ABSTRACT

SONYA TRAWICK. “English-like” Approximant Rhotics in Paraguayan Spanish. (Under the direction of Professor Erik Thomas.)

The present study is an analysis of coda rhotics in Paraguayan Spanish. It is motivated by personal experiences the author had on a trip to Paraguay, during which every Paraguayan speaker spoke in a way that gave an impression of being a nonnative speaker. This is due to the presence of an “English-like” approximant rhotic in Paraguayan Spanish, marked as nonnative by native speakers of other dialects. The English rhotic sounds very different from the rhotics of standard Spanish, and is one of the “most noticeable marks of a foreign accent in the perception of Spanish speakers” (Hualde, 2005: 181). Despite being such a salient characteristic, it is mentioned only qualitatively in linguistic literature (Morgan, 2006) and has been the subject of no quantitative research known to the author.

The present study analyzes the coda rhotics of nine speakers from the capital of Paraguay, Asuncion, by providing an impressionistic category of rhotic production and analyzing F3 and F4. To tackle both the claim that the Paraguayan rhotic is “English-like” and the lack of any relevant previous literature on Paraguayan rhotics or retroflexed rhotics in Spanish at all, it relies heavily on previous literature describing English rhotics. It uses a linear regression model in R to look for statistical significance of linguistic and social factors, and is an exploratory and descriptive study aiming to provide a base of information for future research in order to fill in a fascinating research gap.