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# A sociolinguistic analysis of final /s/ in Miami Cuban Spanish

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## Abstract

This study analyzes the variation of syllable- and word-final /s/ among two generations of Cubans in Miami, Florida (USA): older, early exile immigrants who arrived in Miami as adults in the 1960s and 1970s, and young Miami-born Cubans whose maternal and paternal grandparents immigrated to Miami from Cuba prior to 1980. Since sibilant weakening is generally considered to be an ongoing language change in Caribbean Spanish, it was hypothesized that the young generation of English-dominant bilinguals would present with much higher rates of aspiration and deletion, in keeping with [Silva-Corvalán, C., 1994. *Language Contact and Change. Spanish in Los Angeles*. Clarendon Press, Oxford] hypothesis that linguistic changes are accelerated in situations of language contact. However, the data instead revealed significantly higher rates of sibilant retention among young Miami-born speakers, indicative of a ‘reversed’ language change. This finding is attributed principally to the social need of the Miami-born grandchildren of early exile Cubans to differentiate their speech from that of later Cuban immigrant groups, mostly for political and ideological reasons. The influence of gender and the impact of Spanish language fluency among the young generation are considered, as is the role of language-internal factors.

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*Keywords:* Language contact; Language variation; Phonology; Sibilant weakening; Spanish

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## 1. Introduction

Due to the clash of political and economic ideologies and the geographic division of Cubans as a result of exile politics, as well as the radical socioeconomic changes that affected Cuban society during the latter 20th century, the situation of Cuban Spanish today presents a unique opportunity for sociolinguistic study.<sup>1</sup> While socioeconomic classes in Cuba have basically disappeared as a result of five decades of communism under Fidel Castro, capitalist and socioeconomic class ideologies constitute the social fabric of life for the more than 750,000 Cubans and Cuban–Americans in the US city of Miami, some 120 miles across the

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<sup>1</sup> With the term ‘Cuban Spanish’ I refer in a general, dialectological sense to those varieties of Spanish spoken on the island of Cuba as well as the sociolects of Spanish brought to South Florida since 1959 by hundreds of thousands of Cuban immigrants, subsequently transmitted to their children and grandchildren and spoken regularly in everyday life among the three generations in Miami.

Florida Straits (US Census Bureau, 2006). Many of these immigrants and their US-born children and grandchildren, who are secondary speakers of Spanish, position themselves fervently against Castro's communist order of things, placing social classes among Miami Cubans in sharp relief and maintaining marked divisions in the community according to immigrant arrival group (cf. Alberts, 2005; Alfaraz, 2000; De la Torre, 2003). In this way, linguistic variation in Cuban Spanish takes on not only social but ideological dimensions as well. Sociolinguistic variation plays a vital role in conveying and maintaining one's personal identity as a Cuban in Miami.

Particularly complex is the case of those Cuban-Americans whom we may classify as 'third generation' speakers of Spanish, i.e., those individuals who are the grandchildren of the original immigrants of the decades of the 1960s and 1970s and whose parents were either born in the US or arrived from Cuba as small children.<sup>2</sup> The third generation of Miami Cubans presents disparate degrees of proficiency in Spanish, depending upon familial patterns of Spanish and English usage, the presence of Spanish-dominant members in one's social network (cf. Cashman, 2003; Stoessel, 2002), the use of Spanish in the work/professional sphere, and amount of formal schooling in the language (cf. López Morales, 2003; Lynch, 2000; Otheguy et al., 2000). While some third generation Miami Cubans demonstrate high levels of fluency and grammatical accuracy in Spanish, others present a substantial lack of formal vocabulary, a simplified verb system, errors of morphological agreement in person, number and gender, and reliance upon code-switching and the syntactic and discursive patterns of English (cf. Gutiérrez-Rivas, 2007; Lynch, 1999). English is clearly the dominant language of all Miami-born Cubans (Portes and Schauflyer, 1996), yet the majority have acquired basic productive competence in informal registers of Spanish and some would be considered highly fluent 'native-like' speakers of the language by most standards. Spanish-English bilingualism is incontestably the social norm among US-born Miami Cubans, as they are very often placed in situations of having or needing to use the language not only with family members and friends but also in the broader social and economic context of Miami (Lynch, 2000).

Given the complexity and multi-dimensionality of bilingualism in the global Latin cultural setting of Spanish-speaking Miami (cf. Yúdice, 2003), the city provides an ideal setting for the testing of sociolinguistic hypotheses regarding Spanish language variation and change, and the repercussions of language contact. In her seminal work on Spanish language contact and change among Mexican-origin speakers in East Los Angeles, Silva-Corvalán (1994) defended the following hypothesis:

...[I]n language contact situations, bilinguals develop strategies aimed at lightening the cognitive load of having to remember and use two different linguistic systems. . . The result is more or less massive changes in the secondary language [Spanish]. The extent of these changes correlates with the speakers' level of bilingual proficiency and with extralinguistic factors. The occurrence of the changes is further favored and accelerated by (a) absence of normative pressures on the subordinate language; (b) restriction in the range of communicative uses of the subordinate language; and (c) speakers' positive attitudes towards the superordinate language combined with either neutral or negative attitudes toward the subordinate one. (pp. 6–7)

Silva-Corvalán (1994) described the variation of the morphosyntactic system of Mexican Spanish in East Los Angeles and convincingly demonstrated that linguistic changes apparent in monolingual varieties of Spanish seem to be accelerated among second and third generation speakers in the US who are English-dominant and who reflect processes of incomplete acquisition of the language during childhood (cf. Silva-Corvalán, 2003). Her study did not address phonological issues, however.

To my knowledge, no study to date has tested the hypothesis regarding acceleration of language change at the phonological level in the situation of Spanish in the US. The present study attempts to do so, examining some of the principal social and linguistic factors implicated in the production of syllable- and word-final /s/. This particular phonological segment presents a high degree of variability in contemporary Spanish which

<sup>2</sup> López Morales (2003) and Portes and Stepick (1993) both provide extensive overviews of the distinct waves of Cuban immigrants during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Grenier and Pérez (2003) and De la Torre (2003) offer highly insightful discussions of the political issues affecting Cuban exile communities in Miami.

many scholars (Terrell, 1979, 1981; Lafford, 1986; Calero Fernández, 1993, among others) attribute to an ongoing process of diachronic change involving the sibilant (cf. Penny, 2000).<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Previous studies of final /s/ variation in Spanish

Lipski (1995, p. 291) observed that “in many Spanish dialects, including those of southern and western Spain, the Canary Islands, the Caribbean region and much of Central and South America, syllable- and word-final /s/ suffers frequent weakening.” Canfield (1981) initially relied upon this feature to distinguish *grosso modo* two major dialect regions of the Spanish-speaking Americas: highlands and lowlands. This apparent geographical division has a sociopolitical and economic basis, according to Penny (2000). He affirmed that, historically, the division “corresponds to the degree of closeness of contact between central Spain and the specific American area concerned: those areas which, because of their political and economic importance in the Empire, attracted prestigious speakers of central Castilian varieties are the ones which retain /-s/ most frequently” (Penny, 2000, p. 148). In the Caribbean, the influence of speakers of Andalusian varieties of Spanish—in which aspiration and deletion frequently occur—was predominant, while contact with the /s/-retaining central Castilian norm was more distant (Penny, 2000, p. 149).

With regards to Caribbean Spanish in particular, Ma and Herasimchuk’s (1971) study of Puerto Ricans in New York was the first large-scale, contemporary speech-based project to document the correlation of /s/ weakening and stylistic variation. The first important variationist<sup>4</sup> study of /s/ in Caribbean Spanish was that of Cedergren (1973), who analyzed the speech of 79 individuals in Panama City according to a series of linguistic and social factors. With regards to linguistic factors, she found that aspiration was most strongly conditioned by the presence of a following consonant and deletion was most likely to occur before a pause. In social terms, Cedergren observed that aspiration was much more frequent among speakers of the lower socio-economic classes, and more common among younger speakers in general. The findings of these studies confirmed, from a variationist perspective, the impressionistic observations made by numerous other scholars of Caribbean Spanish earlier in the 20th century, Navarro-Tomás (1948) among them.<sup>5</sup> Observing the Spanish of Puerto Rico during the 1920s, Navarro-Tomás remarked that “final /s/ is generally aspirated in Puerto Rico over all social classes and regions. Educated people give this aspirated /s/ a fairly regular form, while the uneducated submit it to variants of pronunciation” (1948, p. 69).

Since the 1970s, there has been a proliferation of synchronic studies of sibilant reduction in contemporary Spanish. In what follows, I summarize the most relevant findings of this research over the last three decades. Section 2.1 presents the principal findings of previous studies of final /s/ with regards to language-internal

<sup>3</sup> One anonymous reviewer of this article correctly pointed out that final /s/ in present-day Spanish may well constitute a case of stable variation rather than a change in progress. Nonetheless, sibilant reduction in Spanish has been amply documented and discussed by historical linguists (cf. Penny, 1991), who hypothesize that the evolution [s] > [h] > [Ø] is the last phase of a long process of phonological reduction of the original system of Sixteenth Century Spanish which comprised six sibilants and included voiced/voiceless counterparts. Silva-Corvalán (2001, p. 257), affirmed that the variants [s], [h], and [Ø] in contemporary Spanish “parecen reflejar el proceso diacrónico gradual de laxitud de la sibilante implosiva” [“appear to reflect the gradual diachronic process of laxity of the sibilant in postnuclear position”]. Many other prominent scholars, Terrell (1979, 1981) and Lafford (1986) among them, have treated sibilant variation in Caribbean Spanish as an ongoing language change. Poplack (1980, p. 371), addressed the phenomenon in those same terms. Furthermore, we know that the same phonological process affected other Romance varieties, standard French among them (cf. Terrell, 1978b). Whether the variation of final /s/ in Cuban Spanish is stable or is indeed symptomatic of ongoing language change, the findings of the present study are highly relevant to theories of language change in contemporary sociolinguistics (cf. Labov, 1972).

<sup>4</sup> The term ‘variationist’ refers to those studies based on the notion of variable rule analysis, a model carefully developed by Labov (1966, 1972) in his groundbreaking studies of the social stratification of English in New York City and in Martha’s Vineyard. A basic theoretical tenet of variationist studies is that the seeds of diachronic language change are found in those spaces where language varies synchronically. In terms of methodology, variationist studies adhere to quantitative analyses based mostly on oral corpora. Actual language production on the part of the speaker is considered primordial to variationist inquiry, unlike other types of theoretical linguistic research (e.g. generativist studies). Caravado (1991) offers a thoughtful theoretical discussion of the ‘spaces of variability’ in Spanish phonology.

<sup>5</sup> Terrell (1982, p. 50), remarked that “although all phonologists have commented on these processes from the time any serious study of Caribbean phonology began, only after the advent of quantitative analysis with the variable rule model was it shown that the rules of aspiration and deletion are applied consistently following a well-defined system of conditioning factors.”

Table 1  
Distribution of word-final variants by phonological context in Terrell's 1979 study of Cuban Spanish<sup>a</sup> (p. 602)

Context	Retention (%)	Aspiration (%)	Deletion (%)
Preconsonantal	2	75	23
Prevocalic	18	48	34
Prepausal	61	13	26

<sup>a</sup> Terrell (1979) did not indicate the number of tokens for each cell of this table (appearing on p. 602 of his article). Only total numbers of tokens were indicated for each phonological context: 3265 preconsonantal; 1300 prevocalic; and 1776 prepausal.

factors, and considers the functional hypothesis in Section 2.1.1. Section 2.2, describes the most important findings of previous inquiry into the role of social factors in the realization of final /s/.

### 2.1. Language-internal factors

Terrell's (1979) study of Cuban Spanish in Miami reflects one of the first substantial endeavors to explain the role of phonological factors in final /s/ weakening and deletion in contemporary Spanish. Terrell's stated aim was to develop "a diachronic explanation of [the] phonological rules" inherent in the processes of sibilant weakening and deletion in particular geographic dialects of world Spanish; he remarked that "a detailed study of these processes would be pertinent to sociolinguistic theory" (1979, p. 599).<sup>6</sup> Terrell (1979) hypothesized that, in terms of a theory of diachronic language change, the evolution of [s] > [h] > [Ø] would first be manifest in preconsonantal syllable-final position, "since phonetically this is the position in which consonants tend to weaken in all languages and, in particular, throughout the history of the Spanish language, consonants have been subject to weakening processes in syllable-final position" (1979, p. 608).<sup>7</sup>

Terrell's (1979) data, taken from recorded semi-formal interviews with 22 middle-class educated Cubans residing in Miami in the 1970s,<sup>8</sup> seem to support this hypothesis. In word-internal position, in which postnuclear /s/ is always followed by a consonant, the aspirate was by far the most common variant produced (97% of the time). In word-final position, the realization of /s/ was strongly conditioned by the following segment (consonant, vowel, or pause). Table 1 reproduces Terrell's (1979) data for word-final variants of /s/, showing that the sibilant was least likely to be retained in preconsonantal position (2%) and was greatly favored by a following pause (61% of the time). In prevocalic position, aspiration was most likely (48%), followed by deletion (34%).

In terms of the data overall, the aspirate was by far the most common variant produced by the 22 speakers included in Terrell's (1979) study, constituting 61% of the cases. Deletion occurred in 21% of possible contexts, and the sibilant occurred in only 18% (p. 601). Terrell affirmed that "clearly the phonetic norm of word- and syllable-final /s/ for educated middle-class [Cuban] speakers is some sort of aspiration" (1979, p. 601).<sup>9</sup>

A more recent study of Cuban Spanish carried out by Alfaraz (2000) analyzed aspiration and deletion of /s/ in recorded conversations with 12 speakers in Miami (six males and six females, from 28 to 69 years of age), all

<sup>6</sup> Although Terrell affirmed in the introduction of his article that "phonetic output varies according to the socioeconomic class of the speaker and the social situation in which he finds himself" (p. 599), he left the impact of social variables in Cuban Spanish unexplored as he focused solely on phonological factors.

<sup>7</sup> Calero Fernández (1993, p. 98) observed the following diachronic 'order of priority' for sibilant weakening in preconsonantal position in Spanish: semi-consonant, liquid, nasal, voiced fricative, voiceless fricative and voiced occlusive equally, and, finally, voiceless occlusive. Silva-Corvalán (2001, p. 257) pointed out, however, that synchronic studies of final /s/ in Spanish do not show a clear and consistent correlation between sibilant weakening and following consonant types in this particular order. The data of the present study do not reflect this order, either.

<sup>8</sup> Terrell's (1979) study participants ranged from 25 to 50 years of age, and all were natives of Havana who had been in the US less than 3 months.

<sup>9</sup> Terrell (1979, p. 601) clarified that he coded as [Ø] only those occurrences of the phoneme /s/ for which he was "absolutely sure that [he] heard nothing at all". He pointed out that: "Weak aspiration, complete assimilation resulting in a geminate consonant and a nasalized aspiration are very difficult to distinguish from the complete absence of /s/. Even more difficult is the problem of vowel length. Aspiration, particularly if voiced, is nothing more than a continuation of the preceding vowel" (pp. 601–602). All such cases were transcribed as [h] by Terrell. In the present data, I followed the same procedure, so as to facilitate direct comparisons between the two studies.

of whom were born and raised in central Cuba and had immigrated to the US in their late twenties or early thirties (p. 43). With the exception of one of the older participants, all had been in the US for less than 4 years. The sample was socially stratified according to origin (rural vs. urban) and status (lower, middle, upper). Since the sibilant [s] occurred in only 3% of her data, Alfaraz limited her statistical analysis to differential usage of the aspirated and deleted variants, employing VARBRUL (a program based on logistic regression that requires a binary dependent variable). She found that syllable stress was the only linguistic factor that contributed to word-internal variation, and that stress interacted significantly with morpheme type and following segment to determine aspiration. Aspiration was most favored in stressed syllables preceding a vowel while deletion was most favored in unstressed syllables followed by a pause (p. 68).

Many other variationist studies have been concerned specifically with the realization of /s/ in word-final position. In this position, /s/ often has a grammatical function, e.g. as a marker of plurality in determiners (*la* vs. *las*), nouns (*casa* vs. *casas*), and adjectives (*grande* vs. *grandes*), or a marker of person in the verb (*canta* vs. *cantas*). In what follows, I summarize the main findings of previous studies that have addressed the ‘functional hypothesis’ regarding Spanish /s/ variation in such cases.

### 2.1.1. The functional hypothesis

In its original form, the functional hypothesis (Kiparsky, 1972) proposed that speakers tend to retain semantically relevant information in the surface structure of the language. According to this proposal, in Spanish phonology one would expect a higher rate of retention of /s/, either as sibilant or aspirate, in those word-final positions in which it has grammatical–functional value (Terrell, 1978a). This hypothesis was subsequently tested by scholars such as Poplack (1979, 1980) among Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia, Hundley (1987) in Peru, Uber (1989) among Cubans in New Jersey, Lafford (1989) in the Spanish of Cartagena, Colombia, Samper Padilla (1990) in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, and Ranson (1992) in Andalusia. Many of these studies revealed that, ironically, /s/ was generally deleted at even higher rates when it had grammatical–functional value than when it did not (e.g. Poplack, 1979; Hundley, 1987; Lafford, 1989).

In her detailed analysis of the expression of plurality in Noun Phrase [NP] strings in the informal speech of 24 first generation Puerto Ricans in a working-class neighborhood in Philadelphia, Poplack (1980) revealed a clear tendency to eliminate redundancy in plural marking. Poplack explained that position in the NP string played a significant role: “One marker leads to more, but zeros lead to zeros. In other words, if a plural is going to be realized, the tendency will be for it to be realized on the first element; if it is not, subsequent developments will not tend to compensate for this in a functional way. What follows might either be all markers or all zeros” (1980, p. 378). Among Cuban Mariel immigrants<sup>10</sup> residing in northern New Jersey, however, Uber (1989) found “little redundancy and virtually no concord within multi-word NPs, except for concord of all [Ø]” (p. 81). Uber stated that this latter finding was likely due to overall high rates of /s/ deletion among those speakers, rather than a tendency toward concord within the NP (p. 81).

Despite some evidence in her data for a limited influence of functional constraints on /s/ deletion,<sup>11</sup> Poplack pointed out that “no functional explanation can account for the fact that, out of 1031 tokens of (s) in contexts in which inflection on the NP was the only source of plural/singular disambiguation, 39% of the markers were nonetheless deleted” (p. 379). In an analysis of Andalusian Spanish, Ranson (1992) found that nominal number marking “does not tend to be retained in surface structure”, leading her to argue that the functional

<sup>10</sup> Mariel immigrants, or “Marielitos”, left Cuba en masse in 1980 from the port of Mariel, seeking political asylum in the US (cf. Olson and Olson, 1995). Economic recession and heightened political dissent in Cuba during the late 1970s, tied to the cultural “Blue Jeans Revolution” in 1979, led to the mass exodus of Cubans beginning in April 1980, when Castro declared that anyone desiring to exit Cuba could do so from the port of Mariel. He also granted exit to prisoners. Some 125,000 Marielitos arrived in South Florida in 1980 (Olson and Olson, 1995). Although it is estimated that 26,000 had prison records in Cuba, only 4–6% of those were believed to be hard criminals. This small criminal element among Mariel immigrants in South Florida was greatly publicized, creating alarm and disdain on the part of previous waves of Cubans already settled in Miami. After 3 years in the US, 75% of Marielitos in Miami indicated that they had been clearly discriminated against by “older” pre-1980 Miami Cubans, and 21% reported frequent experiences of anti-Mariel discrimination in the Miami Cuban community (Portes et al., 1985, p. 8). Alberts (2005) affirmed that “. . . ethnic solidarity in the Cuban community has not recovered from the divisions that developed during the Mariel crisis” (p. 243).

<sup>11</sup> Poplack (1980) found higher frequencies of /s/ deletion in those contexts in which plurality could be expressed in non-inflectional ways (p. 379).

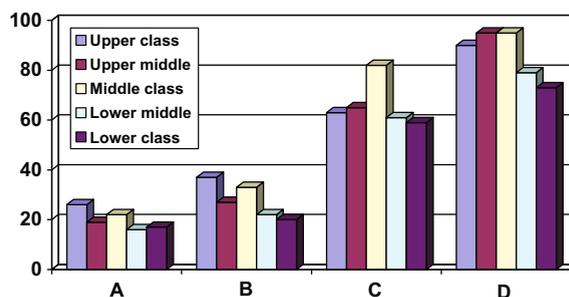


Fig. 1. Occurrence of the sibilant [s] according to socioeconomic class and speech style in the Spanish of Cartagena, Colombia (Lafford, 1986, p. 59), A = spontaneous speech; B = semi-formal speech; C = reading a paragraph; D = list of words.

hypothesis “should be revised to state that ‘there is a tendency for semantically relevant information to be retained (whether through linguistic or contextual means)’” (p. 317). Uber (1989) came to a similar conclusion, affirming that her study of Mariel Cuban Spanish “can support the functional hypothesis only in a global sense” (p. 86). She explained that: “Claims of functional compensation within the phonology are not supported. . . , but some aspect of the context (morphological, syntactic, semantic, or pragmatic) generally disambiguates NPs which are phonologically ambiguous with respect to number” (Uber, 1989, p. 86). Indeed, Uber found that, out of 50% of masculine NPs and 42% of feminine NPs in which there was no plural marker (i.e. all phonetic manifestations of /s/ were deleted), less than 7% of those remained ambiguous as to number (2% of masculine NPs and 7% of feminine NPs).<sup>12</sup>

Uber (1989) noted a correlation between plural /s/ retention in NPs and educational level. At least one plural /s/ was retained in about 72% of NPs produced by speakers who had at least some college education (p. 82), vs. only about 44% among those with lower levels of educational attainment (p. 84). This brings us to the issue of social factors in final /s/ reduction, summarized in Section 2.2.

## 2.2. Social factors

The preponderance of /s/ weakening and deletion among speakers of lower socioeconomic classes, the younger generations, and men in general has been attested in numerous studies throughout the Spanish-speaking world: in Panama (Cedergren, 1973), the Dominican Republic (Alba, 1982), Puerto Rico (López Morales, 1983), Colombia (Lafford, 1986), Chile (Valdivieso and Magaña, 1991; Cepeda, 1995), and Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (Samper Padilla, 1990), among others. Lafford’s (1986) study, based on a socially stratified sample of 83 speakers in Cartagena, Colombia, demonstrated that as socioeconomic class increased, so did the use of the sibilant. She also observed that as speech style became more monitored—from casual speech to reading a text and a list of words—the sibilant appeared more frequently. These data, taken from Lafford (1986), are reproduced in Fig. 1.

Regarding the possibility of an ongoing language change with respect to final /s/ in Cartagena Spanish, Lafford (1986, p. 65) revealed slightly higher rates of deletion in spontaneous and semi-formal speech styles among young speakers (14–24 years of age) than among middle-age (30–43 years) and older (50+ years) speakers (39% vs. 37% and 34%, respectively). She noted, however, that the rate of retention of the sibilant was the same for the young generation as it was for the middle-age group (24%) in those same styles. When the more formal speech styles (reading a paragraph and a word list) were taken into account, Lafford observed higher rates of sibilant retention and lower rates of deletion among the young generation than among middle-age speakers (1986, p. 66). These data led her to conclude that “although it is evident that the change  $s > h > \emptyset$  continues to extend itself in the conversational styles of the speech of the young, there appears to be a halting effect that inverts (particularly in more formal speech styles) the existing tendency to lose /s/ among the older

<sup>12</sup> Uber (1989, p. 80) stated that this particular finding of her study “runs counter to the findings of Flores et al. (1983), where masculine plural determiners and nouns were found to be more likely than their feminine counterparts to lack the plural /s/ inflection”.

generations” (p. 70, my translation).<sup>13</sup> By way of explanation, Lafford (1986, p. 71) proposed that the sibilant appeared to have become more prestigious among the young in Cartagena due to their higher levels of formal education and greater social mobility, increased contact with educated speakers from other regions of Colombia—particularly the capital city of Bogota—where final /s/ weakening does not occur, and a concomitant ‘inferiority complex’ among Cartagenans toward their own variety of Spanish and their desire to speak more normatively vis-à-vis the capital and other important cities of the interior.<sup>14</sup>

Lafford (1986) observed that the aspirate appeared to be a neutral variant in Cartagena Spanish: “It cannot be considered a significant social marker due to its weak stratification power and the resulting lack of correlation between its use and a specific socioeconomic group” (p. 73, my translation).<sup>15</sup> Lafford (1986) discovered that deletion, on the other hand, was indeed highly stratified in Cartagena: “The correlation between the use of [Ø] and low socioeconomic position can be clearly seen in all speech styles. For that reason, [Ø] is considered a stigmatized variant which can become an effective marker of low social position” (p. 63, my translation).<sup>16</sup> The same appears to be true in Chilean Spanish to some extent. In a quantitative study of 34 speakers from the city of Valdivia, Cepeda (1995) observed that /s/ deletion is “a characteristic of informal, uneducated or ‘vulgar’ speech in Chile” and is much more common among speakers of the lower social strata and among men in general (pp. 346–347).

As Labov (1972) argued, negative social attitudes toward a particular variant generally work to constrain and limit the use of that variant. Although language-internal factors undeniably play a large part in conditioning the occurrence of variants in a particular phonological context, language external factors may provide much of the speaker’s motivation for using particular variants, on both conscious and unconscious levels. In this way, the expression of social and situational identities is inextricably bound up in the selection of particular ways of saying things. The case of final /s/ appears to be a paragon example of such socially motivated variation in Spanish. This could perhaps explain why the young Cartagena speakers included in Lafford’s (1986) study appeared to be halting the spread of [Ø] in more formal speech styles. It may also account partially for the fact that deletion has remained relatively infrequent in the Spanish of Lima, Montevideo, and Buenos Aires despite the pervasiveness of aspiration in the diverse sociolects of those cities.<sup>17</sup> In Buenos Aires, I have observed that deletion remains socially stigmatized in most contexts and is avoided in more formal speech styles, particularly in word-final position. Aspiration, on the other hand, appears to be socially neutral in Buenos Aires, and is highly frequent in all contexts and speech styles (cf. Fontanella de Weinberg, 1987). In Concepción, Chile, Valdivieso and Magaña (1991) made a similar observation regarding the widespread social acceptance of the aspirate, as did Carbonero (1982) in Seville, Spain, Molina Martos (1997) in Toledo, Spain, and Samper Padilla (1990) in Las Palmas, Canary Islands (Spain). Terrell (1982) affirmed that “in the Caribbean, aspiration is clearly the preference for educated speakers, even in formal speech situations. . . . The mental connection between a sibilant in orthography and aspiration in speech is strong for these speakers” (p. 52).

Among 1990s Cuban immigrants in Miami, Alfaraz (2000) found that, in general, deletion was less common among upper status speakers, older speakers, and females. Alfaraz noted two exceptional patterns in her data in sociolinguistic terms, ones that she characterized as “unusual” (pp. 50–51). First, she observed that

<sup>13</sup> In Lafford’s (1986) original words: “Aunque es evidente que el cambio  $s > h > \emptyset$  sigue extendiéndose en el habla juvenil en los estilos hablados, parece haber un efecto refrenador que invierte (sobre todo en los estilos más formales) la tendencia ya existente de las generaciones mayores a perder /s/”.

<sup>14</sup> Lafford (1980/1984) offers more detailed discussion of these factors apparently involved in halting /s/ weakening in Cartagena Spanish.

<sup>15</sup> In Lafford’s (1986) original words: “No se la puede considerar un marcador social de fuerza significativa debido a su débil poder estratificador y a la resultante falta de correlación firme entre su uso y un grupo socioeconómico específico.”

<sup>16</sup> In Lafford’s (1986) original words: “[S]e puede ver claramente la correlación entre el uso de [Ø] y una baja posición socioeconómica en todos los estilos. Por ello se considera el [Ø] una variante estigmatizada que puede llegar a ser un marcador efectivo de baja posición social.”

<sup>17</sup> Terrell (1979, p. 609) stated that the high frequency of aspiration without deletion in the contemporary Spanish of Buenos Aires provides evidence that “the adoption of aspiration was indeed independent and preceded the adoption of deletion,” this latter process being much more frequent in what he considered more ‘advanced’ dialects with respect to this change, such as those spoken in the Caribbean. In more advanced dialects, the realization of /s/ appears to be conditioned by the following segment, as reflected in Table 1. Terrell stated that “it is impossible to determine if deletion was an immediate consequence of aspiration. In any case, it could not have been delayed too long since practically it is difficult to maintain one’s speech with a high number of aspirations in syllable- and word-final position without at least sporadic deletion” (1979, p. 609).

middle status males showed a higher likelihood of using the aspirate in word-internal position than did females of middle and lower status. Second, she noted that upper status speakers of rural origin had the highest rates of deletion. Alfaraz maintained that upper middle-class association with a negatively evaluated rural feature is linked to “the positive effects of rural ties on an individual’s quality of life in Cuba, which make rural origins prestigious within the local culture, and rural sociolinguistic variants an expression of that prestige” (2000, p. 52). In concluding, she affirmed that the “strong motivation for young college-educated males to use more non-standard variants [i.e. deletion] is an expression of locality and solidarity” (p. 72).

Alfaraz (2000) claimed that the 12 speakers included in her study were representative of processes of variation and change in Cuban Spanish because of the “unique dialect situation to which they immigrated”, i.e. Miami. She explained that in Miami, “although there is a certain degree of mixing of individuals from different regions [of Cuba], most Cubans maintain their old social network”, and that “new arrivals rely heavily on social network ties” (p. 44). While this is likely true of first generation immigrants who have been in Miami for only a few years, I would add that the situation is quite different for those Cubans who have been born and raised in Miami. The present study involves these latter individuals, for whom ‘mixing’ with speakers of other regional varieties of Cuban Spanish is quite common, and whose dominant language of peer interaction is English.

I turn now to the principal research questions posed by the study and an explanation of the methodology that I followed to address these.

### 3. The study

#### 3.1. Research questions

The two main questions guiding the present study were the following:

1. How does the pronunciation of final /s/ vary among Miami Cuban Spanish speakers according to the following social variables: generation (older, Cuban-born early exile speakers who immigrated to Miami as adults vs. young Miami-born speakers of the third generation), sex, and social status?
2. How do language-internal factors (word position, following segment, syllable stress, morphological function) influence the realization of final /s/ in Miami Cuban Spanish? Do these factors exert different influences in the speech of young Miami-born Cubans than among Cuban-born speakers of the older generation?

#### 3.2. Methodology

##### 3.2.1. Data collection

Tape-recorded interviews were carried out with 16 speakers of Cuban Spanish in Miami, comprising two principal groups for purposes of comparison: (1) older early exile immigrants (ranging in age from 56 to 76 years) who arrived in Miami as adults in the 1960s and 1970s ( $N = 5$ ); and (2) young Miami-born Cuban adults (ranging in age from 18 to 24 years) whose maternal and paternal grandparents immigrated from Cuba prior to 1980 ( $N = 11$ ). The interviews, each lasting 60–75 min, had the general purpose of collecting casual to semi-casual speech on a wide range of topics. All interviews reflected the same speech style described by Terrell for his interviews in the 1970s—“relaxed but of course not completely informal” (1979, p. 600).<sup>18</sup> Conversation topics included observations on social and cultural life in Miami, relations among Cubans and other Latin American-origin groups,<sup>19</sup> views on US–Cuba relations and Castro’s regime, problems of violence and drugs among young people, race relations in the US, and other current political affairs, including the

<sup>18</sup> The speech style reflected in the present interviews is best characterized as being somewhere between the ‘casual’ and ‘consultative’ styles delimited by Joos (1959). Joos defined consultative style as the norm for informal conversation between strangers, characterized by the use of informal discourse markers and other elements of informality, including limited ellipsis and slang. Joos described casual style as being typical of informal speech among peers, including more frequent ellipsis and slang.

<sup>19</sup> According to the US Census Bureau (2006), Cubans represented 52% of Miami-Dade County’s total Hispanic population. Contingents of Colombians and Nicaraguans numbered more than 100,000 people each, and there were about 90,000 Puerto Ricans. There were also large groups of Dominicans and Hondurans (slightly less than 50,000 people each), as well as Venezuelans, Argentines, Peruvians and Mexicans (more than 25,000 people each) (US Census Bureau, 2006).

recently abated Clinton–Lewinsky scandal. Participants were also asked about their personal background in Spanish, how often and with whom they spoke the language, and how comfortable they felt speaking it. All of the interviews were conducted by me, entirely in Spanish.

Of the 16 interviewed speakers included in the study, 10 were females and six were males; eight were of lower middle social status and eight were considered upper middle. The variable ‘social status’ was based on family history in Cuba, participants’ occupation and/or their parents’ occupation, and the neighborhood in which they resided in Miami. The variable ‘generation’ reflects both place of birth and age in the present study. Although studies of Spanish in the US generally classify generation based on speakers’ place of birth and the immigrant status of their parents and grandparents, irrespective of their age (i.e. ‘first generation’ refers to anyone who was born abroad and who immigrated to the US as an adult; ‘second generation’ signifies anyone who immigrated as a small child or who was born in the US to first generation parents; ‘third generation’ refers to anyone who has at least one second generation parent, etc.), I felt it was crucial to account for both age and birthplace in the concept of ‘generation’ in the present study. I considered that only the speech of older-age Cubans who came to Miami as adults during the 1960s and 1970s should be compared only with the speech of those Miami-born speakers who would naturally constitute their grandchildren’s generation,<sup>20</sup> i.e., those who would be considered ‘third generation’ and be young adults, under the age of 25. This criterion made the sample representative of Miami’s demographic reality as the extreme majority of third generation Miami Cubans are under the age of 30, reason being there were only an estimated five to six thousand Cubans residing in the city of Miami on the eve of Castro’s government takeover in Cuba in 1959 (Boswell, 1994).

Any inclusion of younger-age first or second generation speakers in the present study would have confounded two distinct phenomena: the evolution of Cuban Spanish in Miami vs. the evolution of Spanish in post-Castro Cuba. As Alfaraz (2002) noted, Cuban communities in Miami consciously distinguish between the sociolects of pre-Castro Spanish spoken by early immigrants in the 1960s and 1970s and those spoken by later arrivals (particularly post-1980) who were born and grew up in communist Cuba. Alfaraz’s (2000) research supports the proposition that those linguistic variants that were more commonly associated with rural and lower class speech in Cuba before Castro’s revolution have become much more widespread on the island over the past five decades, as “an expression of locality and solidarity” (p. 72). My own personal observations and research endeavors in Miami also support this proposition. Many pre-1980 Cuban immigrants have commented to me their impression that the Spanish spoken by more recent immigrants from Cuba is “very different” than the Spanish spoken by their own generation, often affirming that the former “has gotten worse” [“ha empeorado”]. Similar sorts of comments were documented by Alfaraz (2002), as will be highlighted in Section 5.

For this reason, the situation of Cuban Spanish differs importantly from that of other varieties of Spanish spoken in the US. Other principal varieties, constantly renewed by the continuous influx of monolingual or Spanish-dominant (im)migrants in the US (e.g. Mexicans, Colombians, Salvadorans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, etc.), do not reflect the sort of rapid sociolinguistic change that has characterized Cuban Spanish over the past five decades, at least not to the same extent and not within the context of stark sociopolitical and ideological division among the population. It thus seems to me that, in a study of the present type, it would have been counterproductive to include 1960s Cuban immigrants, or early exiles, in the same general category as Mariel immigrants and others who left Cuba in the 1990s and 2000s, especially if the latter were younger than the former because they would have been born, raised and educated within the context of post-Castro Cuba. Although all such individuals would correctly be labeled ‘first generation’ speakers according to general methodological procedure in research on Spanish in the US, this grouping would ignore a very important aspect of present-day Cuban sociolinguistic reality and would have muddled my effort to elucidate the evolution of Cuban Spanish in Miami as opposed to its evolution in Cuba.

With regards to post-Castro Cuban Spanish, I included interviews with three young Cuban-born Marielitos (a female who immigrated to the US at age five, a male who immigrated at age two, and another male who left Cuba at age three). The data from these interviews, taken with those provided by Alfaraz (2000), are presented

<sup>20</sup> None of the young Miami-born speakers was actually the grandchild of an older immigrant speaker included in the present study.

merely for purposes of comparison between sociolects of pre-Castro and post-Castro Cuban Spanish in Miami in Section 5. They were not included in the statistical analysis reported on below. A full-scale quantitative comparison of the pre- and post-Castro sociolects of Cuban Spanish spoken in Miami constitutes a study topic in its own right, and goes beyond the scope of the present work.

### 3.2.2. Data analysis

The quantitative analysis included 2454 tokens of postnuclear /s/ occurring in word-internal and word-final position, taken from complete transcriptions of the recorded interviews described above. All of the tokens of /s/ were taken from segments of the conversation lasting 10–12 min, in which participants talked about two general topics: (1) Castro, the situation of Cuba, and its political and economic relations with the US and (2) the Clinton–Lewinsky scandal, which had recently abated at the time that the interviews were recorded (between late 1998 and early 2001). Additional tokens were taken from 3 to 5 min of speech involving a variety of other topics. The order of the topics was similar in all of the conversations, and all segments occurred at least 15 min into the conversation.

The data were entered as categorical variables into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 15.0 for Windows. Syllable- and word-final /s/ constituted the dependent variable. Following Terrell (1975), each occurrence of the dependent variable in the selected segments of recorded conversation was classified as a sibilant [s], an aspirate [h], or a phonetic zero [Ø].<sup>21</sup> For each token, eight independent variables were also coded for analysis. Three of these were social variables: the generation (older immigrant or young Miami-born) of the speaker who produced each token of /s/, the speaker's sex (male or female), and her/his social status (upper middle or lower middle). The remaining five independent variables were linguistic factors. These were: morphological value of /s/ (lexical, plural marker, or verbal morpheme indicating person), the phonological segment following /s/ (pause, vowel, or consonant<sup>22</sup>), the position of /s/ in the word (internal or final), stress of the syllable in which /s/ occurred (stressed or unstressed), and the topic of conversation ('Cuba', 'Clinton–Lewinsky', or 'other'). Since the topic of conversation had virtually no effect on the variation of /s/ in the data, this variable was excluded from further analysis.<sup>23</sup>

Crosstabs were used to reveal the distribution of each of the variants of /s/ (sibilant, aspirate, phonetic zero) according to the independent variables. Chi-square tests were performed on each of the crosstabs. The value of Chi-square, its significance, and the value of Cramer's *V* are reported for each of the crosstabs displayed in the tables that appear in Section 4. To assess the strength of each of the independent variables relative to each other, logistic regression analysis was carried out. Since this regression requires a binary dependent variable, [h] and [Ø] were merged into a single value. The regression thus analyzed the influence of all of the independent variables, taken together, on the presence or absence of the sibilant [s]. The decision to merge [h] and [Ø] into a single value (rather than [s] and [h]) was based on the results of the

<sup>21</sup> Terrell (1975) affirmed that these three variants represent points along what we may consider an acoustic continuum, since the process of phonetic weakening involved in the interplay of [s → h → Ø] would necessarily implicate a scale of degrees (cf. Lipski, 1984). Terrell (1975, p. 7) explained that: "De la aspiración fuerte hasta su desaparición hay una infinidad de posibilidades. Al principio pensé distinguir una aspiración fuerte de una débil, pero resultó prácticamente imposible hacer la distinción semánticamente. Pero hay otras variantes que resultan más fáciles de distinguir: una variante mixta sibilante-aspirada [s<sup>h</sup>], una aspiración algo sonorizada [h]...," etc. ["From strong aspiration to its disappearance there are infinite possibilities. At first I planned to distinguish between strong and weak aspiration, but it ended up being practically impossible to make the distinction semantically. But there are other variants which are easier to distinguish: a hybrid sibilant-aspirate [s<sup>h</sup>], a somewhat voiced aspiration [h]...," etc.]. Poplack (1980) also affirmed that there is "ample evidence" that [s] follows a continuous weakening process (p. 378), and Hammond (2001) described the same sort of continuum for sibilant weakening. Similarly, Martínez and Moya (2000, p. 138) remarked upon an acoustic continuum inherent in *seseo* and *distinción* (i.e. the variation of [s] and the interdental fricative /θ/) among speakers of Spanish in Granada, Spain.

<sup>22</sup> Occurrences of /s/ preceding a segment beginning with /s/ were excluded from the analysis (e.g. *ellososon*) since the possible realization of final /s/ as [h] or [Ø] in such positions was masked by the sibilance of initial /s/ in the segment immediately following. No occurrences of sibilant reduction in syllable- and word-initial position were observed in the present data (e.g. 'nosotros' pronounced as [nohotros], as sometimes heard in highland Colombia and northern Mexico).

<sup>23</sup> The frequency of each of the variants of /s/ was essentially the same across the three topics considered. Within the context of conversation about Cuba, [s] = 19.7%; [h] = 47.7%; [Ø] = 32.6%. In discussions about the Clinton–Lewinsky scandal, [s] = 19.7%; [h] = 48.0%; [Ø] = 32.3%. For all other topics, [s] = 21.2%; [h] = 46.8%; [Ø] = 32.0%.

Table 2

Results of logistic regression analysis: significant variables for realization of /s/ in syllable- and word-final position in Miami Cuban Spanish

Variable	Wald	df	Sig.
Following segment	125.026	8	.000
Speaker generation	62.133	1	.000
Morphological value	20.977	2	.000
Speaker sex	11.619	1	.001
Syllable stress	6.971	1	.008
Social status	4.362	1	.037

$N = 16$ , total tokens = 2454. Model  $X^2 = 236.614$ ,  $df = 14$ ,  $p = .000$ .

crosstabs, which revealed important social differences with respect to the sibilant, as will be highlighted in the remaining pages of this article.

#### 4. Results

Table 2 displays the results of the binary logistic regression analysis. Since the relative strength of each independent variable is determined by its corresponding Wald statistic (Hosmer and Lemeshow, 2000), these values, and their significance, are reported in Table 2. According to these values, the type of segment following /s/ had the strongest influence on its phonetic realization (Wald = 125.026,  $p = .000$ ). Speaker generation had the second strongest predictive value (Wald = 62.133,  $p = .000$ ), and morphological value the third strongest (Wald = 20.977,  $p = .000$ ). Speaker sex, syllable stress, and social status also showed significant effects, with social status being the weakest. The only independent variable that did not show any significant effects in the regression was position of /s/ in the word ( $p = .087$ ).

In the following pages, the distribution of the phonetic variants (sibilant, aspirate, phonetic zero) is displayed for each of the independent variables, and significant differences (according to Chi-square) are highlighted. The presentation of these findings is divided into two main subsections, following the format of Section 2 above: language-internal factors (4.1) and social factors (4.2). I have organized the presentation of findings within each of these subsections according to the relative strength of each of the independent variables, as revealed in the regression analysis.

##### 4.1. Language-internal factors

Of all the independent variables, the phonological segment following /s/ displayed the greatest strength in the regression analysis, as previously noted (Table 2). Table 3 reveals that deletion was most common in prepausal position (47%). The sibilant was also most likely in prepausal and prevocalic positions (35% and 29%, respectively), and least likely to occur before a consonant (only 11% of the time before /k/ and /g/, 20% of the time before the palatal /y/, and 15% of the time before all other consonants). The aspirate was the preferred variant in preconsonantal position; the sibilant occurred only about 15% of the time before consonants.

In general terms, these findings concur with those of Cedergren (1973) for Panama City Spanish and those of Terrell (1979) for 1970s Cuban immigrants in Miami. Terrell observed that prepausal and prevocalic positions favored the sibilant the most (Table 1). However, the rate of sibilant retention in prepausal position was much higher in Terrell's study than in the present one (61% vs. 35%, respectively). Occurrence of the aspirate in prepausal position in the present data was slightly higher (18% vs. 13% in Terrell's data), and rates of deletion were nearly double those observed by Terrell in the 1970s (47% in the present study vs. 26% in Terrell's study). It is noteworthy that rates of deletion in word-final position in the present data were nearly the same as those reported by Lafford (1989, p. 54) for prepausal and prevocalic contexts: 45% before pauses in Cartagena vs. 47% in the present study; 36% before vowels in Cartagena vs. 35% in the present study. Before consonants,

Table 3  
Realization of /s/ among Miami Cubans according to following segment ( $N = 16$ )

Following segment	[s]	[h]	[Ø]
Pause	35% (138/398)	18% (72/398)	47% (188/398)
Vowel	29% (128/448)	36% (163/448)	35% (157/448)
/t d/	15% (102/679)	63.5% (431/679)	21.5% (146/679)
Liquid	15% (16/104)	46% (48/104)	39% (40/104)
/p b/	15% (44/294)	56% (165/294)	29% (85/294)
Nasal	15% (33/219)	53% (116/219)	32% (70/219)
/x/	15% (2/13)	46% (6/13)	39% (5/13)
/k g/	11% (30/279)	57% (159/279)	32% (90/279)
Palatal	20% (4/20)	20% (4/20)	60% (12/20)

$\chi^2 = 281.60$ ,  $df = 16$ ,  $p = .000$ , Cramer's  $V = .240$  (three cells with count less than 5).

Table 4  
Realization of /s/ before pauses according to speaker generation ( $N = 16$ )

	[s]	[h]	[Ø]
Immigrants	34% (44/131)	19% (25/131)	47% (62/131)
Miami-born	35% (94/267)	18% (47/267)	47% (126/267)

$\chi^2 = .173$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .917$ , Cramer's  $V = .021$  (no cells with count less than 5).

Table 5  
Realization of /s/ before vowels according to speaker generation ( $N = 16$ )

	[s]	[h]	[Ø]
Immigrants	18% (29/162)	44% (72/162)	38% (61/162)
Miami-born	34% (99/286)	32% (91/286)	34% (96/286)

$\chi^2 = 15.14$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .001$ , Cramer's  $V = .184$  (no cells with count less than 5).

Table 6  
Realization of /s/ before consonants according to speaker generation ( $N = 16$ )

	[s]	[h]	[Ø]
Immigrants	6% (33/595)	64% (381/595)	30% (181/595)
Miami-born	20% (198/1013)	54% (548/1013)	26% (267/1013)

$\chi^2 = 59.77$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .000$ , Cramer's  $V = .193$  (no cells with count less than 5).

however, the rates of deletion were much higher in Lafford's data than in the present study: 52% in the former vs. 37.5% in the latter.<sup>24</sup>

Exploration of the present data according to following segment and speaker generation revealed that occurrence of the sibilant was the same in prepausal position (Table 4), but significantly greater in prevocalic and preconsonantal positions among Miami-born speakers (Tables 5 and 6). I will relate this particular finding to a theory of language change in Section 5.

In terms of the morphological value of word-final /s/, the results of the present study were in full accordance with those of previous investigations, mentioned earlier, regarding the functional hypothesis in contemporary Spanish (Section 2.1.1). As observed in Table 7, rates of deletion in the present data were significantly higher in plurality morphemes and in verb endings: /s/ as plural marker was deleted 41% of the time and in verb endings 65% of the time, while it was retained as a sibilant or an aspirate in 68% of the contexts where its

<sup>24</sup> Comparisons with Lafford's (1989) data can only be made for word-final position since her analysis, concerned with functionalism, was limited to occurrences of /s/ in this position.

Table 7  
Realization of word-final /s/ among Miami Cubans according to morphological value ( $N = 16$ )

Morphological value	[s]	[h]	[Ø]
Lexical	27% (181/667)	41% (273/667)	32% (213/667)
Plural	20% (205/1007)	38% (386/1007)	41% (416/1007)
Verbal	8% (8/102)	27% (28/102)	65% (66/102)

$\chi^2 = 49.673$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = .000$ , Cramer's  $V = .118$  (no cells with count less than 5).

Table 8  
Realization of /s/ in plurality morphemes according to speaker generation ( $N = 16$ )

	[s]	[h]	[Ø]
Immigrants	13% (49/384)	46% (176/384)	41% (159/384)
Miami-born	25% (156/625)	34% (211/625)	41% (258/625)

$\chi^2 = 26.46$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .000$ , Cramer's  $V = .162$  (no cells with count less than 5).

Table 9  
Realization of /s/ among Miami Cubans according to syllable stress ( $N = 16$ )

Syllable stress	[s]	[h]	[Ø]
Stressed	24.5% (134/546)	57% (311/546)	18.5% (101/546)
Unstressed	19% (363/1908)	45% (853/1908)	36% (692/1908)

$\chi^2 = 61.30$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .000$ , Cramer's  $V = .158$  (no cells with count less than 5).

function was not inflectional. This is precisely the opposite tendency than that suggested by the functional hypothesis. Lafford (1989, p. 58) made a similar finding for word-final /s/ in Cartagena Spanish. She observed significantly higher rates of /s/ deletion in grammatical–functional contexts (49%) than in contexts where final /s/ had only lexical value (40%). In the present data, this contrast was a bit stronger: 32% of occurrences of word-final /s/ having only lexical value were realized as [Ø], while 43.5% of /s/ with grammatical–functional value was deleted in Miami Cuban Spanish.

It is noteworthy that the increased frequency of the sibilant among young Miami-born speakers (compared to speakers of their grandparents' generation) did not affect the rate of deletion in plurality morphemes. Table 8 reflects that although young Miami-born speakers produced significantly more [s] to mark plurality than did the older generation, they used [Ø] with the same frequency as the latter: 41%. This seems to be additional evidence that the functional hypothesis does not adequately explain the variance observed in the present data.

The relationship of syllable stress to /s/ reduction in the present data was the same as in Terrell's (1979), Lafford's (1989) and Alfaraz's (2000) investigations: deletion was most favored by unstressed syllables (36% of the time in the present study). The sibilant and the aspirate, on the other hand, were more likely to occur in stressed syllables. These data appear in Table 9.

A breakdown of the data by the factors syllable stress and speaker generation (Tables 10 and 11) shows that rates of deletion remained the same in unstressed syllables (36% for both groups) but decreased significantly in stressed syllables (27% among older generation immigrants vs. 14% among young Miami-born speakers). It is noteworthy that the rate of increase in sibilant use among Miami-born speakers was exactly the same in both types of syllables (+13%), yet in the case of unstressed syllables this increase happened at the expense of the

Table 10  
Realization of /s/ in unstressed syllables according to speaker generation ( $N = 16$ )

	[s]	[h]	[Ø]
Immigrants	11% (74/691)	53% (367/691)	36% (250/691)
Miami-born	24% (289/1217)	40% (486/1217)	36% (442/1217)

$\chi^2 = 56.50$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .000$ , Cramer's  $V = .172$  (no cells with count less than 5).

Table 11  
Realization of /s/ in stressed syllables according to speaker generation ( $N = 16$ )

	[s]	[h]	[Ø]
Immigrants	16% (32/197)	56% (111/197)	27% (54/197)
Miami-born	29% (102/349)	57% (200/349)	14% (47/349)

$\chi^2 = 21.90$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .000$ , Cramer's  $V = .200$  (no cells with count less than 5).

Table 12  
Realization of /s/ among Miami Cubans according to position in word ( $N = 16$ )

Position	[s]	[h]	[Ø]
Word-internal	15% (103/678)	70% (477/678)	15% (98/678)
Word-final	22% (394/1776)	39% (687/1776)	39% (695/1776)

$\chi^2 = 208.09$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .000$ , Cramer's  $V = .291$  (no cells with count less than 5).

Table 13  
Realization of /s/ in word-internal position according to speaker generation ( $N = 16$ )

	[s]	[h]	[Ø]
Immigrants	4% (9/229)	77% (177/229)	19% (43/229)
Miami-born	21% (94/449)	67% (300/449)	12% (55/449)

$\chi^2 = 35.70$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .000$ , Cramer's  $V = .229$  (no cells with count less than 5).

Table 14  
Realization of /s/ in word-final position according to speaker generation ( $N = 16$ )

	[s]	[h]	[Ø]
Immigrants	15% (97/659)	46% (301/659)	39% (261/659)
Miami-born	26.5% (297/1117)	34.5% (386/1117)	39% (434/1117)

$\chi^2 = 39.63$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .000$ , Cramer's  $V = .149$  (no cells with count less than 5).

aspirate as deletion remained stable, at 36% (Table 10). In the case of stressed syllables, this increase occurred at the expense of the deleted variant as rates of aspiration remained the same (Table 11). The latter can be attributed to the fact that most occurrences of /s/ in stressed syllables were in word-internal position, a context in which the aspirate was greatly preferred because of the influence of a following consonant (cf. Tables 3 and 12).

Although word position did not prove to be a significant variable in the regression analysis, the Chi-square value for the distribution of the variants was highly significant ( $p = .000$ ). Table 12 reflects that [h] was the preferred variant in word-internal position (occurring 70% of the time), while [s] and [Ø] were more favored by word-final contexts. The fact that most occurrences of word-final /s/ were in unstressed syllables, plus the fact that many of these occurrences also constituted prepausal contexts, increased the probability of their being deleted by speakers of the older immigrant generation. This tendency was maintained by young Miami-born speakers (cf. Table 4).

Consideration of the data according to word position and speaker generation revealed that speakers of both groups (the older immigrant generation and the young Miami-born generation) overwhelmingly preferred the aspirate in word-internal position (which is also necessarily preconsonantal), although use of the sibilant increased significantly in this position among the Miami-born group (Table 13).

In word-final position (Table 14), rates of deletion remained exactly the same across the two generations (39%) as aspiration decreased in favor of the sibilant (15% among immigrants vs. 26.5% among Miami-born speakers).

Table 15  
Realization of /s/ among Miami Cubans according to speaker generation ( $N = 16$ )

Speaker generation	[s]	[h]	[Ø]
Immigrants	12% (106/888)	54% (478/888)	34% (304/888)
Miami-born	25% (391/1566)	44% (686/1566)	31% (489/1566)

$\chi^2 = 61.10$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .000$ , Cramer's  $V = .158$  (no cells with count less than 5).

Table 16  
Realization of /s/ among Miami Cubans according to speaker sex ( $N = 16$ )

Speaker sex	[s]	[h]	[Ø]
Females	18% (252/1424)	51% (720/1424)	32% (452/1424)
Males	24% (245/1030)	43% (444/1030)	33% (341/1030)

$\chi^2 = 18.29$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .000$ , Cramer's  $V = .086$  (no cells with count less than 5).

In sum, it appears that young Miami-born speakers continued to observe the same general linguistic constraints on /s/ reduction as speakers of their grandparents' generation.<sup>25</sup>

#### 4.2. Social factors

Among the social factors taken into account, speaker generation showed the strongest influence on the realization of /s/ in the regression analysis, as pointed out above. Table 15 shows that the frequency of the sibilant among young Miami-born speakers was more than double that observed among the older speakers of the immigrant group. Among speakers of this latter group, the sibilant occurred in only 12% of the possible contexts, while the Miami-born speakers produced it 25% of the time. Interestingly, this apparent language change has occurred at the expense of the aspirate, reduced from 54% among the immigrant generation to 44% among the Miami-born speakers. Deletion appears to have remained mostly stable across the two generations, at 31–34%.

With regards to speaker sex, Table 16 reveals that males produced more [s] than females (24% vs. 18%, respectively) and presented lower rates of aspiration (43% among males vs. 51% among females). Rates of deletion between the two sexes were essentially the same (33% and 32%). At first blush, this distribution seems odd, since the great majority of previous sociolinguistic studies of /s/ reduction in Spanish have revealed generally higher frequencies of sibilant use among females than among males, and higher rates of deletion among males. The tendencies of women to produce [s] more than men, and men to produce [Ø] more than women, have generally been explained in terms of consciousness of linguistic prestige, with women supposedly being more concerned with overt prestige, i.e. use of the sibilant, and men more concerned with covert prestige, i.e. use of phonetic zero (cf. Labov, 1972; Silva-Corvalán, 2001; Trudgill, 1974, 1983).<sup>26</sup> I will return to this issue further below.

Further exploration of the data by speaker sex and generation (Tables 17 and 18) reveals that although males in both groups (older immigrant and young Miami-born) produced [s] more than females, the differences were statistically significant only in the case of the young Miami-born generation. While the difference in the rate of [s] usage among females and males of the older immigrant generation was only 4.5% (Table 17), this difference reached 8% among the young Miami-born generation (Table 18). Comparing the data shown in

<sup>25</sup> Lafford (1989) found the same to be true in her comparison of /s/ deletion among speakers of the upper and lower socioeconomic classes of Cartagena, Colombia. She stated that "... in every case, the upper and lower classes were constrained by the same linguistic factors in the same way; only the absolute percentages differed" (p. 53).

<sup>26</sup> In his studies of English in Norwich, England, Trudgill (1974) observed the tendency of female subjects to over-report their own use of overt prestige, i.e. standard, variants in self-evaluation tests vis-à-vis their actual use of those same forms in recorded speech. Trudgill observed the opposite tendency among male subjects, who generally under-reported their own use of overtly prestigious variants in self-evaluation tests, instead favoring the non-standard variants more typical of working-class speech. Trudgill attributed this latter tendency to the phenomenon of covert prestige of non-standard variants among working-class men in Norwich.

Table 17  
Realization of /s/ among older immigrant Miami Cubans according to speaker sex ( $N = 5$ )

Speaker sex	[s]	[h]	[Ø]
Females	10% (48/485)	54% (262/485)	36% (175/485)
Males	14.5% (58/403)	53.5% (216/403)	32% (129/403)

$\chi^2 = 4.80$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .091$ , Cramer's  $V = .074$  (no cells with count less than 5).

Table 18  
Realization of /s/ among young Miami-born Cubans according to speaker sex ( $N = 11$ )

Speaker sex	[s]	[h]	[Ø]
Females	22% (204/939)	49% (458/939)	29% (277/939)
Males	30% (187/627)	36% (228/627)	34% (212/627)

$\chi^2 = 25.338$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .000$ , Cramer's  $V = .127$  (no cells with count less than 5).

Table 19  
Realization of /s/ among upper middle-class Miami Cubans according to speaker sex ( $N = 8$ )

Speaker sex	[s]	[h]	[Ø]
Females	11.5% (66/569)	55.5% (316/569)	33% (187/569)
Males	33% (224/682)	38% (259/682)	29% (199/682)

$\chi^2 = 82.573$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .000$ , Cramer's  $V = .257$  (no cells with count less than 5).

Table 20  
Realization of /s/ among lower middle-class Miami Cubans according to speaker sex ( $N = 8$ )

Speaker sex	[s]	[h]	[Ø]
Females	22% (186/855)	47% (404/855)	31% (265/855)
Males	6% (21/348)	53% (185/348)	41% (142/348)

$\chi^2 = 44.320$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .000$ , Cramer's  $V = .192$  (no cells with count less than 5).

Tables 17 and 18, it is interesting to note that young Miami-born females deleted /s/ less than their older same-sex counterparts (29% vs. 36%, respectively) yet young Miami-born males presented rates of deletion very similar to those of older males (34% vs. 32%, respectively). As a consequence of this latter tendency, rates of aspiration appeared greatly reduced among males of the younger generation in comparison with those of males corresponding to their grandparents' generation (36% vs. 53.5%, respectively).

Particularly striking are the differences related to speaker sex and social status for the sibilant. Table 19 reflects that among upper middle-class Miami Cubans, males retained the sibilant nearly three times more than their female counterparts (33% among males vs. 11.5% among females). Among lower middle-class speakers (Table 20), on the other hand, the pattern was reversed: females produced [s] almost four times more than males (22% vs. 6%, respectively). It is also noteworthy that lower middle-class females produced the sibilant twice as much as upper middle-class females (22% vs. 11.5%, respectively).

In sum, upper middle-class males of the present sample appeared significantly more concerned with overt linguistic prestige, i.e. sibilant usage, than females of their same social status and both females and males of lower social status. At the same time, lower middle-class females seemed to be more concerned with overt linguistic prestige than females of upper middle social status. Lower middle-class males appeared least concerned of all with overt linguistic prestige and perhaps most conscious of covert prestige of the non-standard variant; they exhibited the lowest rates of sibilant retention (6%) and the highest rates of deletion (41%). I take up this issue in Section 5.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

Three principal conclusions can be reached based on the results of the quantitative analysis. First, the general trend toward sibilant reduction documented in studies of Caribbean Spanish appears to be halted—or reversed—among young, middle-class Miami-born speakers of Cuban Spanish in the South Florida context. Second, this apparent reversal is most salient among males of upper middle social status, who appear to be more conscious of the overt linguistic prestige associated with the sibilant but, at the same time, reflect rates of deletion similar to those found in the speech of their grandparents' generation. And finally, this apparent reversal manifests itself in preconsonantal and prevocalic positions, precisely those linguistic contexts in which the reduction of /s/ was most far advanced in the speech of the older generation who left Cuba as adults during the 1960s and 1970s.

I begin the Discussion with this last observation. Lipski (1995, p. 291) affirmed that “historically, aspiration of /s/ appears to have begun in preconsonantal contexts” and notes that in Caribbean varieties of Spanish “aspiration of word-final /s/ is normally extended to prevocalic contexts: los amigos [lohamígoɦ]” (cf. Tables 10 and 11).<sup>27</sup> If indeed prepausal position least favors reduction of the sibilant in the course of a diachronic language change—as Terrell (1979) proposed—it would make sense that the rate of occurrence of [s] in this position remained unchanged in the speech of Miami-born Cubans vis-à-vis the older immigrant generation (as reflected in Table 4) in a reversal of the apparent change in progress in the variety of Spanish brought to Miami in the 1960s. The pattern of increased sibilant use among young Miami-born Cubans in preconsonantal and prevocalic positions seems to conform to diachronic tendencies of the Spanish language (cf. Penny, 2000, pp. 150–151).

The fact that young Miami-born Cubans produced significantly more [s] than speakers of their grandparents' generation was, at first glance, surprising to me. Since sibilant weakening has generally been associated with ongoing language change in Caribbean varieties of Spanish (as stated in Section 1), I expected to find higher rates of aspiration and deletion among young Miami-born speakers. My initial expectation was heightened by Silva-Corvalán's (1994) hypothesis regarding the acceleration of changes in varieties of Spanish in the US, one which seems fully supported with regards to morphosyntactic phenomena. Silva-Corvalán (1994, p. 7) affirmed that ongoing language changes present in the monolingual varieties of Spanish brought to the US by immigrant speakers are accelerated in the language contact situation because of the absence of normative pressures on the language and its more restricted use in the US setting. Since formal education in Spanish was quite limited among the young Miami-born Cubans included in the present study, and their exposure to Spanish had been principally in informal situations and settings (with English being the language of formal education and written communication, and the preferred language of interaction with peers and in most areas of public life), I hypothesized that in their speech the non-standard variant, i.e. phonetic zero, would be overgeneralized at the expense of the standard variant, i.e. the sibilant.

Beyond first glance, however, greater use of the sibilant among young Miami-born speakers of the middle class—particularly those of the upper middle class—is precisely what the sociolinguist should expect, given the sociopolitical context of Cuban immigration in Miami. Pre-Mariel Miami-born Cubans often face social pressure to dissociate themselves from Mariel and post-Mariel immigrants who were born and grew up in communist Cuba, and who often maintain relationships with friends and family members back on the island.<sup>28</sup> Alfaraz (2002) pointed out that:

The political nature of the Miami Cuban community motivates the rejection of all aspects of Cuba-Post [post-Castro Cuba], whether political, cultural, artistic or linguistic. Language, as a symbol of group membership, is used to build up group boundaries between different political ideologies. The linguistic boundary the group perceives between its variety and the one spoken on the island serves an important separatist function, as it is necessary to distinguish Miami Cubans from Cubans on the island. (p. 7)

The speech of Marielitos and post-Mariel Cubans is oft perceived by pre-Mariel Cubans in Miami as reflecting more rural and lower class patterns of pre-Castro Cuban Spanish, which some even characterize as “un español anegrado” [“a black-like Spanish”] (Alfaraz, 2002, p. 6). Indeed, in her questionnaire study

<sup>27</sup> Lipski (1995) observed that “there are still dialects in which only preconsonantal (and sometimes phrase-final)/s/is reduced, e.g. the upper sociolects of Buenos Aires, Montevideo and Lima” (p. 291).

<sup>28</sup> Fernández (2002) provides an analysis of the social stigmatization of Mariel immigrants in Miami.

Table 21  
Realization of /s/ by young Marielitos

	[s]	[h]	[Ø]
<i>Eva</i>	2% (4/198)	70% (139/198)	28% (55/198)
<i>Armando</i>	4% (4/101)	47.5% (48/101)	48.5% (49/101)
<i>Alex</i>	8% (19/222)	70% (156/222)	21% (47/222)
Average (total)	5% (27/521)	66% (343/521)	29% (151/521)

in which a demographically diverse sample of 148 Cubans in Miami were asked to rate national varieties of Spanish according to their ‘correctness’ and ‘pleasantness’ on a seven-point scale, Alfaraz (2002) found that ‘Spain’ and ‘pre-Castro Cuba’ received the highest ratings, while ‘post-Castro Cuba’ was rated among the lowest (p. 4).<sup>29</sup>

The social need of young Miami-born Cubans—children and grandchildren of early Cuban emigrants who were members of the middle and upper middle socioeconomic classes of pre-Castro Cuba—to differentiate themselves from Marielitos and post-Mariel immigrants provides a highly plausible, albeit partial, explanation for their increased rates of [s]. This explanation seems confirmed by data from three young Marielito speakers (of the same age range as the Miami-born Cubans included in the statistical analysis) who were born in Cuba but immigrated to Miami in their preschool years; they had been educated entirely in Miami. Table 21 reflects that the frequency of [s] was much lower in their speech than among the two generations of pre-Mariel Cubans analyzed in the preceding pages; this was true even for the older generation. The rate of sibilant use among the three young Marielito speakers shown in Table 21 (averaging 5%) is similar to that observed by Alfaraz (about 3%) in her 2000 study of recently arrived Cuban immigrants in Miami, and supports Alfaraz’s conclusion that the sibilant has become much less frequent in post-Castro Cuba, for purposes of solidarity within the context of the communist revolution (p. 72). Even Alex,<sup>30</sup> the Marielito speaker who produced the sibilant with greatest frequency (on 8% of the occasions), reflected a rate of retention much lower than that of the Miami-born grandchildren of pre-Mariel immigrants who were the focus of the present study (25%, as shown in Table 15).

Different than what Alfaraz (2000) observed, i.e. that [Ø] is the variant that reflects solidarity and locality in post-Castro Cuba, the present analysis suggests that, in the context of Cuban Miami, [s] assumes responsibility as a social differentiator. As the frequency of [s] increased significantly among the Miami-born grandchildren of the early exile generation in the present data, rates of deletion appeared to remain stable, similar to those of their grandparents’ generation and those of young Marielito speakers (Table 21). Young Miami-born males in particular appeared to continue to observe the sociophonetic norms of deletion found in the speech of their grandfathers’ generation (Table 18), perhaps because of the covert ‘male’ prestige often associated with this non-standard variant in Caribbean Spanish (cf. Silva-Corvalán, 2001; Trudgill, 1983; Zentella, 1990).<sup>31</sup> The aspirate [h]—as a socially neutral variant in Caribbean varieties (Lafford, 1986; Terrell, 1982) and other varieties of world Spanish (Fontanella de Weinberg, 1987; Samper Padilla, 1990; Valdivieso and Magaña, 1991), among others)—seems to provide a sort of ‘cushion’ in the sociophonetic processes affecting final /s/ in Miami Cuban Spanish. Rates of aspiration in the present data generally appear to be a reflex of the increase or decrease of [s] according to social group.

<sup>29</sup> For Alfaraz’s (2002) study, participants merely rated the abstract constructs “Spain”, “pre-Castro Cuba”, etc. on a Likert-type scale. They were not asked to evaluate audio-recorded voices; a matched guise technique or any other sort of implicit measure was not employed.

<sup>30</sup> All speaker names used in this article are pseudonyms.

<sup>31</sup> In her study of Spanish dialect contact in New York City, Zentella (1990, p. 1103) noted that several Dominican respondents “linked the pronunciation of syllable-final /s/ in male speech to effeminacy and/or putting on airs; they refer to it as ‘hablar fisno’. Thus, although the pronunciation of /s/ is lauded overtly as correct in the Dominican community, its deletion may be linked covertly to masculinity, and being down to earth.” Mesthrie et al. (2000, p. 223) remarked, in relation to Trudgill’s (1983) affirmations about the relationship between gender and covert prestige, that “there is... some evidence for the association of working-class speech with masculinity”, but they noted an “absence of convincing independent evidence that women actually are more status-conscious than men.”

The present findings bear an important parallelism with those of Lafford (1982, 1986) for Cartagena Spanish nearly thirty years ago. Lafford noted that social status exerted a strong influence on the use of the prestige variant [s] and that, among the younger generation in Cartagena, its use had increased because of higher levels of formal education and greater contact with speakers of highland (/s/-retaining) varieties of Colombian Spanish, particularly from the capital, Bogota. The reversal, or at least halting, of the change [s] > [h] > [Ø] apparent among young people in Cartagena, attributable to a heightened consciousness of linguistic forms associated with social prestige, seems to be happening in Cuban Miami also. The reasons underlying this phenomenon in Miami are different than those in Cartagena, however. While their basis seems mostly socioeconomic and cultural in the national context of Colombia, ideological and political factors provide the strongest motivation to use more [s] among young Miami Cubans. By doing so, they communicate their identity as early exile Cubans in Miami, i.e. those who constituted Cuba's wealthiest, most educated, and affluent social groups before Castro (López Morales, 2003; Olson and Olson, 1995); those who left the island immediately or soon after his takeover, to establish the foundations of Miami's highly prosperous Cuban enclave economy (Alberts, 2005; Boswell, 1994); and those who were (and generally still are) the segment of the population most staunchly opposed to his communist regime (De la Torre, 2003).

Most young Miami-born grandchildren of the early exile Cuban immigrants seem to be aware of the level of education and social status that [s] connotes, despite having received relatively little formal instruction in Spanish. One of the young Miami-born males of upper middle social status included in the present study, whom I will call Javier (whose speech is highlighted further below), and one of his same-age friends (the Miami-born son of early Cuban exiles, not included in this study) both casually commented to me on one occasion that later Cuban arrivals to Miami, i.e. those who came in the 1990s and 2000s, often “sound uneducated and low class” in their opinion. When I asked what gave them this impression, they mentioned the use of certain words, phrases, and gestures, and imitated particular intonations and phonological patterns, among them sibilant deletion and vowel opening, especially in word-final position. Javier affirmed that “people who don't pronounce /s/ come across as uneducated” and remarked that his grandparents “never spoke like that” [“nunca hablaban así”]. Javier's friend agreed with him, and added that, when speaking Spanish, he “always [tries] to pronounce /s/ clearly” because he “[does] not want to sound like a ‘ref’ or a ‘guajiro’.”<sup>32</sup> He also stated that the speech of recent arrivals from Cuba (i.e. those who immigrated to Miami within the past decade or so) at times appears “vulgar” and “low class” to him. These impressions merit the attention of sociologists and sociolinguists alike in future studies of Cuban Miami; they go beyond the scope of the present analysis.

As already noted, upper middle-class Cuban American<sup>33</sup> males were significantly more likely to produce the sibilant than speakers of any other group ([s] = 33%), and females of lower middle social status retained the sibilant at a rate that was double that of their same-sex counterparts of upper middle social status ([s] = 22% vs. 11.5%, respectively, as shown in Tables 19 and 20). Although these differential sex-related patterns require more careful, in-depth exploration, I would tentatively propose at least two possible contributing factors for future investigation. First, it is my general impression that young Miami-born men of upper middle- and upper-class Cuban backgrounds sometimes seem more concerned with making money than their female counterparts.<sup>34</sup> Of course, I do not wish to imply that upper middle- and upper-class Cuban American women in Miami are not concerned with being economically successful or that their families do not have this expectation of them. Rather, I note here what numerous upper middle- and upper-class Cuban American men in Miami have commented to me—both implicitly and explicitly—over the years: that they feel greatly pressured to succeed

<sup>32</sup> Young Miami-born Cubans, like Miami teens and young adults in general, use the term ‘ref’—short for ‘refugee’—to refer pejoratively to a recently arrived Spanish-speaking immigrant of lower socioeconomic status who does not know or speak English well. One's appearance also contributes to being considered a ‘ref’ in Miami—dress, bodily movement, hand and facial gestures. In Cuban Spanish, the term ‘guajiro’ refers to a person from the countryside, with low levels of formal education and who is poor, sometimes used synonymously with ‘redneck’ in US English. Cubans in Miami also sometimes use ‘guajiro’ in a sense synonymous with that of ‘country bumpkin’ or ‘simpleton’ in English, i.e. someone who is so uneducated or simple-minded that s/he cannot function well or appears out of place in the fast-paced, modern urban context of Miami.

<sup>33</sup> As a sociocultural phenomenon, young upper middle-class and upper-class Cuban Americans in Miami are sometimes referred to as “yucas” (an acronym homonymous with the Spanish word for the cassava root, which constitutes a staple of Cuban cuisine).

<sup>34</sup> I would note that a study carried out by Lambert and Taylor (1996) revealed a greater emphasis on Spanish language ability and being bilingual for children in middle-class Cuban American families than for those in lower class Cuban American families in Miami.

economically, both on their own part and on the part of their families. This could perhaps create a heightened desire to “sound more educated” (as commented by Javier’s friend above) and differentiate oneself from other Miami Cubans of lower social status when speaking Spanish, which is a must for business and commerce in South Florida (Fradd, 1996). Indeed, US Census research conducted by Boswell (2000) showed that, in metropolitan Miami, individuals who speak both English and Spanish ‘very well’ earn more money than those who do not. Lower middle-class Cuban American females in the present study also appeared to be conscious of this economic and linguistic reality in Miami, and seemingly strived to use the overt prestige variant [s] in semi-formal speech much more than upper middle-class females (Tables 19 and 20). For lower middle-class males in this study, the covert prestige generally associated with deletion in Caribbean Spanish seemed to be socially more important, as they eschewed the sibilant (Table 20).

A second factor that may perhaps condition more sibilant retention among young Miami-born Cuban males of upper middle social status is a heightened sense of personal investment in Cuban exile politics through relationships with their fathers and grandfathers. Men in general were more involved in politics than women in pre-Castro Cuba, and so they also tended to be more actively committed to the opposition of Castro, both in Cuba and in Miami.<sup>35</sup> Several young third generation Cuban American men whom I have interviewed over the years, including two in the present study, have recounted to me stories of how their grandfathers were imprisoned and tortured by Castro’s government, and how, because of their being imprisoned, they could not leave Cuba until well after their wives and children had already gone to Miami. Many early exile Cubans lost real estate, homes, and businesses, confiscated by Castro’s revolution. Once in Miami, they actively continued the struggle against Castro and his regime, being involved in such movements as the Bay of Pigs invasion and the political organization *Hermanos al Rescate* (‘Brothers to the Rescue’). Young Cuban American males who grew up close to grandfathers and fathers with strong anti-Castro convictions usually also express vehement opposition to Castro and to communism in Cuba. This sentiment perhaps could, in turn, compel them—be it consciously or unconsciously—to differentiate themselves more purposefully from successive waves of Cuban immigrants, particularly those from the past two decades who are not as strongly opposed to Castro and his regime and who generally do not show interest in exile politics in Miami.<sup>36</sup> Since the sibilant appears to have become greatly diminished within the context of Castro’s Cuba, as “an expression of locality and solidarity” (Alfaraz, 2000), it seems fitting that the young Miami-born grandchildren of the early exiles—most vehemently opposed to Castro and his regime—may produce the sibilant more purposefully in some situations (like the present interview).

But the sociopolitical circumstances of Cuban immigration in Miami are likely not the sole determinant of /s/ realization among the grandchildren of pre-1980 Cuban immigrants. Relative fluency in Spanish also appears to play some role. If we consider the realization of /s/ among young Miami-born Cubans in this study taking into account the levels of fluency demonstrated by individual speakers, it is evident that those with more halting fluency in Spanish produced higher rates of [s] than those whose speech appeared more fluent.<sup>37</sup> Table 22 shows that the frequency of [s] in the speech of Elena and Miguel, who demonstrated the lowest levels of fluency in Spanish of all the Miami-born speakers included in the study, was double that of the group aver-

<sup>35</sup> The cultural phenomenon of domino games among Cuban men in Miami is a good example of politically oriented social ‘male bonding’. During these games, easily observed in public cafes and parks, and on neighborhood sidewalks all over Miami, politics are commonly discussed. Women rarely ever participate in these games. Among the older generation of early exile Cubans, gender-based patterns of interaction and socialization during family gatherings are also easily observed, with men typically involved in political discussions more than women.

<sup>36</sup> Corral (2006) affirmed that “the political energy that characterized the first wave of Cuban exiles seems to fade away among the recent arrivals. The majority... know little to nothing about South Florida politics, and they reduce to a minimum their criticisms of Fidel Castro’s government” (Internet source, my translation). Corral’s original words are: “La energía política que caracterizaba la primera ola de exiliados cubanos parece esfumarse entre los recién llegados. La mayoría... conocen poco o nada de la política sudfloridana, y reducen al mínimo las críticas al gobierno de Fidel Castro.”

<sup>37</sup> For the present purposes, I considered as less fluent speakers those who often self-repaired, searched for vocabulary, demonstrated substantial pauses and hesitations, and at times stammered to express themselves in Spanish. These same participants also indicated to me during the interview that they felt much less confident speaking Spanish than English, an observation that none of the higher fluency Miami-born speakers made. As an additional consideration, I asked three educated native Spanish speakers (also Spanish language professionals) to listen to short segments of all the Miami-born participants’ speech and indicate to me their impressions regarding the participants’ general oral ability in Spanish. On all accounts, their impressions concurred with my own judgments regarding fluency.

Table 22  
Realization of /s/ by less fluent Miami-born speakers

	[s]	[h]	[Ø]
<i>Elena</i>	61% (54/88)	34% (30/88)	5% (4/88)
<i>Miguel</i>	49% (74/150)	20% (30/150)	31% (46/150)
<i>Javier</i>	44% (85/192)	18% (34/192)	38% (73/192)
<i>Marisol</i>	40% (76/188)	38% (72/188)	21% (40/188)
Average (total)	47% (289/618)	27% (166/618)	26% (163/618)

Table 23  
Realization of /s/ by highly fluent Miami-born speakers

	[s]	[h]	[Ø]
<i>Leo</i>	15% (20/130)	63% (82/130)	22% (28/130)
<i>Virginia</i>	12% (19/145)	48% (70/145)	39% (56/145)
<i>María</i>	13% (16/113)	55% (62/113)	32% (35/113)
Average (total)	14% (55/388)	55% (214/388)	31% (119/388)

age (25%): Elena produced the sibilant 61% of the time and Miguel 49% of the time. Elena's case seemed exceptional. She produced the least amount of speech in the segments chosen for analysis (because of her substantial lack of ability to express herself in Spanish), and demonstrated the lowest degrees of fluency and grammatical accuracy among all of the speakers interviewed. The distribution of variants in her speech (61% [s]; 34% [h]; 5% [Ø]) offer good support for the hypothesis that lower levels of fluency are concomitant with greater use of the sibilant. Javier and Marisol, both highly proficient bilinguals who nonetheless presented more self-repairs and vocabulary searches than the other Miami-born speakers included in the study, produced [s] about 40% of the time—a rate much higher than that generally presented by their cohort. Interestingly, though, the rates of deletion observed in Miguel's and Javier's speech—31% and 38%, respectively—are about the same as those found in the speech of their grandparents' generation (34%, as shown in Table 15). Once again, we see some evidence that the reversal of language change does not seem to happen generally at the expense of the non-standard variant [Ø], but rather the aspirate.

Table 23, on the other hand, reflects the data for/s/realization among the three most highly fluent Miami-born speakers included in the present study, none of whom presented noteworthy hesitations, self-repairs or vocabulary searches. Their speech was, in a general impressionistic sense, 'native-like' in terms of fluency and grammatical accuracy. The rates of sibilant retention among these three speakers were much lower than those observed among the less fluent speakers (shown in Table 22), but still slightly higher than the average rate presented among the older immigrant generation (12%, as shown in Table 15).

To synthesize, Fig. 2 visually reflects the comparisons made in the previous pages. One can observe that the rate of sibilant use was, by far, highest among the least fluent Miami-born [MB] grandchildren of pre-1980

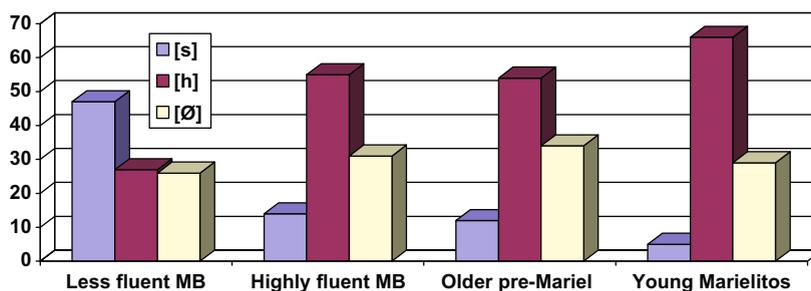


Fig. 2. Differential realization of /s/ among Miami Cubans.

immigrants, and lowest among same-age Marielitos who had been in Miami since very early childhood. The rate of sibilant use among highly fluent Miami-born [MB] speakers was much lower than that of their less fluent peers, but still slightly higher than among the older generation of pre-1980 immigrants and more than double the rate found among young Marielitos.

Previous studies (Mougeon and Beniak, 1991; Mougeon et al., 2004; Nadasdi et al., 2005; Sankoff et al., 1997) carried out in other bilingual settings have suggested that the acquisition and ‘native-like’ use of the range of sociolinguistic variants available to speakers in those particular settings is correlated with higher degrees of competence and fluency. To acquire these variants fully, speakers must have ample social exposure to both standard and non-standard varieties of the language. It could be that the apparent reversal of a language change in progress in Cuban Spanish—seemingly more advanced on the island than in Miami—is at least partially attributable to the incomplete acquisition of a sociophonetic norm among some Miami-born speakers, such as Elena, Miguel, Javier and Marisol (Table 22). Conscious awareness based on the educated norm seems an unlikely factor in their differential use of the sibilant in comparison with their cohort, since none of these four participants had received more formal education in Spanish than the other young Miami-born speakers included in the study.<sup>38</sup>

The vast majority of Miami-born Cubans are exposed to non-standard variants, i.e. [h] and [Ø], much more than they are to standard variants, i.e. [s]. Most Miami-born Cubans study Spanish language formally in school for only a few years, generally two or three at the primary level and another year or two at the secondary level. Most graduate high school, and even college, with a quite limited knowledge of the written norms of Spanish and have low levels of active literacy in the language. Like the great majority of other Hispanics born and educated in the US context, their awareness of the lexical, syntactic, and discursive conventions of formal register in Spanish is generally quite restricted (cf. Lynch, 2003; Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci, 1998). Given this reality, it seems to me that if incomplete acquisition constituted a definitive explanation for the phenomenon I have observed, the aspirated and deleted variants would have been overgeneralized at the expense of the sibilant among younger Miami-born speakers. This was not the case, however. Direct transfer from English phonology—which does not manifest sibilant reduction—provides another possible explanation for increased use of the sibilant among the Miami-born speakers who, as already stated, are all English-dominant bilinguals of Spanish (cf. Alvord, 2006; Phillips, 1982). This should be especially true among those who are less fluent. Again, however, this was not the case. Among the four less fluent speakers included in the study (Table 22), deletion—the possibility that would seem most far removed from English phonological norms—remained quite frequent (with the exception of Elena who, as already stated above, seemed exceptional among her cohort). In the case of Miguel and Javier, deletion occurred at the same rate observed among the older immigrant generation (around 34%), and Marisol produced [Ø] in 21% of possible contexts. In sum, this pattern does not seem suggestive of English language transfer.

With regards to Silva-Corvalán’s (1994) hypothesis regarding the acceleration of language change in varieties of Spanish spoken in the US, it seems to me that issues of personal identity and expressions of ‘in-group’ and ‘out-group’ belonging are more intimately linked to phonological variation than they are to morphological or syntactic phenomena in Spanish. External social concerns probably play a more vital role in phonological spaces, where speakers mark—both consciously and unconsciously—socioeconomic, political and cultural differences relevant to group identities (as appears to be the case of postnuclear /s/ in the sociolects of contemporary Caribbean Spanish). For this reason, processes of phonological variation and change may not respond to the language contact situation in the way that morphological and syntactic processes do.

<sup>38</sup> Sayahi (2005) analyzed the realization of postnuclear /s/ in the speech of six northern Moroccan speakers of Spanish. Three of them were native speakers of Spanish and the other three were native speakers of Arabic who had acquired Spanish as a second language through naturalistic means (i.e. they had never studied it formally but had watched Spanish language television most of their lives and used the language with others). Sayahi found that the Moroccan-born native speakers of Spanish deleted /s/ 87% of the time while the second language speakers (natives of Arabic), on the other hand, produced the sibilant in 94% of cases (2005, p. 521). Sayahi attributed the great preference for the sibilant among this latter group to the following factors: its existence in Arabic, the speakers’ competence in French, and the process of their acquisition of Spanish (2005, p. 525). With regards to the latter, the author explained that Spanish audiovisual media had been their principal source of input, in which northern and central varieties of Spain (in which sibilant weakening is rare) predominate and carry great social prestige. Sayahi did not consider the question of fluency or proficiency among the non-native speakers in the study.

All of these issues merit further research on the part of language acquisition and language contact scholars. The present study can offer only tentative suggestions. Any generalizations or definitive conclusions regarding evolutionary patterns in Cuban Spanish in Miami and their implications for a theory of language change are precluded by the small and unequal number of speakers (5 vs. 11) representing the two generations under analysis and the inclusion of only three Mariel Cubans for comparison purposes. Future studies should include more participants and should also address issues of social interaction, language attitudes, bilingual identity (cf. Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004; Pavlenko, 2006), and dialect contact (cf. Aaron and Hernández, 2007; Otheguy et al., 2007; Zentella, 1990).<sup>39</sup>

More linguistic studies addressing the variables of social status, generation, and immigrant group among Miami Cubans are needed, so that the sociolinguistic phenomena documented in Miami may then be compared with those found on the island of Cuba in the years to come. Such comparative sociolinguistic inquiries could have extremely interesting political and ideological dimensions. To illustrate this point, the studies carried out by Dittmar et al. (1988a,b) in Berlin in the 1980s revealed that the variants associated with ‘Berlinerisch’—the local urban vernacular of that city—had become much less frequent in the speech of middle-class West Berliners since the division of West and East Germany following World War II, a political division that was physically enforced by the Berlin Wall. In West Berlin, the standard variants of ‘Hochdeutsch’ (‘High German’) became more common in the decades following World War II as local vernacular variants were socially stigmatized, being characterized by some as ‘vulgar’. It is interesting to note that this was the same adjective used by several young Cuban Americans in the present study to describe the speech of post-1980 Cuban immigrants in Miami (mentioned above). In communist East Berlin, on the other hand, vernacular variants gained greater prestige and, by the 1980s, variants of ‘Berlinerisch’ were used with great frequency and with a sense of local pride. These studies of Berlin urban speech provide clear evidence that political and ideological divisions affect processes of language variation and change in very salient ways. The findings of the present study, as well as those discussed by Alfaraz (2000, 2002), already seem suggestive of this phenomenon among a geographically and ideologically divided Cuban population. I believe that this topic will prove to be of great interest for scholars of Spanish sociolinguistics on both sides of the Florida Straits in the years to come.

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<sup>39</sup> Although none of the speakers included in the present study indicated having any close personal relationships with speakers of other Spanish dialects, I would not dismiss the possibility of influence on Miami Cuban Spanish of other geographical varieties in which the sibilant tends not to be reduced, e.g. highland Colombian and Central American. Nonetheless, such influence seems improbable for three reasons: (1) Cuban Spanish has considerable socioeconomic and political prestige within the context of Spanish-speaking Miami; (2) speakers of Caribbean /s/-weakening varieties of Spanish far outnumber speakers of /s/-retaining varieties in South Florida; and (3) among Miami-born speakers of the third generation, English use prevails in the sorts of intimate social relationships that would be most apt to facilitate interdialectal influences, e.g. peer interactions and romantic relationships.

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