The social life of a sound change: production and perception of fricative voicing in Buenos Aires Spanish

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An examination of the past history and current progression of the devoicing of the postalveolar fricative, utilizing instrumental acoustic measurements in order to precisely determine how different social groups in the Buenos Aires speech community vary in the pronunciation of ‘y’/’ll’. This novel methodology provides a metric for determining when a sound change has been completed by comparing the production of the postalveolar fricative to other sounds in the phonological system. Contrary to what had previously been described by impressionistic means, results in this study from instrumental analysis show that this sound change is still ongoing even among upper class speakers, demonstrating the wide range of voicing variation present in the speech community.

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