

ANA ESTRADA ARRÁEZ

THE LOSS OF INTERVOCALIC  
/D/ IN EUROPEAN  
PENINSULAR SPANISH



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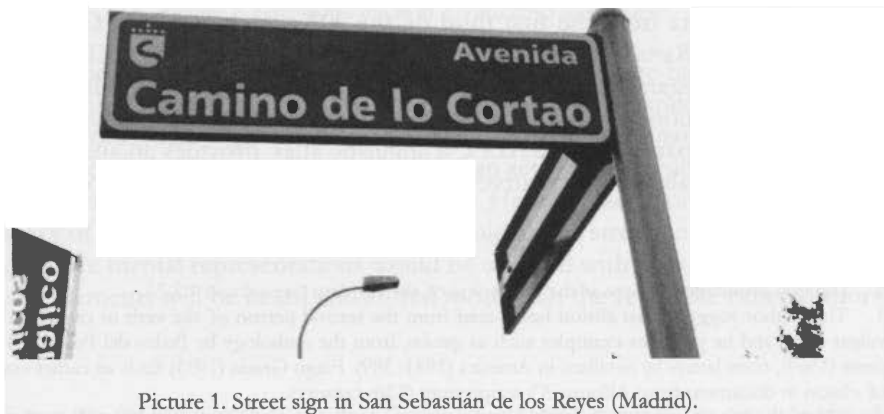
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## 1. Introduction

Each and every speaker of European Peninsular Spanish will have heard, or even said, «*to pa na*» (*todo para nada* ‘all for nothing’), «*estamos apañaos*» (*estamos apañados* ‘we are in trouble’), or similar expressions in which intervocalic /d/ is missing. This deletion of /d/, which is much more common in Spain than in other Spanish-speaking countries<sup>1</sup>, is a sociolinguistic marker; its use covaries with the speech register due to speaker awareness, which deems the variants with elision less prestigious. Although it has generally been connected with colloquial speech, the loss of the dental can also be found in official written text (Picture 1) or in the speech of university professors, in particular for the context *-ado* (where elision is most widespread).



Picture 1. Street sign in San Sebastián de los Reyes (Madrid).

1. Vid. Zamora Vicente 1970, Alba 2000.

This loss of intervocalic /d/ is part of a broader process of lenition<sup>2</sup> that includes the consonants /b, d, g/. The greatest effects are, nonetheless, found on /d/, leading to the elision of the segment in many cases. This lenition is nothing new, as the history of Spanish shows: the first occurrence took place during the transition from Latin to romance (e.g. *CADERE* > *caer*), where geminated consonants were simplified, voiceless occlusives became voiced, and voiced occlusives often disappeared. Between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the second person plural of the verb lost the dental from their ending (*amades* > *amáis*, *amavades* > *amabáis*), and as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century we can find examples of the loss of intervocalic /d/ that still occurs today (Lapesa: 1981)<sup>3</sup>. Bustos (1960, *apud* Ariza 1992) establishes three periods in the loss of the dental: the first two, which we have already mentioned, and the final stage, which began in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This final stage of the phenomenon will be the focus of this work.

Although the weakening and deletion of /d/ is a well-known phenomenon and has been widely explored from different perspectives, there is no overview of its peninsular distribution in literature, since studies with a dialectological or sociolinguistic approach have focused only on a small part of Iberian geography. In addition, there is no general consensus about the factors of change or their relative importance. In this work I will use two different peninsular corpora to analyse the possible factors of change. I will also assess lenition in the European Peninsular Spanish of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from a dialectological point of view. The objectives of this study are:

- to show the geographical distribution of the elision of intervocalic /d/ in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in European Peninsular Spanish data.
- to find the most relevant factors of change for the aforementioned data and assess their relative importance.

The chosen corpora –which will be described in sections 2.1. and 3.1.– are the *Atlas Lingüístico de la Península Ibérica* –*Linguistic Atlas of the Iberian Peninsula*– (ALPI), which collects data from the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the *Corpus Oral y Sonoro del Español Rural* –*Audible Corpus of Rural Spoken Spanish*– (COSER), an ongoing project that began in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>4</sup>. A comparison of their data can shed light on the evolution of the phenomenon, although it is important to note that they are not fully comparable: while ALPI, a linguistic atlas, provides an answer for the same question in almost every surveyed locality, COSER is a corpus collected with

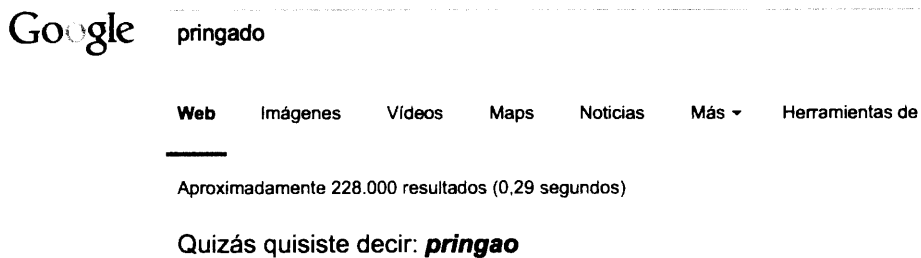
2. Lenition is understood here as the weakening of the segment (see section 1.2.2.).

3. This author suggests that elision has spread from the second person of the verb to casual and very vulgar texts, and he provides examples such as *quedao*, from the anthology by Pedro del Pozo (1547), or *perdio* (1569), from letters by Sevilians in America (1981: 389). Frago Gracia (1993) finds an earlier example of elision in document from Alfonso X's scriptorium (13<sup>th</sup> century).

4. Although they are not used for this study, there are other projects in this field, such as the *Atlas Lingüístico de España y Portugal* –*Linguistic Atlas of Spain and Portugal*, ALEP– (Alvar 1974) and the regional Spanish atlases like the *Atlas Lingüístico y Etnográfico de Andalucía* –*Linguistic and Ethnographic Atlas of Andalucía*, ALEA– (Alvar 1960-1973), among others.

semi-directed interviews in which it is not easy to find the exact same tokens for each location. In addition, the information from ALPI presented here corresponds to the totality of the data given for each question (i.e., data from all the localities are represented in the maps), whereas only a sample from the localities of COSER is displayed. This topic will be addressed again in section 3.2.

The fact that all informants belong to the same population sector means that we cannot conduct a sociolinguistic study here. It is, however, worth noting that sociolinguistic variables have an impact on the evolution of the consonant, as we shall see in the section on the current State of Affairs (section 1.2.2.). Stylistic variables, which are not addressed here either, also seem to influence the phenomenon: The screenshot in Picture 2, for example, illustrates the impact of register with Google's suggestion of the form «pringao» instead of «pringado» ('loser'), a word clearly belonging to colloquial speech. This suggests that the form «pringao» is used more frequently within the texts accessed by the search engine<sup>5</sup>. Words connected to higher registers, on the other hand, are expected to maintain the consonant even when they include the context most prone to loss (-*ado*), i.e. in cases such as *doctorado* ('doctorate') or *ilustrado* ('erudite').



Picture 2. Screenshot made in 27/06/2015 (google.es)<sup>6</sup>.

The theoretical framework used in this work is the usage-based approach to language, which claims that language structure is affected by experience. According to these theories, language works as any other cognitive domain and «a general characteristic of cognition is that repetition of an activity has a cumulative effect on future behavior» (Bybee & Beckner: 2010, 829). Hence, in addition to other factors, frequency of occurrence of language units should have a strong influence on sound change, since mental representations would be updated with new information, and frequent elements will be heard and stored more than the rest. Like other authors

5. We must take this with a pinch of salt, since Google is just a search engine and we cannot be sure of criteria it uses for these suggestions nor the texts it accesses.

6. Interestingly enough, this result no longer appeared at the end of 2016; it is maintained, however, when looking for the sequence *es un pringado*.