Documentary Exploration of the Evolution of Spanish Sibilants

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-Topic/sub-discipline of research: Historical linguistics
-Keywords: Spanish, historical linguistics, sibilants, seseo, Ladino
-I would like to present this as a talk.

Spanish underwent significant phonological alteration in the Late Middle Ages and Early Modernity. Perhaps the most important group of changes concerns the sibilants (s-like sounds), which descend from a system of four original sibilants (s, z, ʃ, ʒ) and two alveolar affricates (ts, dz) which became sibilant (s̪, z̪). In a long process spanning until the 16th century, this system simplified to the extent that, in most regions (including the colonies), alveolar sibilants became reduced to a single phoneme /s/, a system called “seseo”. In this work I will examine the transitory stages between the old system and seseo and explore the alternate system of Judaeo-Spanish.

The method used for the most part of this research is text analysis. The texts I used are epistolary, legal and ecclesiastical, and most come from either of two corpora: “GITHE CODEA+”, and Documentos Lingüísticos de la Nueva España: Golfo de México. I also used Spanish historical grammar books and the glossary of a Ladino orthography book.

Some of my findings are: 1. By the late Middle Ages the loss of s/z distinction was dominant in the Christian population of Castilian-speaking Spain. 2. There was a stage of at least 200 years where the northern part of Castilian-speaking Spain merged /ʒ/ with /z/ and /ʃ/ with /ʒ/ and the southern part conserved the distinctions. 3. Ladino developed an alternate system where /z/ merged with /ʒ/ and /s/ with /s̪/.
**Visual representations:**

The transition between the sibilant system of Old Spanish and seseo appears as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S</th>
<th>z</th>
<th>ts</th>
<th>dz</th>
<th>ʃ</th>
<th>ʒ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>s</td>
<td>ʃ</td>
<td>ʒ</td>
<td>ʃ</td>
<td>ʒ</td>
<td>loss of distinction between &lt;ss&gt; and &lt;s&gt;, deaffrication of ts and dz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s</td>
<td>ʃ</td>
<td>ʒ</td>
<td>s̪</td>
<td>ʒ</td>
<td>emergence of spellings such as &lt;veçino&gt; and &lt;trabaxo&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s</td>
<td>ʃ</td>
<td>s̪</td>
<td>ʒ</td>
<td>s̪</td>
<td>seseo in southern Spain and in the colonies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The alternate Ladino transition is the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S</th>
<th>z</th>
<th>ts</th>
<th>dz</th>
<th>ʃ</th>
<th>ʒ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>z</td>
<td>ʃ</td>
<td>ʒ</td>
<td>ʃ</td>
<td>ʒ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(s ʃ)</td>
<td>(z ʒ)</td>
<td>ʃ</td>
<td>ʒ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>z</td>
<td>ʃ</td>
<td>ʒ</td>
<td>ʃ</td>
<td>ʒ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


Melis, Chantal; Rivero Franyutti, Agustín; Arias Álvarez, Beatriz., 2008. Documentos Lingüísticos de la Nueva España: Golfo de México. México D. F., Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

