

# ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE IPA

## Argentine Spanish

Germán Coloma  
CEMA University, Buenos Aires  
gcoloma@cema.edu.ar

Although Spanish is a relatively unified language, in the sense that people from very distant locations manage to understand each other well, there are several phonetic phenomena that distinguish different geographically separated varieties. The total number of native speakers of Spanish is above 400 million, and roughly 10% of them live in Argentina (Instituto Cervantes, 2014). The accent described below corresponds to formal Spanish spoken in Buenos Aires, and the main allophones are indicated by parentheses. The recordings are from a 49-year-old college-educated male speaker, who has lived all his life in either the city of Buenos Aires or the province of Buenos Aires.

### Consonants

|           | Labial   | Dental /<br>Alveolar | Palatal | Velar    | Glottal |
|-----------|----------|----------------------|---------|----------|---------|
| Plosive   | p    b   | t    d               |         | k    g   |         |
| Affricate |          |                      | tʃ      |          |         |
| Nasal     | m        | n                    | ɲ       | (ŋ)      |         |
| Tap       |          | ɾ                    |         |          |         |
| Trill     |          | r                    |         |          |         |
| Fricative | f    (β) | s    (ð)             | ʃ       | x    (χ) | (h)     |
| Lateral   |          | l                    |         |          |         |

| <u>Phonemes</u> |          |                            | <u>Allophones</u> |          |                        |
|-----------------|----------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------|------------------------|
| p               | [ˈpala]  | <i>pala</i> “spade”        |                   |          |                        |
| b               | [ˈbala]  | <i>bala</i> “bullet”       | β                 | [ˈpaβa]  | <i>pava</i> “kettle”   |
| m               | [ˈmapa]  | <i>mapa</i> “map”          |                   |          |                        |
| f               | [ˈfama]  | <i>fama</i> “fame”         |                   |          |                        |
| t               | [ˈtapa]  | <i>tapa</i> “lid”          |                   |          |                        |
| d               | [ˈdama]  | <i>dama</i> “lady”         | ð                 | [ˈnaða]  | <i>nada</i> “nothing”  |
| n               | [ˈnapa]  | <i>napa</i> “water table”  | ŋ                 | [ˈmaŋga] | <i>manga</i> “sleeve”  |
| r               | [ˈpara]  | <i>parra</i> “grapevine”   |                   |          |                        |
| r               | [ˈpara]  | <i>para</i> “for”          |                   |          |                        |
| s               | [ˈsala]  | <i>sala</i> “room”         | h                 | [ˈpahta] | <i>pasta</i> “paste”   |
| l               | [ˈlata]  | <i>lata</i> “tin/can”      |                   |          |                        |
| tʃ              | [ˈtʃapa] | <i>chapa</i> “sheet metal” |                   |          |                        |
| ʃ               | [ˈʃama]  | <i>llama</i> “flame”       |                   |          |                        |
| ɲ               | [ˈɲata]  | <i>ñata</i> “small nose”   |                   |          |                        |
| k               | [ˈkama]  | <i>cama</i> “bed”          |                   |          |                        |
| g               | [ˈgara]  | <i>garra</i> “claw”        | ɣ                 | [ˈmaɣa]  | <i>maga</i> “magician” |
| x               | [ˈxara]  | <i>jarra</i> “jug”         |                   |          |                        |

In Spanish, all plosives are unaspirated, and some authors prefer to use the word “occlusive” instead of “plosive” for them (Monroy & Hernández, 2105). /p/, /b/ and /m/ are generally bilabial, while /f/ is labiodental. Correspondingly, /t/, /d/ and /s/ are generally alveodental, while /n/, /l/, /r/ and /r/ are typically alveolar. /tʃ/ and /ʃ/ are postalveolar, while /ɲ/ is properly palatal. The oppositions between /r/ and /r/, and between /m/ and /n/, are neutralized in pre-consonantal positions, and [ŋ] is an allophone of /n/ (before velar consonants).

The phonemes /b/, /d/ and /g/ are pronounced as [β], [ð] and [ɣ], respectively, when they appear between vowels (and also after some consonants). These sounds are here classified as voiced fricatives, but in fact they are generally pronounced as approximants (Hualde, 2005: 138–143), i.e., as continuant consonants without friction. From a functional or phonological point of view, however, they are always obstruents rather than sonorants (Real Academia Española, 2011: 142-162).

The characteristics mentioned in the two previous paragraphs are shared with almost all the Spanish varieties spoken around the world, but Argentine Spanish also possesses some features that are typical of Latin American accents, as opposed to European accents. One of them is the absence of the phoneme /θ/, and its merger with the phoneme /s/, which is generally referred to as  *seseo* . In most positions, the phoneme /s/ is pronounced as a laminal fricative (instead of an apical or apico-dorsal fricative, which are the most common Castilian pronunciations), but it is pronounced as [h] before other consonants. On the other hand, in Argentine Spanish, [h] is never an allophone of /x/ (as is the case in other accents such as Central American, Colombian and Caribbean Spanish).

Buenos Aires Spanish is also characterized by the absence of the phoneme /k/, and its merger with the phoneme /ʃ/. This is a version of what the Spanish phonetics’ literature usually calls  *yeísmo*  (Penny, 2004: 118-121), which is a very common feature in many varieties of Spanish (both European and Latin American).

## Distinctive characteristics

The main distinctive characteristic of Buenos Aires Spanish is the assibilation of the phoneme /ʃ/, which in most Spanish varieties is pronounced as a voiced non-assibilated palatal fricative [j], plosive [ɟ] or affricate [tʃ], or even as a palatal glide [j]. In the variety described here, the sound for this phoneme is the voiceless postalveolar fricative [ʃ]. Many variations of this exist, influenced by age, sex and social class (Colantoni, 2006). Those variations go from the use of [j] to the use of the voiced postalveolar fricative [ʒ], but they all share the common feature of possessing a strong and strident assibilation (Kochetov & Colantoni, 2011).

Fontanella (1987: 144–150) described a variety of Buenos Aires Spanish in which /z/ and /ʃ/ were different phonemes, the former being used for most words written with “y” or “ll” (such as *lluvia* [ˈʒuβja] “rain” or *yuyo* [ˈʒuʒo] “weed”), and the latter being used in borrowed foreign words (such as *shampoo* [ʃamˈpu]). That distinction has almost disappeared for the current generations of speakers, who either use [j] or [ʒ] in all cases (Rohena-Madrado, 2013).

Due to its use as a realization for the phoneme /ʃ/, in Argentine Spanish [j] is never an allophone of the phoneme /tʃ/ (as occurs in other accents such as Andalusian, Chilean or Caribbean Spanish). This characteristic also implies that there is a strong distinction between [j] and [j], which is always an allophone of the vowel phoneme /i/ (Harris & Kaisse, 1999). Consequently, in Buenos Aires Spanish, speakers make a clear phonemic difference between *hierro* [ˈjero] “iron” and *yerro* [ˈjero] “mistake” (which is something that does not occur in other Spanish accents).

Another variation under way in Argentine Spanish is the disappearance of /ɲ/ as a separate phoneme, and its merger with the combination /ni/. Consequently, many young Argentinians do not distinguish between *huraño* [uˈraɲo] “unsociable” and *uranio* [uˈranjo] “uranium”, and treat them as homophones (Colantoni & Hualde, 2013). It is also relatively common to hear the voiced labiodental fricative sound [v] as an allophone of /b/. Some speakers use it in emphatic pronunciation, especially for words written with “v” (e.g., *vida* [ˈviða] “life”).

## Regional variations

Although Buenos Aires exercises a strong influence over the Spanish spoken in Argentina, several regional variations exist. In general, it can be considered that the accent described here is close to the one used by roughly 70% of the Argentine population, who lives in the South East of Argentina (i.e., in the city of Buenos Aires, and in the provinces of Entre Ríos, Santa Fe, Buenos Aires, La Pampa, Neuquén, Río Negro, Chubut, Santa Cruz, Tierra del Fuego and the southern part of Córdoba). This accent is also similar to the one used in the Republic of Uruguay, and because of that it can be generically referred to as ‘River Plate Spanish’ (Hualde 2005: 23–31).

Apart from the region whose accent is described here, the rest of the country can be divided into three main dialect areas, which are the North West, the North East, and the West (Coloma, 2013; see Figure 1). The first of them encompasses the provinces of La Rioja, Catamarca, Tucumán, Santiago del Estero, Salta, Jujuy and the northern part of Córdoba, while the second one includes the provinces of Corrientes, Chaco, Misiones and Formosa (which are in the frontier with Paraguay). The Western region, finally, encompasses the provinces of Mendoza, San Juan and San Luis (which are close to Chile).

The main phonetic difference between the accents of the two above-mentioned Northern regions and the accent of Buenos Aires is the assibilation and fricativization of the phoneme /r/ (Colantoni, 2006). In those areas, that phoneme is typically pronounced as a voiced alveolo-

palatal fricative [z], instead of a trill [r]. Northern Argentinians also use the [h] allophone of /s/ more frequently, especially in cases where /s/ appears at the end of a word (and the next word begins with a vowel).



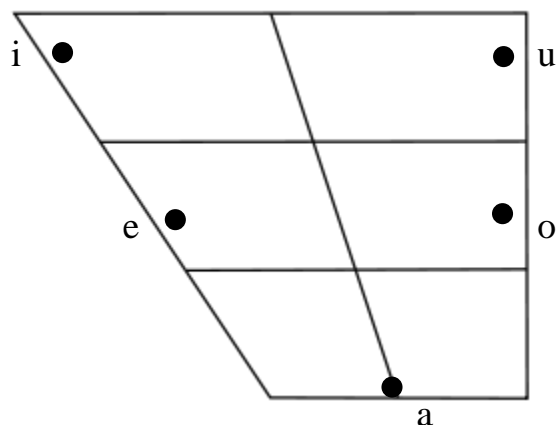
**Figure 1:** Argentine Spanish dialect regions.

In the Northeastern region, moreover, many people use the lateral palatal sound [ʎ] as an additional phoneme, as most speakers of Paraguayan Spanish do (Real Academia Española, 2011: 226–227). Those people typically pronounce the phoneme /ʃ/ as a voiced postalveolar affricate [dʒ], and distinguish between words such as *haya* ['adʒa] “there is” and *halla* ['aʎa] “he finds”.

Another regional variation that has been reported (Gurlekian, Colantoni & Torres, 2001) belongs to the Western region, and it is the use of a palatal voiceless fricative sound [ç] as an allophone of /x/, when that phoneme appears before /e/ or /i/. This feature is typical of Chilean Spanish (Sadowsky & Salamanca, 2011).

The Western region of Argentina is also noticeable for the widespread presence of non-assibilated realizations of the phoneme /ʃ/, which is generally pronounced as a voiced palatal fricative [j]. That pronunciation can also be found in the North West, although in that area there is a considerable variation between [j] and [z] as realizations of that phoneme (Rojas, 2004).

## Vowels



### Phonemes

|   |        |             |           |
|---|--------|-------------|-----------|
| a | ['aso] | <i>aso</i>  | “I roast” |
| e | ['eso] | <i>eso</i>  | “that”    |
| i | ['iso] | <i>hizo</i> | “he did”  |
| o | ['oso] | <i>oso</i>  | “bear”    |
| u | ['uso] | <i>uso</i>  | “usage”   |

### Allophones

|   |              |                  |              |
|---|--------------|------------------|--------------|
| ɛ | ['esɛa'βjon] | <i>ese avión</i> | “that plane” |
| j | ['jelo]      | <i>hielo</i>     | “ice”        |
| ɔ | ['layɔa'sul] | <i>lago azul</i> | “blue lake”  |
| w | ['weβo]      | <i>huevo</i>     | “egg”        |

Like most Spanish accents, Argentine Spanish has five vowel phonemes (/a/, /e/, /i/, /o/ and /u/) that may occur in both stressed and unstressed syllables. The five vowels can be partially nasalized when they are in contact with nasal consonants, but there is no phonemic contrast between oral and nasal vowels. Besides, Argentine Spanish does not make any relevant distinction between open and closed variants of the five vowel phonemes, as occurs in some accents spoken in Southern Spain (Monroy & Hernández, 2015).

The most relevant allophones for the Argentine Spanish vowels are the palatal glide [j] (for the phoneme /i/) and the labiovelar glide [w] (for the phoneme /u/). These glides can also be written as [i̠] and [u̠] (Hualde, 2005: 54–55). Some authors (e.g., Martínez, Fernández & Carrera, 2003; Monroy & Hernández, 2015) use [j] and [w] when these sounds appear before a syllabic nucleus, and [i̠] and [u̠] when they appear after a syllabic nucleus. The phonemes /e/ and /o/ also admit the use of the glides [ɛ] and [ɔ] as allophones, especially in synalepha (i.e., when the last syllable of a word and the first syllable of the following word are pronounced as if they were a single syllable).

Spanish allows for the existence of many diphthongs, both rising ([ja], [je], [jo], [ju], [wa], [we], [wi], [wo]) and falling ([aj], [aw], [ej], [ew], [oj], [ow], [uj]). They consist of a syllabic vowel plus a glide, and they can always be analyzed as formed by two different phonemes. Examples of words with diphthongs are *piano* ['pjano] “piano”, *quieto* ['kjetɔ] “quiet”, *piojo* ['pjoxo] “louse”, *viuda* ['bjuða] “widow”, *cuatro* ['kwatro] “four”, *cuero* ['kwero] “leather”, *fuimos* ['fwimos] “we went”, *cuota* ['kwota] “share”, *baile* ['bajle] “dance”, *jaula* ['xawla] “cage”, *peine* ['pejne] “comb”, *neumático* [new'matiko] “tyre”, *boina* ['bojna] “beret”, *estadounidense* [ehtaðowni'ðense] “U.S. American” and *muy* [muj] “very”.

Triphthongs are also possible (e.g., [joj], [waw], [wej], etc.) and they are always formed by a glide, a syllabic vowel and another glide. Examples of words with triphthongs are *hioides* ['jojðes] “hyoid bone”, *guau* [gwaw] “dog’s sound” and *buey* [bwej] “ox”.

## Prosody

### Stress

Lexical stress is distinctive in Spanish, and it is common to find two-way contrasts (e.g., *revolver* [reβol'βer] “to stir” vs. *revólver* [re'βolβer] “gun”) and even three-way contrasts (e.g., *médico* ['meðiko] “physician” vs. *medico* [me'ðiko] “I prescribe (a medicine)” vs. *medicó* [meði'ko] “he prescribed (a medicine)”).

The stress must fall in the last syllable, the penultimate syllable or the antepenultimate syllable, except in cases in which a word has enclitic pronouns, which admit other positions (e.g., *cantándomelo* [kan'tandomelo] “singing it to me”). In those cases, however, it is relatively common that Argentine Spanish speakers shift the position of the stress to the last syllable of the word (Colantoni & Cuervo, 2013).

Some long words may even have two stressed syllables (e.g., *inmediatamente* [inme'ðjata'mente] “immediately”), when they are pronounced as if they were a sequence of two different words. In those cases, the first of those stresses can be perceived as a secondary stress, and the last one as a primary stress.

### Intonation

Like almost all the other Indo-European languages, Spanish is not tonal. Tone, therefore, is only used to express pragmatic meanings such as commands, questions, statements, etc. In general, the nuclear tone in Spanish is close to the end of each intonation group, and the final boundary tone is low (Martínez & Fernández, 2007: 199–204).

The main distinctive characteristic of Argentine Spanish intonation is the presence of a “long fall” (Kaisse, 2001), which implies the existence of early peak alignments in the realization of pre-nuclear pitch accents and in the final fall in broad focus declarative utterances. Colantoni & Gurlekian (2004) think that this is due to a combination of direct and indirect transfers from Italian, which took place in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (when Buenos Aires experienced a large inflow of Italian immigration).

Another peculiarity of Argentine Spanish intonation appears in yes-no questions. These utterances, which in most Spanish varieties are characterized by a high rise tone, are frequently pronounced in Buenos Aires Spanish with a falling bitonal boundary tone (Gabriel et al., 2010).

## Transcription of the recorded passage

The version of “The North Wind and the Sun” transcribed in this Illustration is essentially the same as that in Martínez, Fernández & Carrera (2003) and Monroy & Hernández (2015), except for a few expressions that are not common in Argentina and have therefore been replaced. I have also included an additional word (*extraño* [eks'traño] “strange”), as an example for the pronunciation of the phoneme /ɲ/ (which does not appear in the original Spanish text).

In the phonemic transcription, words are kept separated according to their meaning. In the narrower (allophonic) transcription, some resyllabification is introduced when there is

synalepha, and when the consonants in the coda of the last syllable of a word are pronounced as if they were in the onset of the first syllable of the following word.

### **Broad (phonemic) transcription**

el 'biento 'norte i el 'sol disku'tian sobre 'kual de 'efos 'era el 'mas 'fuerte | kuando pa'so un eks'traño bia'xero em'buelto en 'una 'antʃa 'kapa || el 'biento i el 'sol kombi'nieron en ke kien 'antes lo'grara obli'gar al bia'xero a ki'tarse la 'kapa se'ria konside'rado 'mas pode'roso || el 'biento 'norte so'plo kon 'gran 'furia | pero 'kuanto 'mas so'plaba 'mas se aga'raba el bia'xero de su 'kapa || por 'fin el 'biento 'norte abando'no la em'presa || en'tonses bri'ʃo el 'sol kon ar'dor | e inme'diata'mente el bia'xero se despo'xo de su 'kapa | por lo ke el 'biento 'norte 'tubo ke rekonos'er la superiori'dad del 'sol ||

### **Semi-narrow (allophonic) transcription**

el 'βjen-to 'nor-te jel 'sol dih·ku·ti·an so·βre 'kwal 'de·ʃo 'se·raɛl 'mah 'fwer-te | kwan·do pa·'sow neks·'tra·ño βja·'xe·rɔem 'bwel·tɔe 'nu·na 'aɲ·tʃa 'ka·pa || el 'βjen-to jel 'sol kom·bi·'nje·ro neɲ ke kje 'nan·teh lo·'ɣra·raɔ βli·'ɣa·ral βja·'xe·rɔa ki·'tar·se la 'ka·pa se·'ri·a kon·si·ðe·'ra·ðo 'mah po·ðe·'ro·so || el 'βjen-to 'nor-te so·'plo koɲ 'gram 'fu·rja | pe·ro 'kwan·to 'ma·so 'pla·βa 'ma·sɛa ɣa·'ra·βaɛl βja·'xe·ro ðe su 'ka·pa || por 'fi·nel 'βjen-to 'nor·tɛa βan·do·'no laɛm·'pre·sa || en·'ton·seh βri·'ʃoel 'sol ko nar·'ðor | ejn·me·'ðja·ta·'men·tel βja·'xe·ro se ðeh·po·'xo ðe su 'ka·pa | por lo kel 'βjen-to 'nor-te 'tu·βo ke re·ko·no·'ser la su·pe·rjo·ri·'ða·ðel 'sol ||

### **Orthographic version**

El viento norte y el sol discutían sobre cuál de ellos era el más fuerte, cuando pasó un extraño viajero envuelto en una ancha capa. El viento y el sol convinieron en que quien antes lograra obligar al viajero a quitarse la capa sería considerado más poderoso. El viento norte sopló con gran furia, pero cuanto más soplaba, más se agarraba el viajero de su capa. Por fin el viento norte abandonó la empresa. Entonces brilló el sol con ardor, e inmediatamente el viajero se despojó de su capa, por lo que el viento norte tuvo que reconocer la superioridad del sol.

### **Acknowledgements**

I thank Amalia Arvaniti, Laura Colantoni, Ana Fernández Planas, Matthew Gordon, Juan Hernández Campoy, Ewa Jaworska, Adrian Simpson, and three anonymous reviewers, for their useful comments. All the remaining errors are mine.

### **References**

- Colantoni, Laura. 2006. Micro and macro sound variation and change in Argentine Spanish. *Proceedings of the IX Hispanic Linguistic Symposium*, 91–102.
- Colantoni, Laura & Jorge Gurlekian. 2004. Convergence and intonation: historical evidence from Buenos Aires Spanish. *Bilingualism* 7(2), 107–119.
- Colantoni, Laura & José Ignacio Hualde. 2013. Variación fonológica en el español de la Argentina. In Colantoni, Laura & Celeste Rodríguez Louro, eds: *Perspectivas teóricas y experimentales sobre el español de la Argentina*, 21–36. Madrid, Iberoamericana Verbuert.

- Colantoni, Laura & María Cristina Cuervo. 2013. Clíticos acentuados. In Colantoni & Rodríguez Louro, *op. cit.*, 143-157.
- Coloma, Germán. 2013. Valoración socioeconómica de tres características fonéticas en el español de la Argentina. In Martínez, Angelita & Adriana Speranza, eds: *Rumbos sociolingüísticos*, 23-36. Mendoza, Sociedad Argentina de Lingüística.
- Fontanella, Beatriz. 1987. *El español bonaerense*. Buenos Aires, Hachette.
- Gabriel, Christoph, Ingo Feldhausen, Andrea Peskova, Laura Colantoni, Sur-Ar Lee, Valeria Arana & Leopoldo Labastía. 2010. Argentinian Spanish intonation. In Prieto, Pilar & Paolo Roseano, eds: *Transcription of intonation of the Spanish language*, 285-317. Munich, Lincom Europa.
- Gurlekian, Jorge, Laura Colantoni & Humberto Torres. 2001. El alfabeto fonético SAMPA y el diseño de corpora fonéticamente balanceados. *Fonoaudiológica* 47(3), 58–69.
- Harris, James & Ellen Kaisse. 1999. Palatal vowels, glides and obstruents in Argentinian Spanish. *Phonology* 16(2), 117–190.
- Hualde, José Ignacio. 2005. *The sounds of Spanish*. New York, Cambridge University Press.
- Instituto Cervantes. 2014. *El español: una lengua viva*. Madrid, Instituto Cervantes.
- Kaisse, Ellen. 2001. The long fall: An intonational melody of Argentinian Spanish. In Herschenson, Julia, Enrique Mallén & Karen Zagona, eds: *Features and interfaces in Romance*, 148–160. Amsterdam, John Benjamins.
- Kochetov, Alexei & Laura Colantoni. 2011. Coronal place contrasts in Argentine and Cuban Spanish: An electropalatographic study. *Journal of the International Phonetic Association* 41(3), 313–342.
- Martínez, Eugenio & Ana Fernández. 2007. *Manual de fonética española*. Barcelona, Ariel.
- Martínez, Eugenio, Ana Fernández & Josefina Carrera. 2003. Castilian Spanish. *Journal of the International Phonetic Association* 33(2), 255–259.
- Monroy, Rafeel & Juan Hernández. 2015. Murcian Spanish. *Journal of the International Phonetic Association* 45(2), 229–240.
- Penny, Ralph. 2004. *Variation and change in Spanish*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Real Academia Española. 2011. *Nueva gramática de la lengua española: fonética y fonología*. Madrid, Espasa-Calpe.
- Rohena-Madrado, Marcos. 2013. Variación y cambio de sonoridad de la fricativa postalveolar del español de Buenos Aires. In Colantoni & Rodríguez Louro, *op. cit.*, 37-58.
- Rojas, Elena. 2004. El español en el noroeste. In Fontanella, Beatriz, ed: *El español de la Argentina y sus variedades regionales*, 161-187. Bahía Blanca, Asociación Rivadavia.
- Sadowsky, Scott & Gastón Salamanca. 2011. El inventario fonético del español de Chile. *Onomázein* 24, 61–84.