Mexican Spanish Speakers Perceive Hyperarticulated [v]
Differently in Male and Female Voices

Indicative of a former phonemic contrast that was merged over time, orthographic <v> and <b> in Modern Standard Spanish fall under the scope of a single phoneme, /b/, and both graphemes receive the same pronunciation in most varieties: either [b] or [β] depending on phonological context (Morgan, 2010, pp. 171-178). In addition to [b] and [β], some dialects also feature the voiced labiodental fricative [v], e.g. *vampiro* 'vampire' as [vam.ˈpi.ɾo]. In Mexico, [v] is most common in formal or emphatic speech, and it has been described as *la v pedante* 'the pedantic [v],' given its association with the hypercorrect speech found in educational settings (Lope Blanch, 1988; Salvador, 1987).

A hyperarticulated variant, or "a stylized and clarified form of pronunciation" (Oviatt, MacEachern, & Levow, 1998, p. 89), can be used to signal intelligence, articulateness, and politeness, among other qualities (Eckert, 2008), but hyperarticulated speech is more common among women than men. For example, female speakers tend to have a more exaggerated vowel space than men across languages (Hay, Sato, Coren, Moran, & Diehl, 2006), and women reduce coda /s/ less frequently than men in several varieties of Spanish (Cedergren, 1973; Dohotaru, 1998). The relationship between women and the production of hyperarticulated forms may influence the way in which these forms are perceived. As such, the present study seeks to quantitatively establish what social properties Mexican Spanish speakers associate with hyperarticulated [v] in male and female voices.

To answer this question, four native speakers of Mexican Spanish, two men and two women, were recorded completing a map task. That is, the speakers gave directions to numerous street names and destinations with orthographic <v>, e.g. *Avenida Veinticinco* '25th Avenue' or *Hostal Oveja Negra* 'Black Sheep Inn,' and they were trained to produce each target word with both [v] and the standard bilabial pronunciation. One baseline clause was used for each speaker with cases of <v> manipulated to create two guises in Praat (Boersma & Weenink, 2017): one with [v] and another with the standard bilabial. Next, the eight target guises were organized in SurveyGizmo (Vanek & McDaniel, 2006) and separated by filler recordings, and 75 Mexican listeners were asked to evaluate each voice along a scalar matrix of social properties, including intelligence, good Spanish, age, snobbishness, niceness, heteronormativity, and confidence. After conducting a factor analysis to conflate correlated factors, mixed effects linear regression models were constructed using the lme4 package (Bates, Maechler, Bolker, & Walker, 2017) in R (R Core Team, 2018). The results of the best-fit models show that speaker gender significantly conditioned ratings: [v] decreased evaluations of intelligence and good Spanish for male speakers but increased evaluations of intelligence and confidence for women ($p < 0.001$).

These results indicate that Mexican listeners perceive [v] to be a socially meaningful marker of identity, but the interpretation of the variant depends crucially on speaker gender. I propose that these different evaluations for men and women are tied to gendered expectations of speech. As women tend to be more strongly associated with hyperarticulated speech, [v] production plays into social expectations of femininity and serves to enhance positive perceptions of female speakers. However, where hyperarticulated speech is not considered the gendered norm, that is, in men's speech, the variant is evaluated more negatively. Broadly speaking, this study demonstrates that the social assessment of linguistic information is fluid rather than static, with gender-specific generalizations contributing to the way in which phonetic variants are perceived.

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