

Viviana Vergara Fernández

1. Introduction

The existence of the voiced labiodental fricative [v] as an allophone of /b/ in Spanish is broadly rejected. It is argued that [v] was lost in the early stages of the transformation of Latin into Spanish, and that currently it only appears as a result of assimilation, hyper-correction or inter-language interference in the case of bilinguals.

In the last several years, however, the existence of [v] as a natural allophone of /b/ in Chilean Spanish has begun to gain acceptance.

One of the arguments against the existence of a natural [v] in Spanish is that it could be a product of the process of learning to read, in which teachers may artificially distinguish between the graphemes and <v> by using bilabial and labiodental pronunciations, respectively. In order to test this hypothesis, a group of pre-literate children was studied.

2. Procedure

Subjects: 9 native-speakers of Chilean Spanish between 4 and 5'3 years old.

Task: Naming and describing pictures.

Recording: Digital videotape with audio.

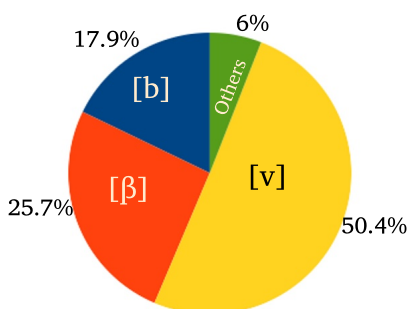
Analysis: Visual analysis to determine the point and mode of articulation of each allophone of /b/, in each phonetic environment.



3. Results

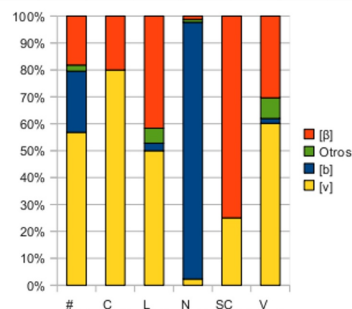
The allophones of /b/ produced by the informants are shown in the following table and figure.

Allophone	[b]	[β]	[v]	[p]	[w]	[ɰ]	[d]	[ð]	[g]	[ɣ]	[p̄v]	[b̄v]	[ɸ]	Total
Tokens	102	147	288	3	2	17	2	3	2	1	1	2	1	571
%	17,9	25,7	50,4	0,5	0,4	3	0,4	0,6	0,4	0,2	0,2	0,4	0,2	100



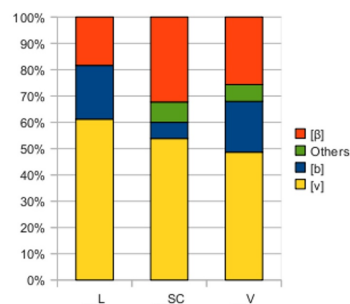
The following table and figure show the occurrence of the allophones of /b/ by preceding context.

	#_		C_		L_		N_		SC_		V_		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
[b]	10	22,7	0	0	1	2,8	84	95,5	0	0	7	1,8	102	17,9
[β]	8	18,2	2	20	15	41,7	1	1,1	3	75	118	30,3	147	25,7
[v]	25	56,8	8	80	18	50	2	2,3	1	25	234	60,2	288	50,4
Others	1	2,3	0	0	2	5,5	1	1,1	0	0	30	7,7	34	5,95
Total	44	100	10	100	36	100	88	100	4	100	389	100	571	100



The following table and figure show the allophones of /b/ by following context.

	_L		_SC		_V		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
[b]	10	20,4	4	6,2	88	19,3	84	95,5
[β]	9	18,4	21	32,3	117	25,7	1	1,1
[v]	30	61,2	35	53,8	222	48,7	2	2,3
Others	0	2	5	7,7	29	6,4	1	1,1
Total	49	100	65	100	456	100	88	100



4. Conclusions

- This investigation confirms the voiced labiodental fricative [v] is a natural allophone in Chilean Spanish.
- [v] is the most frequent allophone of /b/, except before and after the close back vowel /u/ and the bilabial nasal [m], which favor bilabial allophones of /b/.
- The acquisition of [v] is **not related to or influenced by the grapheme <v> or the process of learning to read.**
- It is necessary to **reconsider the place of /b/ as the main member** of this group of allophones, because [v] is frequently produced in neutral contexts (#_ and /a_a/).
- Linguistic development and social class** may favor the occasional production of rare allophones of /b/ such as [w], [g], [ɣ] and Ø.
- Even though the production of [v] is natural in Chilean Spanish, it is still necessary to investigate whether a **restructuring of the allophones of /b/** occurs after the process of learning to read has ended.