/ is in intervocalic position.²³ However, much as the velarization of word-final /n/ in intervocalic position,²⁴ aspiration of word-final intervocalic /s/ serves to mark juncture in the spoken chain; although there are words beginning with [h] (which is the most frequent realization of /x/ in the Central American and Caribbean dialects), context dictates that confusion is rarely produced. In Honduran Spanish (and to a lesser extent in Salvadoran Spanish),²⁵ the juncture-specifying role of the [h] is being generalized in the direction of merely specifying the existence of a juncture on either side of the [h]. There is no way of knowing how extensive this generalization will become, but it is clear that the process is deeply rooted in all social strata and is definitely on the increase. Significantly, there appears to be a process of lexical spread of aspiration of word-initial /s/. For example, evidence points to the word *centavos* as one of the major motivating forces (see Table 2).

Table 2: % of total words pronounced with initial /s/ + V as [h]

se	11.7
centavo	10.0
situacion	9.0
cincuenta	4.7
sesenta	4.7
setenta	4.8
San Pedro	4.5
central	4.1
senor/señora	3.6
semana	2.5

Other words which frequently undergo the same process are the numerals *cincuenta*, *sesenta* and *setenta*. This may perhaps be due to the details of the Honduran monetary system, which results in a number of combinations which occur frequently enough to have become stereo-

typed. The unit of Honduran currency is the *lempira*, with a value of US\$. 50; two *lempiras* to the dollar. The *lempira* is divided into 100 *centavos*, and since the prices of many common items of daily necessity are somewhat lower in Honduras than in the United States, the price in *lempiras* is frequently not much more than it would be in dollars in the United States. At the same time, nearly the entire Honduran economy is oriented to the small merchant, artisan or sidewalk vendor, and it is impossible to traverse the streets of any Honduran city or town without constantly hearing prices of objects and services being shouted out. Also, since the large supermarket or department store is still very much a novelty, most individuals have to acquire their purchases by shopping at several stores, booths, shops and stands, and thus the average Honduran is in constant contact with the small businessman, vendor or provider of services. Most of the latter group represent the socially least advantaged sectors of society, with the least degree of formal education. These speakers are the ones who exhibit the highest degree of weakening of /s/.

The Honduran monetary system is instrumental in projecting the word *centavos* into prominence in the spoken chain, for since the *lempira* is a relatively large unit in terms of buying power, the majority of small objects or items of food normally found in daily transactions cost some fraction of a *lempira*. When the price of objects costing less than one *lempira* is quoted, the word *centavos* is nearly invariably added. When objects costing more than one *lempira* are priced, the term *centavos* is usually left off: L 1.65 = *uno sesenta y cinco*. Since many of the numbers which immediately precede the word *centavos* end in a vowel (*cinco*, *quince*, *veinte*, etc.), the initial /s/ of *centavos* often occurs intervocalically, and for many speakers the realization [hentaβoh] has become effectively lexicalized, to the point where even *un centavo* may be given this pronunciation.

Additional support for the importance of *centavos* on the spread of aspiration of word-initial /s/ comes from comparing the Spanish of Nicaragua and El Salvador; both offer rates of weakening of /s/ comparable with those found in Honduras. The monetary unit of Nicaragua is the *córdoba*, with the official exchange rate being 10 *córdobas* to the dollar while the black market rate is more than four times this much. Thus, a single *córdoba* has little purchasing power, and while coins of fractional values do exist, most prices are simply quoted in *córdobas*, with the word *centavos* all but nonexistent in ordinary discourse. At the same time, combinations of the sort *uno sesenta* do not occur, since prices are given in integral amounts. Aspiration of word-initial /s/ is extremely rare in Nicaraguan Spanish, even among the lower social strata, and among

residents living near the Honduran border. On the other hand, the monetary unit of El Salvador is the *colón*, traditionally quoted as 2.5 *colones* to the dollar and currently worth somewhat less. This makes the *colón* just slightly less than the *lempira*, and consequently fractional prices in *colones* are common in El Salvador, together with the term *centavos*. Salvadoran Spanish exhibits aspiration of word-initial /s/ with rates approaching those found in Honduras. The Costa Rican *colón*, now worth upwards of 50 to the dollar, is divided into *céntimos*; this fact, in addition to the lower rate of weakening of /s/ in Costa Rican Spanish and the infrequent occurrence of *céntimo* (whose first vowel is stressed) may account for the fact that *céntimo* is never pronounced with word-initial [h]. The Guatemalan *quetzal* (at par with the U.S. dollar) is divided into *centavos*, but since /s/ is almost never weakened in the Guatemalan dialect, the word *centavos* suffers no phonetic modification.

Word-internally in Honduran Spanish, intervocalic /s/ is not frequently aspirated before stressed vowels, except in the case of the common pronunciation [nohotroh] for *nosotros*. Aspiration of internal intervocalic /s/ is particularly common at morpheme boundaries (*presupuesto* [prehupuehto], *desempleo* [dehempleo]) or in combinations which have the superficial shape of some sort of prefix (*licenciado* [lihensiaðo], *presidente* [prehidente]). In certain words, such as *necesita*, *licenciado*, etc., the pressure to aspirate the first /s/ may also come from a process of haplology or dissimilation, eliminating the combination of two [s]'s in close succession.

Aspiration of word-internal /s/ occasionally occurs after consonants, although the only common example is *entonces* [entôhes].²⁶

Given the rather unique details of the weakening of /s/ in Honduran Spanish, it is useful to consider the possible phonological processes that could have produced such a state of affairs. Typically, the weakening of /s/ in Spanish is taken to have started from a purely phonotactically-motivated process, reduction of /s/ in implosive position before a consonant and perhaps phrase-finally:²⁷

$$(1) \quad s \rightarrow h / \text{ ___ } \left\{ \begin{array}{l} C \\ \#\# \end{array} \right\}$$

On the other hand, data from Honduran Spanish and other dialects,²⁸ reveal that prepausal /s/ is highly resistant to aspiration and especially to deletion, being conserved with a frequency several times as great as in other syllable-final positions. If one assumes that loss of prepausal /s/ is not part of the general weakening in implosive position, then we may postulate an even simpler rule, namely:

$$(2) \quad s \rightarrow h / \text{ ___ } C$$

This rule is the one most frequently found in phonological descriptions of Spanish, whether or not written in this format. Continuing on to dialects that aspirate word-final /s/ before vowels, such as those of the Antilles and Caribbean, Honduras, Nicaragua, coastal Ecuador, and Paraguay, we are faced with a certain difficulty, since accentuation of the following vowels plays a key role and additional non-phonetic factors may also enter into consideration. If one attempts to generalize (2) in a purely phonological fashion, anomalous statements result. For example, one proposed generalization is:²⁹

(3) $s \rightarrow h / __ [+segment]$.

In addition to the rather curious state of affairs in which any segment whatsoever is sufficient to trigger a phonological rule, this proposed extension makes the false claim that aspiration will be equally frequent in all environments: before word-initial and word-internal consonants, before stressed and unstressed vowels, before diphthongs, in word-initial position, and even after consonants, which is manifestly not the case in any known dialect of Spanish. Another possible extension, if one chooses to include cases of prepausal aspiration of /s/, is:³⁰

(4) $s \rightarrow h / __ \#$

However, this rule only accounts for word-final /s/ and leaves completely untouched the question of word-internal aspiration. If one eliminates the word boundary completely, the tautological rule (5) results:³¹

(5) $s \rightarrow h$

If one were to invoke the presence of variable rules, one would need to postulate a phonological justification for the individual rules that would be required, which is merely a restatement of the impossibility of collapsing the several rules in question.

The data from Honduran Spanish, and those from Caribbean dialects which have formed the basis for earlier studies of Spanish /s/, suggest that a different approach be taken, to account for the present distribution of weakened variants of /s/. In keeping with the reality of synchronic descriptions, one may postulate a rule of phonotactic weakening only in implosive positions, as in (2), plus non-phonetic constraints which account for the differential behavior between word-internal and word-final implosive position. A possible reason for this differential is that word-final /s/ is quite frequently a grammatical suffix predictable from the context, whereas word-internal /s/ is lexical, whether or not carrying a high enough functional load to be considered truly essential. Whatever the reason, the facts of Honduran Spanish speak for themselves; essen-

tially the same distribution holds for Salvadoran and Nicaraguan Spanish, while in Costa Rican and Guatemalan Spanish, noted for conservation of syllable-final /s/, it is becoming increasingly frequent to hear word-final implosive /s/ aspirated.³²

The next stage in the process is some form of extension to cover word-final prevocalic aspiration. There is no ready phonological explanation for this extension; while it is true that for stop consonants, syllable-final position is weakest, followed by intervocalic position, the same weakness of intervocalic position does not normally hold for fricatives. Rather, the data suggest a morphological analogy, the desire to extend the allophonic form of words regardless of the following segment.³³ Instead of postulating a generalization of phonological rule (2), it is more useful to postulate an entirely separate rule, perhaps originally motivated by but in no way generalized from the original rule (2)

(6) $s \rightarrow h / __ \#V$

The next step in the extension, in the case of Honduran Spanish, is the aspiration of word-initial intervocalic /s/. Since word-final /s/ is always preceded by a vowel, while aspiration of word-initial /s/ occurs only intervocalically, it appears that we have a mirror-image generalization of the environment of (6), in the sense that aspiration is now possible either to the left or to the right of the word boundary:

(7) $s \rightarrow h \left\{ \begin{array}{l} V __ \#V \\ V \# __ V \end{array} \right\}$

This may be abbreviated, following accepted conventions,³⁴ as:

(8) $s \rightarrow h // V __ \#V$.

It is even possible that (8) should really be represented as two separate rules, given that the extension of aspiration to word-initial position is based on morphological analogy. Moreover, the mirror-image convention, not entirely uncontroversial, is most frequently invoked in the case of neighborhood assimilation, for example the palatalization of a consonant before or after [i]. In the case of (8), the mirror-image environment contains word boundaries as a critical element, and exhibits no traces of an assimilatory process. Currently accepted abbreviatory conventions provide no ready means of indicating the progressive generalization of a phenomenon to either side of a formative boundary. Thus, the mirror-image notation, while visually satisfying, may ultimately have to be replaced by another notation to describe the weakening of word-initial /s/ in Honduran Spanish.³⁴ In any event, the end result is the achievement of

a canonical surface pattern of [VhV] when two words, one of which contains an initial or final /s/, come together. For some speakers this rule may be on the way to a generalization in which the word boundary does not occur, but this is not the normal state of affairs at present.

Aspiration of word-internal intervocalic /s/ occurs not only before an unaccented vowel, but also most typically in the second syllable, after a prefix or what has the superficial shape of a prefix. Thus, a generalization in which only a morpheme boundary is present may be indicated. Maintaining the mirror-image format, this may be represented as:

(9) s - h // V ___ + V

For most Hondurans, (9) does not operate in all cases, but rather with the variability that characterizes the weakening of /s/ in other environments and in other dialects. Nonetheless, the direction of the process seems clear from the data: there are Hondurans who aspirate implosive /s/ plus word-final intervocalic /s/ but who rarely aspirate /s/ in other positions, but no speakers have been observed who exhibit the reverse implicational formula.

Also of interest is the geographical distribution of weakening of /s/, since Honduras represents a transitional zone between the largely /s/-conserving area of Guatemala and the Spanish of Nicaragua, where /s/ is greatly weakened; Honduras' other neighbor, El Salvador, exhibits a rate of aspiration and deletion of /s/ roughly comparable to that of Honduras itself. Currently, Honduras is divided into 18 departments. However, even in recent times the boundaries have not been exactly where they stand today, and border conflicts with El Salvador and Nicaragua still persist. For example, one of the causes of the 1969 war with El Salvador was the question of fixing the nearly impossible boundary between the two nations, which represents a largely imaginary line that winds its way among the mountains and small rivers of the border area. During one attempt at determining the borders, members of a bilateral commission had to resort to the method of asking inhabitants of remote areas which country they thought they lived in. Due to chronic political, social and economic conditions which have resulted in massive emigration from El Salvador to Honduras, it is impossible to estimate the percentage of Salvadorans in the bordering areas of Honduras, so that a linguistic buffer zone must be postulated, representing an admixture of Salvadoran and Honduran dialects. Since there are few if any phonological differences separating the dialects immediately adjacent to the border on either side, the question of whether an individual is speaking Salvadoran or Honduran Spanish is a purely political matter. Indeed, few residents of Honduras will admit to being Salvadoran, and their speech does not give them away.

Another area which has only recently become officially part of the republic is the remote northeastern department of Gracias a Dios, extending to a line roughly bisecting Cabo Gracias a Dios, the Nicaraguan border. Until an international court decision of 1960, this territory was disputed with Nicaragua, and even today this largely uninhabited region is the subject of constant tensions. There is little cultural contact with the rest of Honduras (there is one scheduled flight weekly to La Ceiba) or with Nicaragua. The inhabitants are mostly black or Carib/Miskito and speak varying mixtures of Miskito, *garífuna* (Black Carib) and Spanish, with the latter language being the least prominent.

The insular department of Islas de la Bahía, consisting of Roatán, Guanaja, Utila and some small islets, shares a similarly checkered history, since until the nineteenth century the islands were under British control. Today the majority of Bay Islanders speak English as a native language, in a curious dialect which is a mixture of British and West Indian. Spanish is also spoken, especially by the increasingly large *ladino* population which comes from the mainland in search of higher wages and job opportunities. Most of the Islands' black inhabitants speak some form of Spanish, sometimes with less than total fluency. The white Islanders, usually descendents of the original British settlers, do not as frequently speak Spanish, and when they do it is often with a noticeable "English" or "American" accent. The Islands' radio station broadcasts in both Spanish and English, with local varieties of each being used. It is thus an academic question whether the Bay Islands may legitimately be considered a Spanish-speaking area for the purposes of a dialect atlas, since most of the Spanish-speaking residents represent transplanted mainlanders.³⁵ Without taking into account the bicultural aspect, it is not possible to give a representative picture of Bay Islands Spanish.

In general, one may characterize all of Honduras as exhibiting a weakening of /s/ to varying degrees, with the exception of the area in the western department of Copán, at the Guatemalan border. While the departmental seat, Santa Rosa, still exhibits weakening, as one travels to the Guatemalan border near the town of Copán Ruinas, the rate of weakening becomes progressively less within the space of a few miles, until on the border itself almost no weakening of /s/ is observed except in word-final implosive position.

The capital city of Tegucigalpa is geographically remote from either coast, being situated in a bowl surrounded by mountains, and in colonial times supplies reached the city (then known as Taguzgalpa) by mule train, usually from the Gulf of Fonseca. The central area of Honduras thus shared with Guatemala and Costa Rica a relative isolation from coastal ports and centers of commerce that presumably led to a more conservative dialect in these areas. However, since 1880, when Tegucigalpa

became the capital of Honduras, and particularly since it burgeoned to the point of becoming a significant economic focal point, the city has served as the center of attraction for immigration from all over the country.³⁶ Therefore, while it is possible to detect an undercurrent of natives of Tegucigalpa (mostly of the upper social classes) who conserve the /s/ in a fashion which does not appear totally artificial, the general speech heard in Tegucigalpa and its sister city Comayagüela exhibits a high rate of weakening of /s/, reflecting successive waves of migration, which have brought people of the socially most disadvantaged classes who seek to earn a marginal living. It is impossible to exist in Tegucigalpa without coming into constant contact with citizens from other parts of the country.

The case of the first colonial capital, Comayagua, is somewhat different. Comayagua is located to the northwest of Tegucigalpa, about halfway between the capital and the Atlantic coast. Although Comayagua is rather prosperous by Honduran standards and has served as a center of attraction for migration, this migration has not been nearly of the scale that has characterized Tegucigalpa. Moreover, the main cross-country highway which connects the capital with San Pedro Sula passes several kilometers outside of Comayagua, with only local buses making the stop in town, so that even today Comayagua retains some of its provincial air of tranquility and isolation. With respect to pronunciation of /s/, the city of Comayagua and its environs is more conservative than the capital; /s/ is particularly conserved in prepausal position and word-internally before consonants.

The highest rates of weakening of /s/ are found in the northern coastal departments of Cortés (San Pedro Sula and Puerto Cortés), Atlántida (La Ceiba) and Colón (Trujillo), and in the nearby department of Yoro. This distribution supports theories that contact with port areas and major trade routes of the Spanish Main enhanced the transmission of weakening of /s/, since all these areas were important in the colonial era. The port of La Ceiba was founded later in the 19th century by the Standard Fruit Company and the rapidly growing department of Atlántida has become one of the most prosperous areas of Honduras. The port of Trujillo exhibits a high rate of weakening of /s/, again reflecting the colonial past. In addition to being an important Caribbean port during the colonial era, Trujillo was the site of a large-scale importation of black slaves. If one accepts the (admittedly controversial) hypothesis that the speech of subjects speaking African languages or creole English tended to weaken an already unstable pronunciation of many consonants, then the heavy proportion of uneducated black speakers in the Trujillo area might be considered a significant factor. Even today, Trujillo contains a high per-

centage of blacks and mulattoes, living a marginal existence as fishermen or laborers and having a minimal educational level. Most speak the Black Carib dialect known locally as *garífuna* or *moreno* and most recent arrivals speak creolized West Indian English. Another important factor is the more recent isolation of Trujillo. Once a thriving quasi-metropolitan port city, then a center of the banana industry, Trujillo was nearly completely cut off when the Standard Fruit company decided to cut its railroad connection with Trujillo in 1935. Not only was train service stopped, but the company actually pulled the tracks up nearly all the way back to La Ceiba.³⁷ Now, Trujillo is reachable from La Ceiba via a tortuous dirt road which is all but impassable after heavy rains (in an area with one of the world's highest rainfalls); for those passengers with more money, there is a small plane that makes a daily flight. Trujillo is marginalized economically and socially, the level of education is quite low, large segments of the population are unemployed or underemployed and the city gives the impression of having turned in upon itself. The characteristics of the language spoken in this department give evidence of the isolation and neglect that have befallen this once animated and still immensely interesting part of Honduras.

In the remote Gracias a Dios area, including the departmental seat of Puerto Lempira, the /s/ is retained to a slightly greater extent, but this may reflect the status of Spanish as a quasi-foreign language for many speakers in this Miskito- and *garífuna*-speaking area. Currently the area is the subject of intense missionary activity by groups based in the United States, and more attention is paid to English than to Spanish, a situation which is likely to continue as the United States military continues to take an interest in this strategic area.

An overview of the geographical distribution of weakening of /s/ is given in Table 3. Only speakers from the working class were used, in keeping with established dialectological practices, since significant dialectal differences are blurred in more educated individuals with access to nationwide university education. For each department, three informants were chosen, few of which had achieved more than a primary education. Approximately one-half hour of interview material was tabulated for each informant.

This table demonstrates that significant linguistic diversity can exist in a small geographical area, even in the face of the supposed homogenizing influence of modern society. Large numbers of Hondurans are completely removed from the benefits of such a society but, perhaps only on a rudimentary level, intercommunication does take place via public transportation and the omnipresent radio broadcasting. This fact not-

Table 3: realization of /s/ in other Honduran departments (expressed in percentages)

	sC			s#C			s##			s#V̆			s#V̇		
	s	h	∅	s	h	∅	s	h	∅	s	h	∅	s	h	∅
Atlántida	55.8	37.7	6.5	9.6	69.1	21.3	76.7	14.7	8.7	52.9	35.3	5.9	38.2	51.0	10.8
Choluteca	51.1	47.7	1.1	6.6	71.7	21.7	60.9	28.2	10.9	42.9	28.6	5.7	36.8	7.6	
Colón	46.4	46.4	7.1	10.7	70.7	18.6	80.7	12.8	6.4	35.7	57.1	7.1	21.0	74.1	4.9
Comayagua	50.5	45.7	3.8	15.5	74.4	10.1	80.3	17.5	2.2	60.0	30.0	10.0	35.7	61.9	2.4
Copán	84.6	15.4	0	25.0	63.2	11.8	94.9	4.3	0.7	70.6	29.4	0	45.9	52.5	1.6
Cortés	57.7	40.9	1.9	4.9	81.3	13.8	59.7	25.4	14.9	40.1	58.0	1.9	14.8	81.5	3.7
Gracias a Dios	79.1	18.5	2.4	23.5	68.3	8.2	86.2	11.3	2.5	51.7	48.3	0	33.2	62.4	4.4
Intibucá	87.3	10.5	2.2	50.0	40.6	9.4	90.3	7.6	2.1	85.7	14.3	0	87.5	10.7	1.8
Islas de la Bahía	47.1	50.2	2.7	8.9	80.1	11.0	68.2	25.1	6.7	81.3	17.6	1.1	29.3	69.0	1.7
La Paz	79.2	19.8	1.0	50.1	44.3	5.5	86.4	10.8	2.8	95.0	5.0	0	73.2	25.4	1.5
Lempira	78.3	20.8	0.9	34.4	51.1	14.5	87.0	6.5	6.5	93.7	6.3	0	52.2	47.8	0
Ocatepeque	93.0	4.7	2.3	44.4	49.2	6.4	98.2	1.2	0	75.0	25.0	0	79.3	17.2	3.4
Olancho	83.9	14.6	1.5	30.0	60.2	9.8	90.5	7.5	2.0	78.1	12.5	9.4	60.9	38.5	0.6
Paraiso	48.5	45.5	9.1	11.1	65.0	23.9	65.2	27.2	7.6	58.3	25.0	16.7	9.3	74.4	16.3
Santa Bárbara	72.0	26.3	1.7	16.8	62.4	20.8	76.7	16.4	6.9	76.2	13.0	12.8	45.5	45.5	9.1
Valle	61.0	37.2	1.8	8.1	69.1	22.8	67.1	29.0	3.9	78.8	21.2	0	14.0	85.1	0.9
Yoro	49.6	38.8	11.5	16.3	63.5	20.2	69.8	25.5	4.7	72.2	22.2	5.6	41.0	64.1	7.7

	V#sV̆			V#sV̇			VsV̆			VsV̇		
	s	h	∅	s	h	∅	s	h	∅	s	h	∅
Atlántida	100	0	0	88.0	12.0	0	97.1	2.9	0	84.7	15.3	0
Choluteca	90.9	9.1	0	75.8	24.2	0	100	0	0	90.1	9.9	0
Colón	100	0	0	86.2	13.8	0	97.8	2.2	0	85.6	14.4	0
Comayagua	97.4	2.6	0	70.9	29.1	0	95.2	4.8	0	87.2	12.8	0
Copán	100	0	0	80.8	19.2	0	100	0	0	93.1	6.9	0
Cortés	96.2	3.8	0	43.8	56.2	0	97.0	3.0	0	84.9	15.1	0
Gracias a Dios	100	0	0	89.7	10.3	0	98.2	1.8	0	90.3	9.7	0
Intibucá	100	0	0	98.3	1.7	0	92.3	7.7	0	91.5	6.4	2.1
Islas de la Bahía	100	0	0	89.2	10.8	0	96.2	3.8	0	92.3	7.7	0
La Paz	99.1	0.9	0	88.1	11.9	0	91.3	8.7	0	88.4	11.2	0.4
Lempira	100	0	0	91.8	8.2	0	96.3	3.7	0	91.8	8.2	0
Ocatepeque	100	0	0	88.2	11.8	0	99.0	1.0	0	86.7	13.3	0
Olancho	100	0	0	84.8	15.2	0	98.5	1.5	0	86.5	13.5	0
Paraiso	100	0	0	80.0	20.0	0	92.1	7.9	0	83.9	16.1	0
Santa Bárbara	96	4.0	0	86.8	11.8	1.4	95.0	5.0	0	75.5	19.1	5.4
Valle	98.0	2.0	0	83.2	16.8	0	93.1	6.9	0	82.4	17.6	0
Yoro	100	0	0	90.1	9.9	0	94.1	5.9	0	84.3	15.7	0

legend: C = consonant; # = word boundary; ## = pause; V̆ = stressed vowel; V̇ = unstressed vowel

withstanding, Honduran Spanish is characterized by a number of phonological profiles which show gradient behavior throughout the country. A study of the intricacies of the Honduran sub-dialects, of which the present article represents only a tiny facet, is of great interest in more accurately fixing the dialectal boundaries of Central America and in putting to the test several hypotheses regarding linguistic influences on colonial American Spanish. In addition, the weakening of word-initial and word-internal intervocalic /s/ offers a demonstration of how, in a situation of isolation and competing forces, a phonological process may spontaneously develop in directions different from those suggested by purely phonetically-motivated evolutions.



1 Copán	7 Comayagua	13 Choluteca
2 Ocotepeque	8 Cortés	14 Paraíso
3 Santa Barbara	9 Atlántida	15 Olancho
4 Lempira	10 Yoro	16 Colón
5 Intimbuca	11 Francisco Morazán	17 Gracias a Dios
6 La Paz	12 Valle	18 Islas de la Bahía

NOTES

- 1 Alberto Membreño, *Hondureñismos* (Tegucigalpa, 1895; 3rd ed. Tegucigalpa, 1982). Membreño also published the "Ligeras observaciones sobre el habla castellana en América," *Revista de la Universidad de Honduras*, 12 (1922), 531-35. A few brief notes were offered by Jeremías Cisneros, "Hondureñismos," *Revista de la Biblioteca Nacional de Honduras*, 3 (1907), 154-57, 181-83, 212-14, 250-52, 282-85, 289-97, 313-16; Pedro Montesinos, "Hondureñismos," *Revista de la Universidad de Honduras*, 2 (1910), 498-501. The *Boletín de la Academia Hondureña de la Lengua* occasionally publishes brief notes on lexicography. A more recent morphological study is H.L. van Wijk, "Algunos aspectos morfológicos y sintácticos del habla hondureña," *Boletín de Filología*, 30 (1969), 3-16, reprinted in the *Boletín de la Academia Hondureña de la Lengua*, 26 (1982), 111-26.
- 2 For example D. Lincoln Canfield, *Spanish Pronunciation in the Americas* (Chicago, 1981).
- 3 For recent observations on the /s/ in Nicaragua, see J. Lipski, "/s/ in the Spanish of Nicaragua," *Orbis* (forthcoming). For El Salvador, see J. Lipski, "Central American Spanish in the United States: the case of El Salvador," forthcoming in the proceedings of the 3rd annual conference *El Español en los Estados Unidos*, Indiana

- Univ., 1982. See also D. Lincoln Canfield, "Observaciones sobre el español salvadoreño," *Filología*, 6 (1960), 29-76.
- 4 Partial funding was supplied by a Grant-in-Aid from the University of Houston. In the collection of regional data, invaluable assistance and advice were offered by Atanasio Herranz and Melba Julia Rivera, of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras.
 - 5 See J. Lipski, "Spanish in U.S. broadcasting: discovering and setting standards," to appear in L. Elías-Olivares, ed., *Spanish Language Usage in Public Life* (The Hague).
 - 6 The one exception was the poem "El negro José" by Carlos Manuel Arita, in the anthology *Poesía negra en Honduras* (Tegucigalpa, n.d.), 64.
 - 7 This was studied by J. Lipski, "The significance of literary 'black phonology' in Spanish America," presented at the annual meeting of the Linguistic Society of America, New York, December, 1981.
 - 8 Cf. Félix Salgado, *Elementos de historia de Honduras* (Tegucigalpa, 1945, 4th ed.); Robustiano Vera, *Apuntes para la historia de Honduras* (Santiago de Chile, 1899); Rómulo Durón, *Bosquejo histórico de Honduras* (Tegucigalpa, 1982, 3rd ed.); Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Central America* (San Francisco, 1886), 1, chap. 17 and 2, chap. 9.
 - 9 For a period of five years during the earliest period of the colony, the inland town of Gracias (in the modern department of Lempira) was the capital of the Capitanía General de Guatemala; the capital was later moved to Guatemala City (currently the town of Antigua).
 - 10 The influence of accessibility to the coast has been most completely expounded by Ramón Menéndez Pidal, "Sevilla frente a Madrid," in D. Catalán, ed., *Miscelánea: homenaje a André Martinet* (La Laguna, 1957), 3, 99-165.
 - 11 For example Rufino J. Cuervo, *El castellano en América* (Buenos Aires, 1927), 82-85.
 - 12 Ruy Galvao de Andrade Coelho, *Los negros caribes de Honduras* (Tegucigalpa, 1981, 2nd ed.); Rafael Leiva Vivas, *Tráfico de esclavos negros a Honduras* (Tegucigalpa, 1982); William Wells, *Explorations and Adventures in Honduras* (New York, 1857), 554; Luis Mariñas Otero, *Honduras* (Madrid, 1963), 41. A case has been made for the influence of pirate contact and black slaves and soldiers in the Caribbean port areas by J. Lipski, "Filibustero: origin and development," *Journal of Hispanic Philology*, 6 (1982), 213-38. Some corroborating evidence for this hypothesis in the case of Honduras may be found in Conrado Bonilla, *Piraterías en Honduras* (San Pedro Sula, 1955); José Antonio Calderón Quijano, "El fuerte de San Fernando de Omoa: su historia e importancia que tuvo en la defensa del Golfo de Honduras," *Revista de Indias*, 3 and 4 (1942-43).
 - 13 See Lipski, "The significance of literary 'black phonology' in Spanish America," and Richard Jackson, *The Black Image in Latin American Literature* (Albuquerque, 1976), 41.
 - 14 Organization of American States, *América en cifras 1970* (Washington, 1971); Edmund Urbanski, *Hispanoamérica, sus razas y civilizaciones* (New York, 1972), 313; Inter-American Development Bank, *Economic and Social Progress in Latin America 1980-81* (Washington, 1981).
 - 15 Canfield, "Observaciones sobre el español salvadoreño," reports this variant in rural Salvadoran Spanish. In Honduras, this sound was occasionally observed among uneducated rural speakers of the southernmost departments, near the Salvadoran border, but occurrence was always sporadic and transitory.
 - 16 See Tracy Terrell, "Constraints on the aspiration and deletion of final /s/ in Cuba and Puerto Rico," *Bilingual Review*, 4 (1977), 35-51; "Final /s/ in Cuban Spanish,"

- Hispania*, 82 (1979), 599–612; Henrietta Cedergren, "The interplay of social and linguistic factors in Panama," doctoral dissertation, Cornell University, 1973.
- 17 Canfield "Observaciones sobre el español salvadoreño," noted occasional aspiration of intervocalic /s/, a process also observed in Chile by Rodolfo Oroz, *La lengua castellana en Chile* (Santiago, 1966). In Argentina, aspiration of word-initial and internal intervocalic /s/ was cited by Berta Elena Vidal de Battini, *El español de la Argentina*, 1 (Buenos Aires, 1964), 102–3. For the Dominican Republic, see Max Jiménez Sabater, *Más datos sobre el español dominicano* (Santo Domingo, 1975), 77. For Cartagena, Colombia, see Servio Becerra, "Consonantes implosivas en el español de Cartagena de Indias," in G. Scavnick, ed., *Dialectología hispanoamericana* (Washington, 1980), 100–12. In literature, this phenomenon has been (erroneously) ascribed to Nicaraguan Spanish by the Costa Rican author Carlos Luis Fallas, *Mamita Yunai* (San José, 1978; first ed. 1962). For coastal Colombia, one attestation comes in the novel *Los muertos tienen sed* by Javier Auque Lara (Caracas, 1969).
- 18 Rafael Lapesa, *Historia de la lengua española* (Madrid, 1980, 8th ed.), 248.
- 19 Terrell, "Final /s/ in Cuban Spanish," details grammatical constraints affecting the behavior of /s/ in the Antillean dialects.
- 20 See J. Lipski, "Preposed subjects in questions," *Hispania*, 60 (1977), 61–67.
- 21 Occasionally confusion may occur in the spoken chain. For example, I recall a conversation with a Puerto Rican speaker who was referring to Neruda's *Las Odas* and pronounced the word *las* with aspirated /s/, i.e. as *la jodas*. Before my eyebrows had time to raise – as they surely would have done – he corrected himself and pronounced a clear sibilant [s].
- 22 Lapesa, *op. cit.*, 248.
- 23 Comparative data are provided by J. Lipski, "The weakening of /s/ in Latin American Spanish," *Zeitschrift für Dialektologie und Linguistik*, 51 (1984), 31–43.
- 24 Ruth Hyman, "n as an allophone denoting juncture in several Spanish American dialects," *Hispania*, 39 (1956), 293–99.
- 25 See Canfield, "Observaciones sobre el español salvadoreño," and Lipski, "Central American Spanish in the United States: the case of El Salvador."
- 26 Jiménez Sabater, *op. cit.*, 77, cites the same pronunciation of *entonces* in the Dominican Republic. I have also observed this pronunciation sporadically in other Central American and Caribbean dialects.
- 27 Lapesa, *op. cit.*, 248; Terrell, "Final /s/ in Cuban Spanish," 609.
- 28 Cedergren, *op. cit.*; Terrell, "Constraints on the aspiration and deletion of /s/ in Cuban and Puerto Rican Spanish;" Lipski, "/s/ in Nicaraguan Spanish;" "The weakening of /s/ in Latin American Spanish."
- 29 Terrell, "Final /s/ in Cuban Spanish," 609.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 610.
- 31 Not only is the rule tautological, but it violates the generally accepted constraint that no absolute neutralization occur, since complete application of such a rule would eliminate all surface occurrences of [s].
- 32 Lipski, "The weakening of /s/ in Latin American Spanish."
- 33 This has been suggested by several authors, including Terrell, "Final /s/ in Cuban Spanish," 610.
- 34 First formally introduced in this format by Ronald Langacker, "Mirror image rules II: lexicon and phonology," *Language*, 45 (1969), 844–62. See also J. Lipski, "Segment, sequence and mirror image," *Linguistics*, 192 (1977), 53–67, for a discussion of the application of this convention to longer sequences of segments.

- 35 William Davidson, *Historical Geography of the Bay Islands, Honduras* (Birmingham, 1974); Pierre Beaucage and Marcel Samson, *Historia del pueblo garífuna y su llegada a Honduras en 1796* (Trujillo, n.d.); Fernando Cevallos, *Reseña histórica de las Islas de la Bahía* (Tegucigalpa, 1919); Gustavo Castañeda, *El dominio insular de Honduras* (San Pedro Sula, 1939).
- 36 Programa Centroamericana de Ciencias Sociales, *Estructura demográfica y migraciones internas en Centroamérica* (San José, 1978), chap. 4.
- 37 Mario Posas, *Luchas del movimiento obrero hondureño* (San José, 1981), 58–59.