A Diachronic Approach to the Confusion of b with v in Spanish

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This volume presents specific topics in diachronic Hispanic linguistics. These topics include lexical survivals in Latin-Romance, Andalusi, lexical variation in early modern Spain, the origin of the confusion of h with v in Andalusian Spanish, in the Americas; the expectation of vowel and syllable processes of vowelization, synthetic change in prehistoric documentation from the Middle Ages and the semantic change of the verbs haber, ser and estar. It provides a comprehensive account of the Spanish lexicon: phonology, morphmorphology, dialectology and sociolinguistics with the emphasis on prehistoric influences.

It focuses not only on relevant issues in the evolution of Spanish but also answers pertinent questions in the field such as: Why do we have Latin lexical survivals in Latin-Romance and not in other Romance languages? What kind of social factors drive Spanish lexical borrowing? How did the extent of growing affect the standardization of the lexicon and orthography? What are the main theories to explain the confusion between h and v? How relevant was the role of the Andalusi dialect in the general historical evolution of Spanish in the Americas? What were the main social and demographic influences operating in the development of Spanish during the colonial period? How accurately did ethnic practices represent the speech of the Middle Ages? How did we DIFFERENCE, unite: OTARIO and take (CASTAR) develop differently in Romance languages?

Eva Núñez Méndez is Professor of Spanish Linguistics at Portland State University. Her research focuses primarily on descriptive Hispanic linguistics (phonetics, phonology, and the history of the Spanish language), and applied linguistic (text analysis and second language acquisition). She has published widely in these areas and has also published extensively in the History of the Spanish Language (2001), Fundamentals of Spanish Phonetics and Phonology (DHO & DOO), and A Spanish Version of Práctico y Conocedor a Biblical Version (1999).
Diachronic Applications in Hispanic Linguistics
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Edited by

Eva Núñez Méndez

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This book was developed as the result of a conference panel organized for the Pacific Modern Language Association in 2013 in San Diego, California. The panel was titled *Diachronic Applications in Spanish Linguistics*, and its theme caught the eye of one of the editors of Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Stephanie Cavanagh, who later contacted me to propose a volume under this line of research. I was only when I considered her idea that I realized what a vast and important theme this opened up, yet it is one that was largely absent from general knowledge and from other books in the field. We are very grateful to Stephanie for giving us the opportunity to publish our academic contributions to the field under this quality peer-reviewed publisher.

The volume focuses on applying a diachronic perspective to specific topics in the field of Hispanic Linguistics. These topics are based on the evolution of the lexicon and Arabisms, phonetic changes like the bilabial confusion and the origins of *seso*, topics in dialectology regarding the influence of Andalusian Spanish in the Americas, the process of *koineization* of colonial Latin American Spanish, diachronic syntactic changes, and semantic changes in verbs such as *ser*, *estar*, and *haber*. The target audience for this volume comprises students of Hispanic Linguistics, as well as general readers and scholars with an interest in the field. Each chapter presents the relevant information of its topic (data, concepts, theories, etc.) in a clear, succinct, and accessible fashion, suitable for the general reader and pedagogical purposes. Because of this, technical terminology has been kept to a minimum. Where specialist terms have been introduced, they are explained in the glossary of the chapter.

*Diachronic Applications in Hispanic Linguistics* falls into nine chapters, written by ten contributors. The first chapter seeks to illustrate and discuss the co-existence of lexical retentions and innovations in the
Preface

history of the core segment of the Spanish vocabulary inherited from spoken Latin. Dworkin provides unique Latin lexical survivals in Ibero-Romance that failed to survive outside the Iberian Peninsula or that have survived only in lateral or marginal linguistic areas of the former Roman Empire.

The second chapter explores many Arabic borrowings in Castilian (Old Spanish) that were lost since the fifteenth century onwards in the development of a standardized variety of Spanish. Giménez investigates the trajectory of lexically synonymous pairs of words, one of Arabic descent and another of typically Latin origin, from the semantic field concerning professions and trades. Lexical losses or substitutions for Arabisms will be studied in line with the official and socio-historical perspective of creating an emerging Spanish nation with its own language without vestiges of the Arab world.

The third chapter presents vocabulary change under the framework of the advent of printing in the Iberian Peninsula in the late fifteenth century. This pivotal moment in the production and transmission of texts creates one of the highest peaks of lexical growth in the history of the Spanish language. Early modern Spanish experienced a linguistic transformation, and limiting the scope to the area of vocabulary, Tejedo explains lexical elaboration and loss through the examination of the printed editions prepared by scholars closely connected to the court circles, such as the Alfonsine Siete Partidas, first edited in 1491 under the patronage of the Catholic Monarchs.

Chapter four analyzes the origins of the confusion between the bilabial sound [b] and the labiodental sound [v] from the beginning of Castilian Spanish to its modern realizations, using medieval texts and testimonies from grammarians and authors from the fifteenth century and after. In modern Spanish there is not a phonemic difference between the bilabial and labiodental sounds; this ambiguity dates back to Roman times, when the Iberian population could not pronounce or differentiate Latin verbs such as BEBERE ‘to drink’ from VIVIRE ‘to live’.

Chapter five describes seseo from a chronological perspective, going back to the pronunciation of sibilants in medieval Spanish, and its development in modern peninsular Castilian and transatlantic Spanish. It also describes yeísmo with its geographical distribution and chronological spread. Kania tracks the historical development of both seseo and yeísmo from their peninsular origins in medieval Spanish to their modern distribution in Spanish-speaking areas using textual documentation and a sociolinguistic framework, taking into account...
factors such as dialects in contact, social networks, the prestige register, and lexical diffusion.

Chapter six discusses the origins of the Andalusian variety of Spanish, taking into account the role of prestige norms in Madrid and Seville. The development of the Andalusian variety can be traced to the patterns of repopulation that occurred during the Reconquest in the Iberian Peninsula. On the other hand, the andalucista theory holds that the similarities between Andalusian and American Spanish are due to the direct influence of that peninsular variety in the Americas throughout the period of colonization. Spaniards setting out for the Americas converged in Andalusia, creating a linguistic situation of leveling, simplification and koineization. Kauffeld looks to the surviving written documentation from the period to resolve the question of the relationship between Andalusian and American Spanish. She contextualizes dialect development while incorporating sociolinguistic sources such as social factors, prestige norms, and migratory patterns, as well as theories regarding dialects in contact.

Chapter seven is aimed at contributing to a more socio-historically nuanced understanding of the diachrony of Latin American Spanish. It studies verbal paradigms in colonial varieties of Spanish to explain the outcome of dialectal mixture in Spanish American colonies where koineization emerged. The original early colonial simplified variety of Spanish was developed from the leveling of phonetic and morphological variation brought by the first Iberian settlers. This new variety became progressively more differentiated locally depending on the degree of influence from specific peninsular dialectal norms. Sanz includes factors such as dialectal mixture, demographic weight, the effect of acquisition tendencies of children in multilingual environments, the presence of speakers of Spanish as a second language, and the inherent internal instability of the morphological system of Spanish to prove his theory on dialectal variation and koineization.

Chapter eight offers a series of syntactic structures from the earlier period of Latinate writing that already exhibited clear, Old Spanish grammatical patterns and, therefore, demonstrates the syntactical continuity with Romance writing around the 13th century. Both Blake and Sánchez provide data on the development of object pronouns, possessive and demonstrative pronouns, the personal a, and a now archaic possessive structure composed of article plus possessive adjective plus noun.

Chapter nine deals with the semantic evolution of frequently used verbs in Spanish such as ser, estar, and haber. Díaz goes back to their
original meanings in Latin and documents their changes in medieval and modern Spanish and in other Romance languages. She also explains the origins of the periphrastic passive voice and its first uses in old Castilian.

Persisting through the ages, our language is both part of a cultural continuum and our history. The faculty of language makes us human and symbolizes our identity, linking our past to the present. Languages maintain our memories as powerful tools to explain our ancestral heritage and thoughts to present generations. Studying a language from a diachronic perspective allows us to envision peoples’ perception of the world, their traditions and beliefs in a gradually changing reality. It is the analysis of diachronic stages of one language that helps us to explain the past and recognize the present of a linguistic community. This book aims to offer a wide range of topics in Spanish historical linguistics to provide the general reader a background in understanding modern Spanish’s place in the world.

I would like to express my gratitude to all the contributors for their support and development of the book. Their remarks and suggestions have contributed to the present outcome of this volume. The journey to complete it has incurred other debts, especially to those attentive readers who have given their time, corrected errors, and shared their insights and generously clarified details. I am sincerely grateful to them all.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the work done by all the researchers working on this volume. Without their collaboration, there would not be such a project. I would like to thank Daniel Ridley, commissioning editor, Amanda Millar, typesetting manager, Victoria Carruthers, author liaison, and Courtney Blades, designer, without their work, there would be no published book.

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their very thorough readings of the manuscript and their helpful comments and suggestions. I am also grateful to Daniel Hall, Adrian Rose Miller, Graham Clarke, and Robert Daly for reading a draft of this book, for spotting inconsistencies and typographical imperfections and offering numerous valuable comments.

I would also like to thank my students for their interest in diachronic linguistics, for their enthusiasm, and for their feedback. Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank Portland State University for supporting this research in many ways with a Faculty Enhancement grant.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arag.</td>
<td>Aragonese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ast.</td>
<td>Asturian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auto.</td>
<td>Auto de los Reyes Magos. 1170. Anonymous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bearn</td>
<td>Bearnais</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cal.</td>
<td>Calabrese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cal.</td>
<td>Calila y Dimna. 1251. Anonymous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cat.</td>
<td>Catalan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cel.</td>
<td>La Celestina. 1499. Fernando de Rojas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cent.</td>
<td>century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cid.</td>
<td>Cantar de Mio Cid. 1200. Anonymous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conj.</td>
<td>conjugation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fr.</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friul.</td>
<td>Friulian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gal.</td>
<td>Galician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gasc.</td>
<td>Gascon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ger.</td>
<td>German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Der.</td>
<td>derived</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doc.</td>
<td>document(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engad.</td>
<td>Engadine, one of the varieties of Romontsch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faz.</td>
<td>Fazienda de Ultramar. 1220. Almerich Malafaida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.</td>
<td>high register, bajo latín</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Id.</td>
<td>Idem, identical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ind.</td>
<td>indicative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It.</td>
<td>Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.</td>
<td>low or vernacular variety with no written attestation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libro.</td>
<td>Libro Rimado de Palacio. 1378-1403. Pedro López de Ayala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lit.</td>
<td>literally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luc.</td>
<td>El Conde Lucanor. 1330-1335. Don Juan Manuel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mil.</td>
<td>Milagros de Nuestra Señora. 1260. Gonzalo de Berceo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms.</td>
<td>manuscript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>no date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-st.</td>
<td>non standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occit.</td>
<td>Occitan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OOccit.</td>
<td>Old Occitan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFr.</td>
<td>Old French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPtg.</td>
<td>Old Portuguese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSp.</td>
<td>Old Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ptg.</td>
<td>Portuguese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p.</td>
<td>person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pl.</td>
<td>plural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r. / v.</td>
<td>recto, front / verso, back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rum.</td>
<td>Rumanian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sard.</td>
<td>Sardinian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sic.</td>
<td>Sicilian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sing.</td>
<td>singular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sp.</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>st.</td>
<td>standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subj.</td>
<td>subjunctive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.V.</td>
<td>sub voce, under a word or heading, as in a dictionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.P.</td>
<td>Siete Partidas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. / r.</td>
<td>verso, back / recto, front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v.</td>
<td>verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegl.</td>
<td>Vegliote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VV. AA.</td>
<td>various authors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*</td>
<td>not documented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ /, /b/</td>
<td>phoneme, bilabial plosive voiced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ , ][b]</td>
<td>sound, bilabial plosive voiced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;b&gt;</td>
<td>grapheme, letter b</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This chapter focuses on the loss of distinction between the bilabial [b] and labiodental [v] in Spanish using a theoretical diachronic perspective. The phonetic evolution of these sounds and their confusion relates back to the roots of the Spanish language in the Peninsula territories, especially in the north where it was in close geographic contact with the Basque language. This confusion was already taking place in Vulgar Latin and, specifically, in the Vulgar Latin spoken in the Peninsula. This lack of distinction evolved slowly until the seventeenth century, when both sounds lost their phonemic contrast.

The differences between the bilabial plosive [b], the fricative [β]₁, and the labiodental [v] are not easily discerned in the recorded manuscripts from the first centuries of written Spanish. Phonetic changes happening in the spoken language were hardly represented in written form during those early periods, and when they were, the orthographic changes did not correspond chronologically. The written language followed a conservative tradition of what was considered to be the scholarly tendency in a given region that did not always match the reality of the spoken language. Therefore, studying the confusion of labial consonants, based on old texts and records, presents a challenge and is in many ways restricted to very few documents.

The main resources used here come from old rhymes and poems, written texts from medieval grammarians, and opinions documented by linguists between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries. Thanks to these (useful but very limited) resources, some chronological benchmarks have
been established to indicate the initial confusion, the expansion of this confusion, and the resulting loss of phonemic distinction.

Diachronic studies present multiple difficulties, especially due to the lack of correspondence between the articulatory phonetic changes happening in the spoken language and their written form in the texts. The further we go back in time, the more difficult it is to obtain accurate conclusions about the chronological evolution of a specific phonetic change. The number of written resources decreases, as does their authenticity and readability. To study the confusion between b and v in Spanish, the oldest resources we have are written documents and rhymes from the thirteenth century, and authors’ opinions dating back to the fifteenth century. The study of this phenomenon has advanced thanks to these written resources; however, the authenticity of these documents could prove to be insufficient, as we know that the written language does not always represent the spoken language. Besides, writers’ opinions and styles could be influenced by their own perceptions of what constituted the standard written language.

Studying bilabial and labiodental sound changes from a diachronic perspective based on old written records presents methodological obstacles: first, due to the lack of sufficient graphic documentation showing changes in the spoken language in its origins; second, due to the inaccuracy of these written texts with regard to the chronology of the phonetic change. Nevertheless, and based on the generally accepted hypothesis that the labial confusion is a very old phonetic change dating back to Castilian origins, this chapter roots its findings in those first written literary manuscripts, including poetic rhymes from the thirteenth century and, later on, from the printed testimonies of grammarians and linguists from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries.

1. Current Framework and Orthographic Intricacies

From the articulatory perspective, in modern normative Spanish there is only one bilabial plosive phoneme /b/ with two voiced allophones or sounds, the plosive [b] and the fricative [β]. The plosive occurs after a nasal sound, after a pause, and at the beginning of a word that is not connected to the discourse. In all other instances, the fricative [β] occurs. Therefore, [β] is the variant most repeated at the phonetic level.

The labiodental fricative voiced sound [v] does not exist as a phoneme in modern Spanish. That is to say, it does not have a phonological value and does not distinguish meanings in words. It does in some other Romance languages such as Portuguese, Catalan, Rumanian, and Italian;
and other non-Romance languages, such as English, where /v/ is a phoneme and has a phonological value. See the following examples.

Table 4.1. Examples of words with \( b \) and \( v \) in various languages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Portuguese</th>
<th>Catalan</th>
<th>Italian</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>baca = vaca</td>
<td>basta / vasta</td>
<td>baga / vaga</td>
<td>barare / varare</td>
<td>beer / veer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[baka]</td>
<td>[bav[a]a] / [vav[a]a]</td>
<td>[bav[a]a] / [vav[a]a]</td>
<td>[bav[a]re] / [vav[a]re]</td>
<td>[bav[a]] / [vav[a]]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>roof / rack, cow</td>
<td>enough / vast</td>
<td>knot / strike</td>
<td>steal / pass</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hil = vil</td>
<td>bêla / vêla</td>
<td>beare / veare</td>
<td>bile / vile</td>
<td>best / vest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[bil]</td>
<td>[bêla] / [vêla]</td>
<td>[bêre] / [vêre]</td>
<td>[bile] / [vile]</td>
<td>[best] /</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bile / vile</td>
<td>belle / candle</td>
<td>drink / see</td>
<td>[bile] / [vile]</td>
<td>[vist]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cabo = cavo</td>
<td>bem / vern</td>
<td>biella / viella</td>
<td>rod / viola</td>
<td>curb / curve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ka[b]o]</td>
<td>[bêj] / [vêj]</td>
<td>[bêjêlla] / [vêjêlla]</td>
<td></td>
<td>[lcbr] /</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cape, I dig</td>
<td>good / corne</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[lcrv]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the other hand, we have the voiceless labiodental phoneme /\( f \)/ with two allophonic variants [\( f \)] and [\( v \)], conditioned by its position in the syllable. In the coda position it becomes a voiced sound [\( v \)] only if it is followed by a voiced consonant as in \( \text{afgano} \ [a\text{v}\gamma\text{ano}] \) \( a\text{fga.no} \) “Afghan,” \( \text{Afganistán} \ [a\text{v}\gamma\text{anistán}] \) \( a\text{fga.nis.tán} \); it does not change when it is followed by a voiceless consonant. It is important to emphasise that this cluster of /\( f \)/ plus consonant in coda position is not abundant in the Spanish lexicon. In syllable initial position, clusters of /\( f \)/ and voiced consonants are frequent, as \( f\text{fl} \) or \( f\text{fr} \).

\[
\begin{align*}
/b/ & = [b] \\
[\beta] & \\
/f/ & = [f] \\
/v/ & = [v]
\end{align*}
\]

If we consider the spelling and the orthography of modern Spanish, the distribution of \( b \) and \( v \) corresponds to the traditional Latin etymology (with very few exceptions, vestiges of the pre-standardisation confusion, such as \( b\text{oda} \) from Latin \( \text{VOTA} \)). In other words, it faithfully follows written classical Latin. The Latin graphemes \( b \) and \( v \) represented two phonemes /\( b \)/ and /\( w \)/ respectively. The Latin \( v \) was pronounced as a close, back
semivowel [w] that later evolved to [β], for example VITAM > vida “life” was pronounced in Latin as [wi:ta] and evolved to [βi:da]. This sound [β] (from Latin [w]) was neutralised in the intervocalic position with the occlusive Latin [b], which was written as a <b>, and developed from the Latin consonant -P- and the rare voiced geminate -BB-. The resulting pronunciation was a fricative [β] that medieval Spanish inherited, as you can see in Latin verbs such as BIBÈRE [bilibere] beber and VIVÈRE [βibere] vivir, words that became homophones. This phonetic levelling caused multiple confusions in the orthographic system, especially in representing bilabial sounds.

There were not so many neutralisations in the initial position of the word. The Latin phonemes for initial B- /b/ and V- /β/ (the latter derived from /w/) kept their opposition for longer in medieval Spanish according to whether the etymon was initialled by B- or V-. However, this levelling even occurred in Latin in both the word initial position and the internal position, explaining the proximity of the plosive bilabial consonant [b] and the velar semivowel [w], as is demonstrated in various examples in the Appendix Probi. This palimpsest, written circa the third or fourth century CE, lists common mistakes in the written Latin of the time. From these mistakes, we can deduce tendencies in pronunciation, spelling, and grammar in the vernacular, which would become the Romance languages. These examples and corrections provide insight into how Latin was evolving at that time. Some of these examples are VACLUS for the correct form BACULUS, or VENE for BENE; see more cases below:

ALVEUS NON ALBEUS
BACULUS NON VACLUS
BENE NON VENE
BRAVIUM NON BRABIUM
PLEBES NON PLEVIS

Parallel to the confusion happening among the Romans speaking Vulgar Latin, the natives in the Iberian Peninsula that spoke Vulgar Latin also could not distinguish between these two labial sounds. Romans even joked about pronunciation in the Peninsula where drinking and living were pronounced the same, as the Latin proverb says BEATI HISPANI, QVIBUS VIVERE BIBERE EST “happy are those Hispanics for whom living is drinking.”

The grapheme V in Latin was the capital letter for u, and represented both the vowel /u/ and the semivowel /w/ (which evolved to a consonant). However, during the medieval period, the letter u was the predominant grapheme. The angular v started to be used at the beginning of a word, and
also to avoid confusion when it was followed by another pointed letter, such as i, u, or n. With time, v became more frequent until the RAE institutionalised both graphemes: u for the vowel and v for the consonant in the eighteenth century.

2. Theoretical Applications: Origins of the Confusion

It is important to distinguish the position of the sound in the word and its etymological origins in order to study the evolution and confusion of the labials b and v. The Latin etymological root from which b and v were derived could be any of the following graphemes: -BB-, -P-, -B-, U, or V. The grapheme V did not exist per se, and was only a graphic variant of U. The basis for neutralisation started in the Latin consonantal system with an opposition between two phonemes: the bilabial plosive voiced /b/, represented by the grapheme B, and the velar semivowel /w/, written as U or V. The semivowel will present a significantly stronger articulatory variation, converting into a bilabial fricative consonant [β], first in the intervocalic position, and secondly at the beginning of a word in Vulgar Latin and old Castilian.

At the same time, the intervocalic bilabial sound [b] derived from Latin consonants -B- and -BB- tends to weaken, changing into a fricative [β]. In the same way, the intervocalic bilabial sound [b] resulting from the Latin intervocalic -P- relaxes its articulation, ending up as [β] as well (after a previous process of becoming voiced [b], therefore, -P- > -b- > -β-). In conclusion, in the intervocalic position, all labial articulations neutralised to a bilabial fricative voiced sound [β], independently of their Latin origins being -V- or -U-, -B-, -BB-, or -P-.

Table 4.2. Early Evolution of Labial Sounds in Vulgar Latin and Primitive Castilian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Labial Sound Transformations</th>
<th>Classic Latin</th>
<th>Vulgar Latin</th>
<th>Primitive Castilian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B- /b/</td>
<td>/b/ &gt; /β/ &gt; /β/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V-, u-</td>
<td>/w/ &gt; /β/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-V- intervocalic</td>
<td>/w/ &gt; /β/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-V- post-consonantal</td>
<td>/b/ &gt; /β/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-B- intervocalic</td>
<td>/b/ &gt; /β/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-BB- intervocalic</td>
<td>/b/ &gt; /β/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-P- intervocalic</td>
<td>/p/ &gt; /β/ &gt; /β/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2. Early Evolution of Labial Sounds in Vulgar Latin and Primitive Castilian
In the initial position, the distinction between the consonant /b/, resulting from Latin B-, and the semivowel /w/, from the initial V-, was kept longer; nevertheless, this contrast would eventually fade away after an intermediary phase of differentiation between /b/ from B- and /β/ from V-. In other words, the initial /b/ and /β/ maintained their phonemic opposition at the beginning of a word for a longer time, though ultimately both were neutralised into /β/.

Table 4.3. Early Evolution of Labial Sounds in Vulgar Latin and Primitive Castilian in the Initial Position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Position</th>
<th>Latin Graphemes</th>
<th>Latin Phonemes</th>
<th>Vulgar Latin</th>
<th>Primitive Castilian</th>
<th>Old Castilian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>/b/</td>
<td>&gt; /b/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>/β/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V-, U-</td>
<td>/w/</td>
<td>&gt; /β/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4. Primitive Castilian Labial Sounds in the Initial Position and the Intervocalic Position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Position</th>
<th>Intervocalic Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B- [b] BENE &gt; bien [bjén]</td>
<td>B- [β] CUBICULUM &gt; cubiculo [kũβikulo]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P- &gt; [b] &gt; /β/</td>
<td>CÓPAM &gt; cuba [kũba] &gt; [kũβa]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the post-consonantal position the occlusive bilabial [b] emerged, either resulting from Latin -B- or -V-, for instance INVIDIAM > envidia [embiðja] “envy,” SINE VINO > sin vino [sim bíno] “without wine.”

Both Latin graphemes B and U, with phonemes /b/ and /w/, pronounced as [b] and [w], evolved into two phonemes in old Castilian, /b/ and /β/, with the close back semivowel [w] disappearing. Later on, these two Castilian phonemes /b/ and /β/ lost their contrast, and they neutralised first in the intervocalic position, and then in the initial position. See a summary in the tables below.
### Table 4.5. Comparison between Latin and Primitive Castilian Phonemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latin Phonemes</th>
<th>Primitive Castilian Phonemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graphemes</td>
<td>initial position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sounds</td>
<td>post-consonantal position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B /b/ [b]</td>
<td>/b/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U, V /w/ [w]</td>
<td>/β/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>intervocalic position from Latin P-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>intervocalic position from Latin BB-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>initial position from Latin V-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>post-consonantal position from Latin V-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>intervocalic position from Latin V-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>confusion between [b] from Latin P- and [β] from Latin V- and B-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4.6. Examples from Classical and Vulgar Latin and Primitive Castilian in Comparison with Modern Spanish

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Classical Latin</th>
<th>Vulgar Latin</th>
<th>Primitive Castilian</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial</td>
<td>BENE</td>
<td>[béne]</td>
<td>[béne]</td>
<td>[b]</td>
<td>bien [bjén]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VENET</td>
<td>[wénet]</td>
<td>[βéne]</td>
<td>[β]</td>
<td>Ana viene [ana βéne]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervocalic</td>
<td>OPUS</td>
<td>[opus]</td>
<td>[wébos]</td>
<td>[β]</td>
<td>huevos [wéβos]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OVOS</td>
<td>[owos]</td>
<td>[wέflos]</td>
<td>[β]</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DEBILIS</td>
<td>[déblis]</td>
<td>[déblí]</td>
<td>[β]</td>
<td>débl [déβl]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ABBATEM</td>
<td>[abatem]</td>
<td>[abád]</td>
<td>[β]</td>
<td>abad [aβád]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-cons.</td>
<td>TUMBA</td>
<td>[túmba]</td>
<td>[túmba]</td>
<td>[b]</td>
<td>tumba [túmba]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>INVENTUM</td>
<td>[imwéntum]</td>
<td>[imβentu]</td>
<td>[β]</td>
<td>invento [imβento]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reasons why this semivowel sound [w] was lost, and why *b* and *v* were neutralised in old Castilian (crediting old texts as mirrors of pronunciation), are difficult to determine due to old traces of betacism and the scarcity of resources from its origins. It seems that the sound [w] (from Latin graphemes U or V) developed in other Romance languages to the labiodental [v], while in Castilian it did not. Nevertheless, there are different theories to explain the loss of distinction between *b* and *v*, and one of them, the theory of the Basque Substratum, generally prevails. This phonetic phenomenon happened in Castilian, and not in other Peninsular
Romance languages, due to Basque influence. The Basque phonetic system affected the origins of Castilian, as both languages were geographically close and in constant contact for several centuries. Basque does not have a labiodental fricative sound [v] in any position in the word; however, it has the bilabial plosive [b] in multiple positions. As in Spanish, Basque has the phoneme /b/ with two allophonic realisations: the plosive [b] and the fricative [β]. Basque betacism was not isolated as this phenomenon spread and became common in geographically close Castilian dialects such as Leonese, Asturian, and Aragonese, other peninsular languages such as Galician, and dialects of Portuguese and Catalan. It also expanded to zones in the Pyrénées where Gascon and Central Occitan were spoken.

We can deduce that the confusion between labial sounds happened in all contexts, both in the initial and intervocalic interior positions, in late primitive Castilian. However, that does not mean that the loss of distinction was a common extended practice.

**Table 4.7. State of confusion in primitive Castilian**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Late Primitive Castilian</th>
<th>Loss of distinction between phonemes /b/ and /β/ (&lt; /w/)&lt;br&gt;Intervocalic interior position</th>
<th>Early loss of opposition&lt;br&gt;Initial position</th>
<th>Opposition lasted longer</th>
<th>Opposition lasted longer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The fusion of these sounds and the final loss of their phonemic contrast happened very slowly over centuries of evolution. It originated in the Vulgar Latin spoken in the Iberian Peninsula, as a result of contact with Iberian languages, and was consolidated in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Experts do not agree as to whether this phenomenon of dephonologisation was common practice before or after the fifteenth century, settling for this century as the basis for comparison. The date for the complete loss of distinction between b and v as a common practice has been the subject of much criticism, and linguists’ opinions vary. In this chapter, the reader can compare different perspectives on grammarians’ and orthographers’ theories on the diachronic controversy of this phenomenon.
3. Hypothesis of the Basque Substratum

It is worthwhile to consider the case of the Vascones in Iberia, always resistant to embrace the Roman Empire and its language. Most inhabitants of ancient Western Europe adopted the new Roman and Latin-speaking ways. Celtiberians replaced their language and their more scattered, mobile, village life with a civic, centralised urban society that used the new lingua franca. By contrast, Basque is a special case in European language history, pre-dating all of the Indo-European languages. It survived the influx of Latin as it has survived contact with other languages during the history of the peninsula over the last two-thousand years.

This case of language survival was critical to the evolution of Castilian. The survival of ancient Basque in the northeast of the peninsula meant that the Latin spoken around that area was going to evolve differently than other vernaculars in the rest of Iberia.

When it comes to explaining the origins of the loss of distinction between the two phonemes /b/ and /v/, most hypotheses present two main lines of thought. On the one hand, the most accepted theory says that it is due to the influence of Euskera as a language of substratum and adstratum—Basque does not have the sound [v]. On the other hand, other hypotheses have explained the loss with other combined substrata such as Iberian and Basque, Cantabrian and Basque, or simply Iberian, together with the internal processes of language evolution. In this chapter we will use the Basque substratum theory as the most logical and widely recognised, based on factors including: the geographic proximity to the Cantabria-Pyrenees region; language contact between Castilian and Basque; the geopolitical and juridical closeness; similarities between Castilian and Basque versus other peninsular and non-peninsular Romance languages; medieval texts with Basque lexical borrowing such as the *Glosas Emilianenses* (in 31 and 42); and the research of important linguists such as Lapesa, Wartburg, and Martinet, who support the Basque substratum theory.

Although both languages come from different families and backgrounds, they still hold strong connections: Castilian is derived from Latin and is Indo-European; and Basque is not Indo-European and its roots are an enigma, being the only pre-Roman language that survived in the Peninsula. The adjoining geography of the two languages is important in tracing the origins of Castilian. The linguistic influence from Basque was possible thanks to a neighbouring population with geopolitical similarities and a language that in pre-Roman times was spoken and spread to the southeast, close to the river Ebro, and towards the east beyond the
Pyrenees. The north of the Kingdom of Castile has bordered the Basque region since its origin. The Basque language was spread south and out of the Basque territories, spoken even in what is now the La Rioja province. In Ojacastro (Logroño), a small town in La Rioja, the use of Basque was allowed for legal documentation and proceedings. According to Julio Caro Baroja (1945) there were linguistic groups speaking Basque in areas that belonged to the provinces of Logroño and Burgos in the medieval ages. A manuscript from the reign of St. Ferdinand III confers a local law-code on the inhabitants of Ojacastro valley, granting them the right to give evidence in court in Basque. St. Ferdinand III (1199–1252), King of Castile-Toledo, Leon, and Galicia, and father of Alfonso X the Wise, was very successful in joining the crowns of Castile and Leon, and expanded the dominion of Castile into southern Spain. During his reign, both Basque and Castilian were still languages in contact in the north as this legal document demonstrates, with Basque being an adstratum in the development of early Castilian.

The linguistic influence can only be explained by the geopolitical closeness to the Basque province. In old times, the Basque language was spoken in wider areas of expansion in comparison to its current centres. Both Castilian and Basque have similarities that other peninsular languages do not have, and these form the foundational basis for the Basque substratum hypothesis. Nevertheless, we do not have written documents to verify the evolution of Basque, its origins, or the existence of a proto-Basque. This absence of a written Basque historical record is quite surprising and has not yet been explained. The first written documents in Basque date back to the sixteenth century. Therefore, the Basque substratum hypothesis is derived from modern comparisons and the retrospective analysis of what we know from modern Basque and the evolution of Castilian. The Basque substratum hypothesis is burdened with the inability to examine older versions of Basque, and must rely on relatively recent written evidence when compared with the more abundant historical record of Spanish. This opens up a margin of disagreement among experts who may or may not agree totally with the Basque substratum theory.

The case of Basque is very unique, and its origins are as yet undiscovered. It has survived across centuries, long before pre-Roman times, is considered to be an autochthonous language in the peninsula, and is still completing its project of planning and standardising its linguistic forms. Basque only began to be standardised in the 1960s, and its first written evidence is late in comparison with other peninsular languages. It adopted the Latin alphabet in the sixteenth century when it started to be
written. Basque is spoken in the mountains of northern Spain and southwestern France, and was spoken in numerous local varieties in the mountain valleys. Nowadays, the continuing formalisation and standardisation of the language are led by the Euskaltzaindia, the Royal Academy of the Basque Language, whose main goal is to formulate rules for the normalisation of the language. In addition to regional varieties, the Euskera Batua has become the academic, standard variety for modern Basque today.

Besides the lexical influence, especially in onamastics including toponyms, the main phonetic characteristics attributed to the influence of the Basque substratum can be summarised as:

- Loss of distinction between the bilabial [b] and the labiodental [v]. Basque does not have a [v]. There is no trace of evidence that medieval Basque ever distinguished [b] from [v] (Trask 1997).
- Loss of the initial Latin F-. This sound does not exist in Basque in that position. In Euskera the Latin F- evolved into bilabial sounds b or p, or was lost in word initial position, for instance bago, pago in Basque from Latin FAGU, equivalent to the tree haya “beech” in Spanish from Latin FAGEAM; boritx from Latin FORTIS, fuerte “strong, violent”; biku from Latin FICU, higo “fig” ; ondo from Latin FUNDU, fondo, hondo in Spanish “bottom, side.” It is important to note that Pre-Basque had no f (Trask 1997).
- The loss of voiced sibilants. Basque does not have the distinction between voiced and voiceless sibilants in its pronunciation. In medieval Spanish there were three pairs of oppositions between voiced and voiceless sibilants: alveolar fricatives [s] and [z], affricates [ts] and [dz], and alveolo-palatal fricatives [ʃ] and [ʒ]. These oppositions were lost in favour of the voiceless sounds, for instance casa “house” was pronounced as [káza], which evolved to [kása] in modern Spanish.
- The creation of a new vibrant, an alveolar trill, especially at the beginning of a word, such as the one in roca “rock” or in perro “dog.” Usually, a trill is a sound produced by multiple vibrations; it vibrates for two to three periods or even more. In Basque this trill always happens in the word initial position; it also occurs in the
A Diachronic Approach to the Confusion of \textit{b} with \textit{v} in Spanish

interior position of a word.\textsuperscript{8} Currently, other Romance languages lack this sound, distinctive of Spanish.\textsuperscript{5}

- The reduction of the Latin vowel system to only five vowels.

Ancient Basque vocalism was much simpler than that of classical Latin. Basque had fewer phonemes and their combinatorial possibilities were more limited. Basque ears could not perceive the differences in quantity between long and short Latin vowels, and this led to merged words and a reduction of the Latin ten-vowel structure.\textsuperscript{10} Ancient Basque had a system of five vowels with three degrees of aperture, very similar to the Castilian system and to that of the great majority of modern dialects of Basque (Michelena, in Hualde, Lakarra, and Trask 1995).

Nevertheless, not all experts agree entirely with the Basque substratum hypothesis, and some postulate the influence of the Ibero-Basque combination, of just Iberian, or even the influence of an old Cantabric language variety. Schuchardt relates Basque origins to the Iberian, Caucasian, and Camitic\textsuperscript{11} languages (Tovar 1971), as does another Basque scholar, William Lewy, who adds Aryan languages to the equation (Kurlansky 1999). In this scenario, linguists such as Wartburg, Martinet, Gerland, Hanssen, Bourciez, Krüger, Muller, Rohlfis, Devoto, and Rodríguez Castellano defend that the initial Latin \textit{f}-loss was activated by Basque influence (Jungemann 1955). Other experts, such as Menéndez Pidal (1905) and Cano Aguilar (1999), describe this phonetic change as a result of the Ibero-Basque effect, whereas Lapesa (1981) and Alarcos Llorach (1991) explain this phenomenon with a Cantabric substratum under Basque influence.

Most linguists agree on either a direct or indirect Basque influence in some of the factors mentioned previously as attributable to the substratum. There is a strong consensus to accept the direct Basque influence in the loss of distinction between the sounds \textit{[b]} and \textit{[v]}, as the latter does not exist in Basque. Lapesa, Wartburg, and Martinet support this hypothesis. Martinet clearly details that the Basque speakers did not have a \textit{[v]}, or an internal plosive \textit{[b]} inside the word; they caused the confusion between Romance \textit{[b]} and \textit{[v]} in the internal position, changing both sounds into a fricative \textit{[β]}, while at the beginning of the word, both sounds changed to plosive \textit{[b]} (Jungemann 1955). Furthermore, Martinet stresses that this tendency first started in the northern central regions of the peninsula. Even their place names demonstrate this lack of distinction, as seen with \textit{Vizcayans} versus \textit{Biscayans}.

In modern varieties, Basque uses the bilabial plosive \textit{[b]} and its fricative allophone \textit{[β]} in the same contexts as modern Spanish. The
plosive [b] occurs after a pause and after a nasal; elsewhere, it is realised as a voiced continuant, the approximant [β]. Phonologically, however, they behave like plosives (Trask 1997). That is to say, there is only one phoneme /b/ with two allophones [b] and [β]. Indeed, all the Basque voiced plosives b, d, g are realised as fricatives in certain positions, in circumstances very similar to those in present day Castilian.\(^{12}\)

Basque and Castillian present many similarities that are not attested in other Romance languages. Linguists’ opinions on whether the Basque substratum impacted the origins of Castilian, or whether this influence was a blend of Iberian and Basque, or whether it was merely Iberian on its own, are difficult to prove. We do not have linguistic proof or written records that date back far enough in the remote past. Based on comparative results and on what these two languages share in common contemporarily, it is obvious that both languages were in close proximity and contact for many centuries. Basque was in contact with the primitive Latin dialect, which would become Castilian in the Middle Ages. It seems very plausible that, even though isolated, the already established Basque could have influenced Castilian while still in its formative phase. We need to draw up a chronological point of reference in order to better understand the interaction between the two languages. While Castilian was developing from a Latin-base dialect to a self-regulating Romance language, Basque had already been spoken for hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of years.\(^{13}\)

There have been sufficient attempts to prove that Castilian comes from the Latin spoken by Basque lips. At the heart of these affirmations is the fact that Euskera has been the linguistic common background to a big part of Castilian’s original ancestral home … This is the reason why these territories are under the Basque substratum and adstratum influence.\(^{14}\)

It must be remembered that Basque coexisted with Latin and, later, with its descendents in the peninsula, even if it was not perceived as a language of prestige, worthy of documentation. While Latin replaced Celtiberian and Celtic, neighbouring languages that were allowed to lapse, Basque was invincible. Latin spread to nearly every corner of Western Europe, and it was only in the north of Spain that a native pre-Roman language prevailed. In the mountains of Vascones, Basque remained an ancient and tenacious language with a life of its own.

4. Testimonies from Grammarians and Other Authors

There are some methodological obstacles in reconstructing the evolutionary phases of these two sounds, primarily due to the lack of sources, limited to
a few scholars’ recorded written opinions about this phonetic confusion, rhymes from medieval poetry, and literary texts. We will take a look at some cases where authors share their opinions about $b$ and $v$. Nebrija, author of the first published Spanish grammar in 1492, states that the graphemes $<b>$ and $<v>$ have different sounds; the articulation of $<v>$ being more similar to $<f>$. For this Sevillian grammarian, the distinction between these two sounds was clear. However, at the same time he admitted to there being a confusion between $<b>$ and $<v>$, as did others of his contemporaries such as Juan del Encina.

This confusion in particular happens mainly due to the phonetic closeness that these letters—i.e., consonants $<b>$ and $<v>$—have between them; to such a degree that some people cannot even distinguish the difference, not only in writing but also in pronunciation, although there is enough difference between them as with any other two letters.  

Busto, in his *Art of Learning to Read and Write, Arte para aprender a leer y escribir* (1533), distinguishes the labiodental sound $[v]$; however, he states that speakers from Burgos do not differentiate $[b]$ from $[v]$.

The $b$ is pronounced with the lips closed, as in *bestia* ... The $u$ is pronounced with the upper teeth over the lower lip, as in *vino, vida* and speakers from Burgos have to pay attention to this as they generally confuse these two letters in their writing and in their pronunciation.

On the other hand, in 1535 Valdés affirms that $<b>$ and $<v>$ were constantly confused in writing among people from Vizcaya, and that it was among these speakers that the confusion started. This confusion was less commonplace among Castilians. Valdés does not comment any further on pronunciation patterns.

I just cannot figure out $v$ and $b$ because I see the same words written sometimes with one letter and other times with the other ... This error mostly originated with the Vizcayans because they are never right when it comes to writing with one or the other. Castilians make the same mistake as well sometimes.

Busto and Valdés both mention the origins of this phenomenon as coming from the north, from Burgos and Vizcaya respectively. Antonio de Torquemada, from León, in his *Manual for Writers, Manual de Escriptibientes* (1574) for secretarial work, explains the articulatory difference between $<b>$ and $<v>$, but adds that they are very similar to each other and that is why these letters are confused in writing.
Because \( V \) in contact with other vowels ... becomes a consonant ... when it is pronounced in this way, its sounds so similar to \( B \) that only a few speakers can differentiate them and can stop making mistakes in writing \( B \) instead of \( V \) and \( V \) instead of \( B \).\(^{18}\)

In his *Castilian Grammar, Gramática Castellana* (1558), Cristóbal de Villalón, the sixteenth-century theologian and humanist, writes that the \(<v>\) was pronounced very similarly to the \(<b>\), with the lip rounded and without any labiodental obstruction. He emphasises that the articulation of \(<b>\) requires that the mouth close down; that is to say, that the sound is plosive. Therefore, Villalón differentiates the plosive [b] from the fricative [β], both of which, according to him, employ two different letters. He also reports that the loss of distinction is characteristic of old Castilians:

In our language, \( B \) ... is rarely distinguished from \( v \) among Castilians, since they have never made differences when they write words with \( b \) or \( v \). For example they write *bibir* and *beuer* indistinctly, and they write *vien* con \( v \) and other similar words: because not even one Castilian can make a distinction in their pronunciation.\(^{19}\)

At the end of the sixteenth century, in his *Castilian Orthography and Pronunciation, Orthographia y pronunciación castellana* (1582), López Velasco argues that the sounds for \(<b>\) and \(<v>\) were pronounced differently. Nevertheless, speakers from Burgos and Castile did not articulate this difference.

The sound of \( b \) is so similar and close to the consonant \( v \) that almost no one can hear the difference, therefore, this is the origin of the confusion and error. Both letters are confused generally in pronunciation and writing in the whole kingdom, and, especially, by people from Burgos and by those from Castile.\(^{20}\)

In 1597 the French hispanist César Oudin published a manual titled *Grammaire espagnolle expliquée en François*, where he claims that the (bi)labial confusion was a common phenomenon in the Spanish language. Among all of his predecessors, Oudin was the only one that defended the neutralisation of these two sounds. Other scholars have discussed the fact that the graphemes \(<b>\) and \(<v>\) differ in their pronunciation, and their still-incipient confusion was spreading from the north towards the centre of the Peninsula. To recapitulate, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries all grammarians, except Oudin, recognised the distinction.
Table 4.8. Grammarians’ Opinions about b and v in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grammarians’ Opinions about the Phonetic Articulation of &lt;b&gt; and &lt;v&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Up to the 16th century</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different Articulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors recognise the confusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebrija 1492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan del Encina 1496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Busto 1533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valdés 1535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torquemada 1574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villalón 1558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>López de Velasco 1582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Except Oudin 1597</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the other hand, by the seventeenth century most authors recognised that the neutralisation of both sounds was a generalised phenomenon. The confluence of [b], [β], and [v] and the consequential graphic chaos became the common tendency, as an intrinsic characteristic of Spanish. In 1614 Ambrosio Salazar attests to the swap between letters <b> and <v> in his General Mirror of Grammar, Espejo general de la gramática:

B serves instead of V and as B; many times B is used instead of V as in biuda, viuda, bandolero, vandolero, vasija, basija, in such a way that one can write B or V because it has the same voice.21

Some of his scholarly contemporaries follow this assertion, such as: Miguel Sebastián in his Orthography and Orthology, Ontología y orthología (1619); and Juan Villar in the Art of the Spanish Language, Arte de la lengua española (1651). Both of them emphasise the standardisation of this articulatory confusion. In Sebastián’s words, “everything is confused and corrupted. Everybody writes indifferently v instead of b and b instead of v in vulgar language.”22 Villar declares, “we do not distinguish our diction writing B sometimes and V others.”23 Also worthy of consideration is the commentary of foreign grammarians such as the British John Sanford who, in 1611, criticised the lack of regularity in the pronunciation of labial sounds by Spaniards.

The Spaniards … so confound the sound of B. with V. that it is hard to determine when and in what words it should retain its own power of a
labial letter. Whence it is that they do not only pronounce, but do also promiscuously write the one or the other.24

Juan Angel de Zumarán, in his *German and Spanish Grammar* from 1634, explains the pronunciation of *w* in German “as a *v*, not as a *b*, as Spaniards do mix them up.”25

Throughout the seventeenth century, written testimonies agree in stating that the confusion was a common practice. Only Mateo Alemán and Gonzalo Correas continue to maintain that the distinction exists and that the confusion happens only in Old Castile. In Alemán’s *Castilian Orthography, Ortografía Castellana* (1609), the Sevillian grammarian describes this neutralisation as a habit that was practiced in ordinary life:

> The *v* is mistaken with the *b* by many speakers; they may say *vuelta* but also *buelta*, or *vino* and *bino*, *vueno* and *bueno*, and that is not recommended as there is a big difference from *vello* to *bello* … Those ignorant people change the *b* into *v* as a regular practice, and they do it even more in Old Castile, where these two letters are confused.26

In the same way, the Extremaduran scholar Correas, in his *Art of the Spanish Language, Arte de la lengua española castellana* (1625), condemned this practice as characteristic of Castile: “*v* is very close to *b* and that is why many speakers from Old Castile mix them up … and they write whatever they feel.”27

According to most of the testimonies from the fifteen, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, we can conclude that the confusion had not spread by the end of the fifteenth century; it became more general in the sixteenth century, coming from the north towards the south, especially in the second half of the century, and it was completely standard and generalised in the seventeenth century. Some authors place this phenomenon as starting geographically with the Biscayans (Valdés), others in the region of Old Castile (Alemán and Correas); finally, others see it as a general trend among Spaniards (Salazar, Oudin, and Sanford).

### Table 4.9. Testimonies and Stages of the Confusion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Periods</th>
<th>Labial Sounds</th>
<th>Textual Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15th century</td>
<td>Incipient confusion at the end of the century</td>
<td>Testimonies about a nascent phenomenon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16th century</td>
<td>The confusion becomes more common</td>
<td>Testimonies about graphic and articulatory confusion Both distinction and confusion are practiced</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Diachronic Approach to the Confusion of b with v in Spanish

The confusion is general
Testimonies about total graphic and articulation neutralisation
Total confusion

Modern Hispanists, who study betacism and date the beginning of the phenomenon, come to varying conclusions. Their opinions differ about the timing of the change. Lapesa, Alarcos, Dámaso Alonso, and Cano Aguilar defend an early start in the north of the Peninsula and a later generalisation towards the mid-sixteenth century. Nevertheless, Amando Alonso and Blanco hesitate about this early beginning and postpone the confusion to a later period closer to the seventeenth century.

Lapesa argues that back in the thirteen century there are examples of the confusion of b and v. He refers to words such as sauidor (sabedor), saue (sabe), bale (vale), and lieha (lleva), recorded in the Miracles of Berceo, written in 1260. He also points to notary manuscripts from Alava, Burgos, and Valladolid written between 1388 and 1432 where one can find words such as bieren (vieren), varrio (barrio), Bitoria (Vitoria), labrada, labrar, abedes (habéis), debisa (divisa), Salbador (Salvador) (Lapesa 1981). According to this grammarian, the indistinction was quite early, and during the mid-sixteenth century it was common across the north of the Peninsula.

D. Alonso also states that the lack of distinction was earlier in the north, from the mid-fifteenth century, and that from there it expanded gradually towards the south, becoming a general practice in the sixteenth century. To reach this conclusion, D. Alonso studies rhymes from poetic works between 1400 and 1558. He states that rhymes with the bilabial plosive consonant [b] from the internal Latin -P- and the fricative [β] from internal Latin -B- and -V- had not been differentiated since the fifteenth century, and the neutralisation was totally regularised in the middle of the sixteenth century.

From the beginning of the fifteenth century, and more and more frequently, rhymes started to show examples of the confusion of the fricative -b- and the mixing of -b- and -u-, resulting in just one bilabial sound.28

According to D. Alonso (1962), some poets born in the beginning of the sixteenth century interchanged b and v, but this was not consistent across all authors. However, poets born in the middle of the century mixed up b and v as a regular tendency, as a norm—all of them did it, with Gongora and Lope as examples.29

Alarcos (1950) closely follows Lapesa’s and D. Alonso’s hypothesis in emphasising that the distinction was lost in the north first, and that
neutralisation did not become general until the sixteenth century. Cano Aguilar (2004) agrees with Alarcos in stressing that it was at the end of this century that the articulatory neutralisation ultimately became a common practice, although speakers from the upper classes still maintained the distinction.

On the other hand, A. Alonso dates the confusion of $b$ and $v$ to after 1550; before then, the confusion was a tendency of minorities in the north, and from there it expanded first towards the northwest and then into the south. To come to this conclusion, he examines testimonies on the interchange of $b$ and $v$ using texts by Juan del Encina along with the texts of P. Villar dating from 1496 to 1651. Together with Blanco, A. Alonso defends that it was not a general practice in the sixteenth century, as in that period it was practiced only in Old Castile (Alonso 1967). Blanco adds that both the confusion and the distinction between $b$ and $v$ coexisted during a long period in the sixteenth century. It was not until the seventeenth century that the articulatory difference between these two sounds was completely lost, although it prevailed in writing due to the conservative graphic tradition from previous centuries.

In summary, the experts do not seem to agree on the dates of the loss of the distinction between $b$ and $v$. There are two hypotheses—one supports a lack of distinction in a previous period, already common in the sixteenth century, and the other states that the confusion occurred later and was practiced in the seventeenth century. A summary of these opinions can be seen in the table below.

### Table 4.10. Authors’ Opinions on Dating the Confusion between $b$ and $v$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Confusion between $b$ and $v$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Previous period</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alarcos (1991)</td>
<td>Very old in the north</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General towards the end of the 16th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Alonso (1962)</td>
<td>Confusion from mid-15th century in the north</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General in the 16th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lapesa (1981)</td>
<td>Very early in the north of the peninsula, in the 13th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Common practice across the north in the middle of the 16th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Later period</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Alonso (1969)</td>
<td>Rejects the early origin of the confusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Only in the north until mid-16th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Common practice in Old Castile in the 16th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. Blanco (2006)</td>
<td>Starting at the end of the 15th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minority phenomenon in the middle of the 16th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General in the 17th century</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

30
In spite of divergent opinions about dating the beginning of the articulatory change, we can highlight a few features that all authors agree upon:

- The confusion started in the northern area and, from there, spread towards the south.
- It arrived in Castile later on and from there spread to the centre and south of the peninsula.
- The phenomenon evolved slowly and gradually, and extended widely with a long period of coexistence of both confusion and distinction between \( b \) and \( v \).
- The dephonologisation was complete in the seventeenth century.

Table 4.11. Chronological Summary of the Confusion between \( b \) and \( v \)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>15th century</th>
<th>End 15th century</th>
<th>16th century</th>
<th>17th century</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distinction in rhymes</td>
<td>Coexistence of the distinction and the confusion</td>
<td>Increasing expansion of the confusion from the north to the south</td>
<td>Articulatory neutralisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confusion: minor</td>
<td></td>
<td>Greater frequency of the confusion</td>
<td>General confusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonetic distinction between ([b]) and ([v])</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Loss of oppositions: both phonetic and phonological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incipient confusion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Etymological distinction versus phonological indistinction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language (RAE), newly founded, officially recognised the loss of the opposition between \( b \) and \( v \) and resorted to the traditional etymology criterion to distinguish graphemes in writing. The articulatory difference was not practiced in the spoken language of this century or in the previous one. Therefore, the *Dictionary of Authorities, Diccionario de Autoridades*, published by the RAE in 1726, deals with this situation directly:

The use of B and V causes a lot of confusion, originating from the fact that Spaniards do not distinguish these two letters, and we have written sometimes B, and others V without any ruling. To address this obstacle, which is quite arduous, we must attend first to the origin from where words derive.\(^{31}\)

If words do not follow their etymological origin, then the graphic variations or exceptions to this rule are due to one of the following reasons:
• Assimilation: e.g. VERMICULUM > bermejo where the non-etymological grapheme b- is used, triggered by anticipatory assimilation to the bilabial -m-. 

• Dissimilation: e.g. VIVIRE > bibir, vivir

• Metathesis: e.g. VIPERA > bivora, vibora

• Phonetic syntax: e.g. VOTA > boda, especially when the v is preceded by a consonant, it changes to b (Cuervo 1987; Cano Aguilar 1999).

5. Graphic Applications of Written Sources

For linguists, the most reliable evidence of how a language evolved and was used comes from written sources. However, writing systems are not totally accurate in representing the spoken language. Our reliance on written records may distort our perception of how an old language was pronounced. In a similar way, grammarians’ opinions sometimes do not reflect the current trends of what is actually happening in oral production. Their testimonies could be skewed from reality, based on their attachment to graphic traditions or orthographic conservatism. Furthermore, old written documents do not show one-hundred percent precision in relating letters to sounds, or graphic characters to their actual pronunciation. With this perspective in mind, the analysis of written resources such as rhymes should be undertaken with the consideration that not all scribes clearly perceived the correspondence of a letter to a phoneme, and not all of them spoke the same dialect or learned to write under the same scriptorium school. It must also be considered that poetic license with respect to pronunciation certainly existed as well.

Before the invention of the printing press in 1440, copyists did not maintain a standardised writing system as a model to follow. After Nebrija’s grammar was published in 1492 a stable spelling tendency began to take shape, but it was not until the foundation of the RAE in the early eighteenth century that a norm was truly established. Before the fifteenth century, scribes followed a heterogeneous way of writing according to various factors, such as the area where they were born, the dialect spoken in that area, writing formation, and level of education. They used to write following traditional scriptoria guidelines. It was very likely that these did not resemble those aspects of the spoken language that were considered vernacular, popular, or simply colloquial. Scribes’ conservatism caused their writing to refer to a version of the language already out of use, and what they wrote was not precisely what they were actually hearing. Therefore, the interpretation of old documents and medieval literary works
must be complemented with other written sources, such as the opinions of older grammarians about previous language stages.

Although most European vernaculars started to have their first written expressions, such as literary poetry, around the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Latin persisted as the language of learning until the time of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century. During this time, those vernaculars, such as Castilian, became acceptable for serious factual writing.

Much has been written about whether the graphic changes reflect changes in pronunciation. Experts such as A. Alonso (1969) disapprove of the importance that has been given to graphic errors. Other academics highly value graphic change as written proof of phonetic change; linguists such as D. Alonso (1962), Frago (1993) and Pensado (1998) follow this line of thought:

Why are we going to believe testimonies from the sixteenth century that say that those people mistake $b$ and $v$ in their writing because they also mixed them in pronunciation and, on the contrary, we are not going to interpret the graphic confusions of $b$ and $v$ in the Medieval Ages in the same way?35

Pensado (1998) underlines the testimonial significance of orthography for the purpose of historical phonetics. However, she points out that the methodology of study needs to be precise and rigorous to distinguish which errors are due to lapses, misspellings, or a scribe’s copying mistakes, and which are real phonetic errors.

Determining which errors reveal phonetic changes in pronunciation is not an easy endeavour. Graphic variations are the result of multiple factors, and are not always a direct consequence of phonetic transformations in the language. Graphic errors may be due to numerous causes such as the lack of a norm, the existence of a norm still in the process of standardisation, traditional writing practices and writers’ conservatism, the influence of neighbouring dialects, or even sociocultural deviations.

In spite of these difficulties in interpreting errors, especially in distinguishing those that reflect actual pronunciation, there is no doubt that analysing rhymes is the most traditional and revealing method to study changes in the spoken language. If a rhyme were established between letters once perceived as having different sounds, it indicates that the distinction between them was lost. For instance, if mancebos rhymes with nueuos, that explains that both $[b]$ for letter $<b>$ and $[β]$ for $<u>$ were not distinctive, but rather were pronounced in the same way.
Rhymes show that the general tendency with Latin <B-> or <V-> in the initial position of a word was to maintain the consonants according to their etymological origin. On the other hand, in the internal position many misspellings between b and v were common, for instance words such as saber “to know” or cabellos “hair” were written as sauer or saber, and cauellos or cavellos. In the eighteenth century, the RAE clarified this confusion (of how to write the words) by following entirely etymological parameters.

Table 4.12. Standardisation of the graphemes b and v

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grapheme</th>
<th>Etymological Origin</th>
<th>Sounds</th>
<th>Phoneme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;-b-&gt;</td>
<td>-BB-, -P-</td>
<td>[b], [β]</td>
<td>/b/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;-v-&gt;</td>
<td>-B-, -V-, -F-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;-u-&gt;</td>
<td>-B-, -V-, -F-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those words that did not follow these etymological parameters in the writing system indicate that the sounds were not distinguished in the pronunciation. This confusion progressively increased from the thirteenth century until the beginning of the sixteenth century, the time of the transition from medieval to classical Spanish. This graphic confusion occurred more often with <-b-> replacing <-v-> and <-u-> than in the opposite direction (Blanco 2006). In other words, <-b-> appears more often in cases of misspellings. See the examples below for this specific orthographical error.

Table 4.13. Misspellings of <-b-> for Latin <-V-> and <-B->

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words with &lt;-b-&gt; [β]</th>
<th>Etymon -V-, -B-</th>
<th>Literary Works</th>
<th>Date of original composition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>njebes</td>
<td>NIVIS</td>
<td>Los Milagros de Nuestra Señora</td>
<td>1246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nave</td>
<td>NAVIS</td>
<td>El Conde Lucanor</td>
<td>ca. 1335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>caballo</td>
<td>CABALLUM</td>
<td>Poema de Fernán González</td>
<td>ca. 1250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>caballo</td>
<td>CABALLUM</td>
<td>Libro de Buen Amor</td>
<td>1330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>caballero</td>
<td>CABALLARIUM</td>
<td>Poema de Fernán González</td>
<td>1250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Both words *njebes* (nieve) “snow” and *nabe* (nave) “vessel” are written with <-b->, although they have to be spelt with v or u according to their etymological origins. The confusion in *caballo* “horse” and in *caballero* “sir” is less immediately apparent, as both words come from an etymon with intervocalic Latin -B-, pronounced as [β], and therefore the corresponding grapheme would have been <-v->. In other romance languages, such as Portuguese, these two words are written as *cavalo* and *cavaleiro*; in Catalan *cavall* and *cavaller*; in Italian *cavallo* and *cavaliere*; and in French *cheval* and *chevalier*. In Galician, as in Spanish, the same orthographic confusion happened, giving *cabalo*, *cabaleiro*.

Table 4.14. Misspellings of <-v->, <-u-> for Latin <-p->

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words with &lt;-v-&gt;, &lt;-u-&gt; for &lt;-b-&gt; [b]</th>
<th>Etymon -&lt;p&gt;-</th>
<th>Literary Works</th>
<th>Date of original composition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cavañas</td>
<td>CAPANNAM</td>
<td>Poema de Fernán González</td>
<td>ca. 1250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arriua</td>
<td>AD RIPAM</td>
<td>Historia del gran Tarmolán</td>
<td>1406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cauñas</td>
<td>CAPANNAM</td>
<td>Historia del gran Tarmolán</td>
<td>1406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cauellos</td>
<td>CAPILUM</td>
<td>Historia del gran Tarmolán</td>
<td>1406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>riueras</td>
<td>RIPARIAM</td>
<td>La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes</td>
<td>1554</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In words such as *cavañas*, *arriua*, *cauellos*, *riueras* the grapheme <-v-> comes from an intervocalic Latin -p-. Consequently, the grapheme should have been <-b-> as in modern Spanish *cabaña* “hut,” *arriba* “up,” *cabellos* “hair,” *riberas* “riverbank.” In other romance languages it is written with <-b-> as *cabana* in Portuguese, Catalan, and Galician, *cabane* in French; *arriba* and *cabelos* in Portuguese and Galician; *ribera* in Catalan and Italian; and *ribeira* in Portuguese and Galician.

When comparing rhymes from literary poetry from the thirteenth century to the first quarter of the sixteenth century, the rate of distinction is quite high. That is to say, rhymes were only established between plosives [b] and [b] or between fricatives [β] and [β] until approximately 1525.
Table 4.15. Rhymes with distinction between intervocalic labial sounds [b] and [b], and [β] and [β]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rhyme [b] and [b]</th>
<th>Etymon</th>
<th>Literary works</th>
<th>Date of original composition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cabo / alabo</td>
<td>CAPUT / v. ALAPARI</td>
<td>Libro de Buen Amor</td>
<td>1330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acaben / caben / alaben / ssaben</td>
<td>v. der. CAPUT / v. CAPERE / v. ALAPARI / v. SAPERE</td>
<td>Cancionero de Baena</td>
<td>ca. 1430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acaben / alaben / caben</td>
<td>v. der. CAPUT / v. ALAPARI / v. CAPERE</td>
<td>Cancionero de las obras</td>
<td>1496</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rhyme [β] and [β]</th>
<th>Etymon</th>
<th>Literary works</th>
<th>Date of original composition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>aues / claues / suaes / graues</td>
<td>AVIS / CLAVIS / SUAVIS / GRAVIS</td>
<td>Libro de Alexandre</td>
<td>ca. 1250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>biuo / lexatiuo / esquiuo / catiuo</td>
<td>V. VIVERE / LAXATIVUS / *SIGILHS / CAPTIVUS</td>
<td>Libro de Apolonio</td>
<td>ca. 1250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>biuo / yua / catiuo / esquiuo</td>
<td>VIVA / IRA, V. BERE / CAPTIVA / *SIGILHS OVLUM / NOVIUM / v. MOVERE / v. PROBARE</td>
<td>Libro de Buen Amor</td>
<td>1330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aues / llaues</td>
<td>AVIS / CLAVIS</td>
<td>Cancionero de Baena</td>
<td>ca. 1430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>escrive / bive</td>
<td>v. SCRIBERE / v. VIVERE</td>
<td>Cancionero de las obras</td>
<td>1496</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) El que mas a ty cree anda mas por mal **cabo**
A ellos & a ellas a todos das mal rramo
De pecado dañoso de al non te **alabo**.
(Libro de Buen Amor, 1330)

(2) Mas que lógica lea muy Sotil
& las sotilezas enel ssce **acaben**
mas que en agostin mjll vezes mjll
quepan enel las que en libros **caben**
& por que los sabios todos lo **ssaben**
… & sea maestro delos que **ssaben**.
(Cancionero de Baena, ca. 1430)

(3) Alabaros sin que **acaben**
y con deuda yo consiento
puis por mucho que os **alaben**
mas y mas loores **caben**
en vuestro merecimiento.
(\textit{Cancionero de las obras}, 1496)

(4) Voluia los estrumentos; a buelta connas \textit{aues}. Encordauan a cierto; las cuerdas connas \textit{claues}. Alçando & apremiendo; fazien cantos \textit{suaues}. Tales que pera orfeo; de formar serien \textit{graues}. (\textit{Libro de Alexandre}, ca. 1250)

(5) Con la calor del fuego que estaua bien \textit{biuo} Aguiso hun hunquente caliente & \textit{lexatiuo} Vntola con sus manos non se fizo \textit{esquiuo} Respiro hun poquielo el espirito \textit{catiuo}. (\textit{Libro de Apolonio}, ca. 1250)

(6) Escritas son las cartas todas con sangre \textit{biua} todos con el plazer cada vno do \textit{yuua} dizen a la quaresma do te asconderas \textit{catiuua} ella aquesta rrazon aujala por \textit{esquiua}. (\textit{Libro de Buen Amor}, 1330)

(7) Fallaras muchas garçotas non fallaras vn \textit{hueuo} remendar bien non sabe todo alfayate de \textit{Nueuo} a trobar con locura non creas que me \textit{mueuo} lo que buen amor dize en rrazon te lo \textit{prueuo}. (\textit{Libro de Buen Amor}, 1330)

(8) Por ser vn poco apartado pensaron las otras \textit{aues} quebrantar viñas & \textit{llaues} al falcon aventajado ….. (\textit{Cancionero de Baena}, ca. 1430)

(9) De aquella manera Ovidio lo \textit{escribe} en medio del mundo adonde ella \textit{hive} y biven y suenan de todos las vidas. (\textit{Cancionero de las obras}, 1496).

After 1525, in the period of classical Spanish, rhymes with the lack of distinction between [b] and [β] grew in number until the seventeenth century when this confusion became the norm. Based on his analysis of rhymes, Blanco (2006) thinks that the confusion started earlier, at the end of the fifteenth century. Nevertheless, not all experts agree with this date. See below for examples of rhymes with orthographic errors, which show the lack of distinction.
Table 4.16. Rhymes with Confusion between Labial Sounds in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rhyme [b] &amp; [β]</th>
<th>Etymon</th>
<th>Author, work</th>
<th>Date of original composition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>save / grave (10)</td>
<td>v. SAPERE / GRAVIS</td>
<td>Boscán, Obras poéticas</td>
<td>1543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>süave / llave / grave / acabe (11)</td>
<td>SUAVIS / CLAVIS / GRAVIS / v. der. CAPUT</td>
<td>Cetina, ¿Ay, sabrosa ilusión!</td>
<td>1520–57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nave / sabe / acabe (12)</td>
<td>NAVIS / v. SAPERE / v. der. CAPUT</td>
<td>Ercilla, La Araucana</td>
<td>1569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mancebo / nuevo (13)</td>
<td>*MANCIUS / NOVUS</td>
<td>Quevedo, Un Heráclito cristiano</td>
<td>1613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prives / recibes / vives (14)</td>
<td>v. PRIVARE / v. RECIPERE / v. VIVERE</td>
<td>Lope de Vega, Rimas</td>
<td>1609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lava / acaba (15)</td>
<td>v. LAVARE / v. der. CAPUT</td>
<td>Góngora, Soledad Primera</td>
<td>1613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sabe / suave / grave / acabe (16)</td>
<td>v. SAPERE / SUAVIS / GRAVIS / v. der. CAPUT</td>
<td>Lope de Vega, La Circe</td>
<td>1624</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(10) Yo, viendo mi mal tan hecho
(lo que siento, Dios lo save,
Sé que estoy en tal estrecho,
Que de ver el daño grave,
Yo quisiera mi provecho.
(Boscán, Obras poéticas, 1543)

(11) ¿Ay, sabrosa ilusión, sueño süave!
¿Quién te ha enviado a mí? ¿Cómo viniste?
¿Por dónde entraste al alma, o qué le diste
A mi secreto por guardar la llave?
¿Quién pudo a mi dolor fiero, tan grave,
El remedio poner que tú pusiste?
Si el ramo tinto en Lete en mí esparciste,
Ten la mano al velar que no se acabe.
(Cetina, 1520)

(12) Y pues del fin y término postrero
no puede andar muy lejos ya mi nave
y el temido y dado paradero
el más sabio piloto no le sabe,
considerando el corto plazo, quiero
acabar de vivir antes que acabe
el curso incierto de la incierta vida …
(Ercilla, La Araucana, 1569)
A Diachronic Approach to the Confusion of $b$ with $v$ in Spanish

(13) Sólo el necio mancebo,
que corona de flores la cabeza,
es el que solo empieza
siempre a vivir de nuevo.
(Quevedo, *Un Heráclito cristiano*, 1613)

(14) Dame algún bien, aunque con él me prive
del padecer por ti, pues por ti muero,
si a cuenta del mis lágirmas recibes.
Mas ¿cómo me darás el bien que espero,
si en darme males tan escasos vives,
que apenas tengo cuantos males quiero?
(Lope de Vega, *Rimas*, 1609)

(15) Pintadas aves, cítaras de pluma,
coronaban la bárbara capilla,
… tantas orejas cuantas guijas lava,
de donde es fuente a donde arroyo acaba.
(Góngora, *Soledad Primera*, 1613)

(16) Quien dice que es Amor cuerpo visible,
¡qué poco del Amor perfecto sabe!
Que es el honesto Amor llama suave
a los humanos ojos invisible.
Es su divina esfera inaccesible
a material mortal, a cuerpo grave;
no hay fin que a su inmortal principio acabe,
como acabarse el alma es imposible.
(Lope de Vega, *La Circe*, 1624)

6. Conclusion

Taking into account the canon of rhymes and grammarians’ opinions about the confusion of $b$ and $v$, several generally accepted conclusions can be drawn. There was a period of distinction between these two sounds that coexisted with the confusion, which was perceived as a minor singularity in older times, based on the influence of the Basque substratum. The focal point of the indistinction started in the north and from there it spread towards the southern centre of the peninsula, extending originally over Old Castile. The confusion, restricted in its first movement to the north, expanded until the distinction and the confusion coexisted in most areas. Finally, the distinction disappeared in speakers’ daily pronunciation. This evolutionary phonetic process took centuries to develop within a diachronic framework that different experts see differently. However, most
of them agree that the orthographic errors between <b> and <v> were indicative of the phonetic changes happening in the language as it was actually spoken. Most of them date the phenomenon as widespread and complete by the sixteenth century. Other linguists postpone the date of generalisation to the seventeenth century.

There is no doubt that the evolution of labial sounds occurred slowly, and that the first traces of written documentation did not always correspond accurately to speakers’ pronunciation habits. There will always be a tendency toward inauthenticity in ancient records. The impact of the orthographic conservatism and the influence of traditional scribal practices jeopardise any meticulous methodical approach to obtain the true phonetics of proto-Romance, old Castilian, and medieval Spanish. The linguistic model, characteristic of early medieval documents, illustrates an orthographic system based on etymology, which only occasionally faithfully reproduced the spoken language as it was used. It was not until the seventeenth century that the lack of distinction in the pronunciation of graphemes b and v was recognised and accepted as a de facto phenomenon. Ultimately, it was the RAE in 1726 that officially standardised these graphemes.

**Glossary**

**Adstratum**: a language that has influenced another language spoken by a neighbouring population. Thus, French has been an adstratum in the development of English in the modern period. Cf. substratum, superstratum.

**Allophone**: an audibly distinct variant of a phoneme; e.g. in Spanish dedo “finger,” [dêðo], [d] and [ð] are allophones of the same phoneme /d/.

**Betacism**: loss of distinction between the sounds of b and v in a language or dialect. The term is derived from the Greek letter beta <β>. It is a fairly common phenomenon and has taken place in Greek, Hebrew, and Spanish. The first traces of betacism in Latin can be found in the third century. In historical linguistics the confusion affects the sounds [b], voiced bilabial plosive, as in “bane,” and [v], voiced labiodental fricative, as in “vane.” The result of the confusion in Spanish was the loss of [v].

**Coda**: the ending sounds of the syllable after the nucleus. In Spanish, the nucleus is a vowel; therefore, the coda follows a vowel. This is a weak position in phonetics. In Spanish, it is common to have phonemes debilitated or lost in this position, e.g. más, where s is the coda, which
in some dialects is pronounced [má]. In English, $d$ is the coda in *read*, $p$ in *flop*.

**Dephonologisation**: loss of distinction between phonemes; e.g. peninsular Spanish has *casa* /ˈkāsə/ and *caza* /káθə/ with different phonemes /s/ and /θ/, which differentiate meanings: “house” and “hunting.” In Latin American Spanish, dephonologisation occurred and there is only one phoneme /s/, and both words are /kāθə/—they are homophones.

**Dissimilation**: change or process by which two sounds in a sequence become less like each other. They can be contiguous or not. It happens often with $r$ and $l$, e.g. in Latin *ARBOREM*, in Spanish *árbol*, with dissimilation of the second $r$ to $l$.

**Euskera or Euskara**: Basque language, the ancestral language of the Basque people who inhabit the Basque Country, a region in northeastern Spain and southwestern France.

**Fricative**: consonant in which the space between articulators is constricted to the point at which the airflow passes through with audible turbulence, e.g. [f] in “feel” or [s] in “sin.”

**Grapheme**: a character in writing, considered to be an abstract or invariant unit.

**Homophones**: forms that have the same pronunciation, although they may have different spellings, e.g. *here* and *hear* in English, *hola* and *ola* in Spanish.

**Metathesis**: change or process by which the order of successive sounds is changed; e.g. *wasp* derives from a metathesised form of Old English *wæps* or *waefs*.

**Nuclear position**: position of a phoneme as the nucleus in a syllable. It could be after a pause or after a consonant in Spanish, e.g. *isla* in Spanish has *i* and *a* in nuclear positions while *s* is in coda.

**Nucleus**: the core or essential part of a syllable; it is usually a vowel or diphthong.

**Onset**: the beginning sounds of the syllable, $r$ in *read*, $fl$ in *flop*, $str$ in *strap*.

**Palimpsest**: a very old document on which the original writing has been erased and replaced with new writing.

**Plosive**: a stop produced with air flowing outwards from the lungs, e.g. *d* in *do* in English, or *p* in *para* in Spanish.

**Phoneme**: the smallest distinct sound unit in a given language that distinguishes meaning; e.g. in Spanish *casa*, *cana*, and *cama* differ in meaning by the presence of three phonemes, /s/, /n/ y /m/. In English, “tip” has three phonemes: /t/, /i/, and /p/.
Proto-Romance: undocumented language derived from Vulgar Latin. It is supposed to have been a mother language for all the Romance languages that developed historically from Latin.

Semivowel: a unit of sound which is phonetically like a vowel but whose place in syllable structure is characteristically that of a consonant, e.g. [j] in “yes” or [w] in “we.”

Sound, allophone: an audibly distinct variant of a phoneme; e.g. in Spanish the phoneme /b/ has two allophones: a plosive [b] and a fricative [β].

Substratum: a language, spoken by some populations, which has influenced the language of the group they were dominated by; e.g. under the Roman Empire, languages such as Iberian were replaced by Latin. But it has often been argued that, in learning Latin, speakers of these languages carried over certain linguistic features (including phonetic ones), and that these are reflected in modern Romance dialects.

Syntactic phonetics: connection between syntax and phonetics. The order of words in a sentence can influence phonetics; e.g. in Spanish el agua cristalina, the noun agua, although feminine, has a masculine article due to the first a, that has the stress [el á wy].

Vulgar Latin: the spoken Latin language. Vulgar in this usage comes from the Latin word for “common.”

Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Der.</th>
<th>derived</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*</td>
<td>not documented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ , /b/</td>
<td>phoneme, bilabial plosive voiced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] , [b]</td>
<td>sound, bilabial plosive voiced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;b&gt;</td>
<td>grapheme, letter b</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References


—. *De la pronunciación medieval a la moderna en español*, I. Madrid: Gredos 2ª edición, 1967.

**Literary Works Quoted**


**Further Reading**


**Topics for Discussion**

(1) Briefly list all the labial phonemes in classical Latin and explain their evolution into Spanish.
(2) Provide all the labial phonemes in old Castilian and explain their word position.

(3) Look up 10 words with b and v in different languages, Romance and non-Romance, and determine whether they have a contrastive meaning.

(4) How important is a labial sound’s position in the word to the confusion? Elaborate.

(5) The Basque substratum theory explains the confusion between b and v. Provide further research of examples of substrate influence on the language of power from the phonetic point of view.

(6) Investigate other theories, besides the Basque substratum, to explain the confusion between b and v.

(7) Briefly describe the diachronic development of the confusion of b and v, providing authors’ names and their framework to date this confusion.

(8) Most authors agree on certain conclusions regarding the confusion of b and v. Describe these conclusions.

(9) Consider Dámaso Alonso’s quote about graphical change as a testimony of phonetic change and provide your own view on the matter.

¿Por qué vamos a creer los testimonios del siglo XVI que nos dicen que las gentes confunden b y v en la escritura, porque las confunden en la pronunciación, y no vamos, en cambio, a interpretar del mismo modo las confusiones ortográficas de b y v en la Edad Media?

(D. Alonso 1962)

(10) The English word “gentleman” is caballero in Spanish, derived from caballo “horse” and CABALLUM in Latin; in Portuguese cavaleiro and cavalo; in Catalan cavaller and cavall; in Italian cavaliere and cavallo; in French chevalier and cheval; and in Galician, similar to Spanish, cabaleiro and cabalo. What do the letters b and v indicate in these examples? Explain.
(11) In medieval Castilian texts, you could find words such as: *cavañas* “huts” (< CAPANNAM), *arriuآ “up” (< AD RIPAM), *cauellos* “hair” (< CAPILLUM), and *riueras* “riverbank” (< RIPARIAM). In modern Spanish, these words are spelled as *cabañas*, *arriba*, *cabellos* y *riberas*. What do the old and modern written forms of these examples show?

(12) Read the following poem and explain the rhyme between *save* (from Latin verb SAPERE) and *grave* (from Latin GRAVIS).

   Yo, viendo mi mal tan hecho
   (lo que siento, Dios lo save,
   Sé que estoy en tal estrecho,
   Que de ver el daño grave,
   Yo quisiera mi provecho.
   (Boscán, *Obras poéticas*, 1543)

(13) Write the phonetic symbol for the labial sound in each of the following words according to the language indicated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latin</th>
<th>Old Castilian</th>
<th>Modern Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Examples: BENE &gt; bien</td>
<td>[b]</td>
<td>[b]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) ABBATEM &gt; abad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) AVIS &gt; aves</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) CAPANNAM &gt; cabaña</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) DEBILIS &gt; débil</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) INVENTUM &gt; invento</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(f) NAVIS &gt; nave</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(g) OVOS &gt; huevos</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(h) SAPERE &gt; saber</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) VENAM &gt; vena</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(j) VENET &gt; viene</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(k) VOTA &gt; boda</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(14) In the preface of volume 1 of *Diccionario de Autoridades* (LXVIII–LXIX) by the RAE you can read:

   Tres son las raíces ó fuentes de donde dimana la variedad y confusión en la Orthographía. La primera el uso incierto de las letras, cuya pronunciación es tan uniforme, que es dificultosissimo, por no decir imposible, discernir por la mera pronunciación quando y en que palabras se han de usar, para no mezclarlas y confundirlas. Estas son la
B y la V consonante; la C y la Z en las combinaciones propias y en las de la C en las dos vocales e i; la G, la J y la X en las dos vocales e i, la J y la X en sus combinaciones enteras; la C y la Q y la G y la H en las combinaciones en que media la u. La segunda, el uso de las consonantes dobladas que regularmente se hallan en las voces compuestas: como Accessión, Immemorial... Y la tercera, el de las consonantes diversas, que concurren en varios vocablos como: Assumpto ...

What did the RAE decide in 1726 about the confusion of b and v? Has this decision survived in modern Spanish?

(15) What parameters did the RAE make official in the eighteenth century for writing the labial sounds b and v?

Notes

1 This sound [β] is produced as a voiced continuant, an approximant with no audible friction. Nevertheless, it is here described as a fricative [β], as is done frequently in the literature, and as approximants are classified as fricatives.
2 The phonetic system for standard Catalan presents two phonemes, /b/ and /v/, in the day-to-day spoken language. This distinction is only practiced in some regions such as Tarragona and the Balearic Islands. The current tendency is to use only /b/, as in Spanish.
3 In Latin, there are few words with the voiced geminate -bb-, some examples being: SABBATUM > sábado “Saturday,” ABBATEM > abad “abbot, priest,” ABBAT(U)ERE > abatir “to demolish.”
4 Medieval Spanish dates between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. According to Menéndez Pidal’s and Echenique Elizondo’s categorisation of Spanish we have the following periods: Old Spanish dates from the tenth century until the mid-thirteenth century (approximately 960–1230); medieval Spanish from the mid-thirteenth century until the mid-fourteenth century (circa 1230–1370); pre-classical and classical Spanish between the end of the fourteenth century and the seventeenth century; and modern Spanish from the eighteenth century (in Echenique Elizondo 2013).
5 My translation of Julio Caro Baroja (1945): “existieron grupos lingüísticos vascos en la Edad Media en tierras que corresponden a las provincias de Logroño y Burgos … Un documento de la época de Fernando III el Santo otorga fuero a los habitantes del valle de Ojacastro y permitía deponer en vascuence.”
6 “To the question which years ago was posed by Menéndez Pidal as to whether medieval Basque distinguished—like Old Castilian—between plosive b and fricative v, we can reply, to judge by all the evidence, in the negative. We have already pointed out that the pronunciation of this unique voiced labial phoneme was in all probability fricative … In Castilian documents, when the orthographic
distinction is well established, Basque b is consistently represented by v (u) in this position” (Trask, in Hualde 1995).

7 Examples from Trask (1997, 133).

8 According to Trask (1997), in all likelihood Pre-Basque had a trill (as in perro in Spanish) and a tap (as in pero in Spanish) that only contrasted between vowels; elsewhere, the contrast was neutralised. In modern varieties of Basque, the result of the neutralisation is usually a trill, at least in careful speech. The ancient contrast survives today in the form of trilled rr and tapped r, in all Spanish Basque varieties. Minimal pairs are abundant: ere “also” and erre “burn,” gorri “red,” gora “up” and gorra “deaf.” In word final position, it is almost always a trill in modern Basque.

9 “Basque has, like the Iberian Peninsula and the south of France, a contrast between two phonemes traditionally known as ‘soft’ r (a tap) and ‘hard’ rr (a trill), or, to use the terminology of Navarro Tomás, simple and multiple r. But there is more. The contrast has all the appearance of being ancient on Spanish soil, for not only do the ancient Iberian and Tartessian texts exhibit two signs whose representation in the classical language is r(r), but in those same texts which use the Greek alphabet there are two forms of r, the second of which is differentiated from the first by the addition of a kind of diacritic (apex). The obvious explanation of this orthographic duality is that there existed in speech two sounds which it was advisable to distinguish in writing, sounds which otherwise, to judge by the testimony of the Greek script, were very similar to each other” (Trask in Hualde 1995).

10 For example, the continuation of Latin short Ī and long Ī merged in i, instead of I resulting in e (as it did in Spanish), i.e. in bikhe from Latin PIECE, pez in Spanish “fish”; bil(ho) from Latin PILU, pelo in Spanish “hair” (Michelena, in Hualde 1995).

11 Camitic Languages, such as ancient Egyptian and modern Berber, belong to the Afroasiatic group. They have been associated with Semitic languages although they are not linguistically related. The term “Camitic” was used in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, this term is obsolete now. These languages have also been denominated Hamitic, a term that is obsolete as well.

12 According to Trask, there is apparently no reason to not suppose that the realisation of voiced plosives b, d, g as fricatives in certain positions might be ancient. The not infrequent examples of alternation among b / d / g suggest a fricative pronunciation as do the abundant cases of loss in the intervocalic position (Hualde 1995). According to Cravens (1994), the restructuring of intervocalic voiceless /p/, /t/, /k/ to voiced /b/, /d/, /ɡ/ and the further weakening of the plosives /b/, /d/, /ɡ/ into the fricatives [β], [ð], [ɣ] are some of the basic problems of historical Romance linguistics. This lenition has two types of explanation: one externally motivated by the Celtic substratum hypothesis; the other internally motivated, concentrating on the factors that led to restructuring.

The first is unsatisfactory due to objections such as the lack of knowledge of Celtic dialects at the time of the Roman settlement and the appearance of voicing in areas
not settled by Celts. In Cravens’s opinion, in many respects previous hypotheses (of this weakening) are upheld in a closer look at languages which appear to be on their way to arriving at the stage which was reached by Spanish long ago (in Dworkin 2000).

13 The Basque language is an enigma in historical linguistics. Anthropologists, historians, reporters, geographers, linguists, and scholars from many disciplines have tried to resolve the mystery of its origins. Mark Kurlansky (1999) associates Basque origins with human prehistory and relates them directly to Cro-Magnon times; therefore, this language would be as old as the Cro-Magnon. Kurt Baldinger (1963) believes that Basque comes from a Pre-Indo-European substratum from the Alps, and disagrees with Humboldt’s theory on Basques as descendants of the Iberians. Baldinger also rejects Hubshmid’s hypothesis about the connection of Basque with two Pre-Indo-European sources, from North Africa and the Caucasian region. Terence Wilbur (1982) supports the idea that the Basque race did not come from outside the Peninsula but that it has been autochthonous in the north of the Peninsula since ancient times, since the Paleolithic age, ten-thousand years ago. Consequently, it would be a prehistoric language. Julio Cejador argues that Basque is a primitive language, the mother of all languages, following a monogenetic perspective, and considers Basque to be a synthetic language per excellence (in Pastor Cesteros 2001).

Basque’s ancient origins are supported by recent genetic studies, such as the American Journal of Human Genetics article on “The Basque Paradigm: Genetic Evidence of a Maternal Continuity in the Franco-Cantabrian Region since the Pre-Neolithic Times.” It states that “different lines of evidence point to the resettlement of western and central Europe by populations from the Franco-Cantabrian region during the Late Glacial and Postglacial periods … The study of the genetic diversity of contemporary Basques, a population located at the epicenter of the Franco-Cantabrian region, is particularly useful because they speak a non-Indo-European language that is considered to be a linguistic isolate … We identified six mtDNA haplogroups, H1j1, H1t1 … which are autochthonous to the Franco-Cantabrian region and, more specifically, to Basque-speaking populations. We detected signals of the expansion of these haplogroups at 4,000 years before present (YBP) and estimated their separation from the pan-European gene pool at 8,000 YBP, antedating the Indo-European arrival to the region. Our results clearly support the hypothesis of a partial genetic continuity of contemporary Basques with the preceding Paleolithic / Mesolithic settlers of their homeland …” (486).

“Our study has identified six autochthonous haplogroups, which explain 36% of the contemporary variation of haplogroup H in the region, restricted to Basque-speaking peoples and their immediate neighbors and virtually absent in the rest of Europe. In light of this, our data provide support for the hypothesis of a partial genetic continuity of contemporary Basques lato sensu—the historical Basque Country—with the earlier settlers of their homeland since pre-Neolithic times” (491).

14 Echenique (2003) quotes: “No han faltado intentos para afirmar que el castellano procede del latin hablado por labios vascos; en la raíz de estas afirmaciones está el
hecho de haber sido el euskera el fondo lingüístico común a una gran parte de su solar originario … razón por la cual se atribuye la acción del sustrato o adstrato vasco a todos estos territorios.”

15 Nebrija states: “El qual error, por la mayor parte acontece a causa del parentesco y vecindad que tienen vnas letras con otras, como entre la «b» y la «v» consonante; en tanto grado, que algunos de los nuestros apenas las pueden distinguir, assí en la escritura, como en la pronunciación, siendo entre ellas tanta diferencia, quanta puede ser entre cualesquier dos letras” (in Blanco 2006).

16 Busto quotes: “La b se pronuncia con los labios cerrados, como Bestia … La u los dientes de arriba sobre los labios de abaxo, como vino, vida y en esto deuen mucho para mientes los burgaleses, que generalmente assí en escreuir como en pronunciar confunden estas dos letras” (in Blanco 2006).

17 Valdés explains: “A la v y a la b nunca acabo de tomarles tino, porque unos mismos vocablos veo escritos unas vezes con la una letra y otras con la otra … La mayor parte deste error nace de los vizcaínos, porque jamás aciertan quándo an de poner la una letra o quándo la otra; pecan algunas veces los castellanos en el mismo pecado” (Valdés, in Blanco 2006).

18 In Torquemada’s words: “Porque la V quando se junta con otra vocal … se convierte en consonante … quando se pronuncia de esta manera, parécese tanto en el sonido y pronunciación a la B, que hallaréis muy pocos hombres que sepan diferenciárlas, y que dexen de errar algunas y muchas vezes, poniendo la B por V, y la V por B” (Torquemada, in Blanco 2006).

19 Villalón says that “la B … En nuestra lengua los castellanos muy poco la diuiden y differencian de la v. Porque ninguna diferencia han hecho en el escriuir la palabra con b, mas que con v. Porque entre ellos ansi escriuen birir y beuer. Y escriuen vien con v. Y otras cualesquiera palabras semejantes: porque en la pronunciacion ningún puro Castellano sabe hazer diferencia” (Villalón, in Blanco 2006).

20 “Es tan allegado y semejante el sonido de la .b. al de la .v. consonante … que a penas ay quien perciba con la oreja la differencia de sus voces de donde á nacido la confussion y error que en la pronunciación y escritura destas dos letras ay general en todo el Reyno, y mas entre Burgaleses y gente de Castilla” (López Velasco, in Blanco 2006).

21 “El B, sirve de V, y de B, que muchas vezes se mete B, por V, como viuda viuda, bandolero vandolero, vasija basija, de manera que se puede escriuir B, ó V, porque tiene vna mesma voz” (Salazar, in Blanco 2006).

22 “Está ya todo confundido y corrompido. Todos ponen indiferentemente, en particular .v. por .b. y .b. por .v. en vulgar” (in Blanco 2006).

23 “Porque nosotros no distinguimos nuestras diciones escriviendo las unas con B, y las otras con V” (in Blanco 2006).

24 In Blanco (2006).

25 “Como ve y no como be, como suelen pecar en esto los Españoles” (Zumarán, in Blanco 2006).

26 “La v … confúndenla muchos con la b, i tan presto dizuen vuelta como buelta, vino como bino, vueno como bueno, i no es bueno, porque ai mucha diferencia de
vello à bello […] Mudaron los imperitos, en y la b, como de ordinario se practica, i más en Castilla la vieja, donde andan confusas estas dos letras” (Alemán, in Blanco 2006).

27 “Tiene esta vu mucha vecindad con la be, i por eso muchos las confunden en Castilla la Viexa … y escriven lo que primero les viene á la mano” (Correas, in Blanco 2006).

28 “Desde principios del siglo XV, y cada vez más abundantemente, las rimas comienzan a dar indicios de la fricativización de -b- y de la reunión de -b- y -u- en un solo sonido, evidentemente bilabial” (D. Alonso 1962).

29 “De los poetas estudiados, los que nacen en los primeros años del XVI ... confunden unos muy repetidamente, otros lo suficiente para testimonio de la realidad fonética […] [Los] que nacen a mediados del siglo confunden todos … En fin la generación de Góngora y Lope confunde ya como norma” (D. Alonso 1962).

30 “La confusión fónica en las labiales, iniciada a finales del siglo XV, no debió de generalizarse hasta el siglo XVII … La distinción gráfica entre /-b/- (escrito <b>) y /-β/- (escrito <v> o <u>) responde en el siglo XVI a una diferencia aún fonológica … pero en el siglo XVII … ya no está motivada por hechos fonológicos, sino por el peso de una tradición continuadora de las grafías romances de varios siglos atrás” (Blanco 2006).

31 “El uso de la B, y de la V causa mucha confusión, nacida de que los Españoles, como no hacémos distinción en la pronunciación de estas dos letras, igualmente nos hemos valido yá de la B; ya de la V, sin el menor reparo. Para allanar este embarazo al parecer no poco árduo … se debe atender lo priméro al origen de donde proceden las palabras” (RAE 1963).

32 It is an example from Malkiel (1975): “Bermejo was almost invariably spelled with a b- in medieval texts, so much that this antietymological graphy has been retained. Observe the striking contrast to the consensus of Portuguese vermelho, French vermeil … The nearly-obligatory change from v- to b- was triggered by anticipatory rapprochement to bilabial -m- at the onset of the following syllable, i.e. through assimilation, for once, rather than dissimilation.”

33 According to Malkiel (1975) the spellings bevir and bivo (for vivir and vivo) were encountered frequently, not to say predominantly, in medieval manuscripts, and the most plausible explanation is the familiar process of consonant dissimilation.

34 As VOTA was a plural noun in Latin, it would likely have been preceded by an agreeing article or demonstrative with a plural ending, which in the evolution of Castilian became the consonant <s>. In Latin IPSA VOTA > esos votos or promesas “vows” or “promises” was declined as a neuter plural noun in the nominative and accusative cases.

35 “¿Por qué vamos a creer los testimonios del siglo XVI que nos dicen que las gentes confunden b y v en la escritura, porque las confunden en la pronunciación, y no vamos, en cambio a interpretar del mismo modo las confusiones ortográficas de b y v en la Edad Media?” (D. Alonso 1962).
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