

# Mapudungun coronal fricatives:

## Affect, change, stability and the contrastive hierarchy

Benjamin Molineaux  
The University of Edinburgh

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The South American language Mapudungun (arn) has a rich repertoire of coronal fricatives distinguished by place alone: interdental [θ], alveolar [s], alveolo-palatal [ʃ] and retro-flex [ʒ]. It has long been observed (cf. Febrés 1765), however, that these segments alternate with each other in ways that are neither lexically nor phonologically predictable, and which can be attributed to affect. Indeed, we find that words with a neutral affect take on a positive or diminutive meaning when a fricative is palatalised (see 1a-c). This is a well-attested pattern cross-linguistically, with a basis in sound-symbolism (cf. Alderete and Kochetov 2017).

- (1) a.[θiweɲ] ‘companion’ vs. [ʃiweɲ] ‘dear companion’  
b.[sɪnuʒa] (< Spanish) ‘white woman’ vs. [ʃɪnuʒa] ‘lovely/little white lady’  
c.[kuʒe] ‘old woman’ vs. [kuʃe] ‘lovely/little old lady’

Less typologically common (though see Nichols 1971) is the linking of dentalisation to pejorative affect, which we also find in Mapudungun (Catrileo 1986, Salas 1992).

- (2) a.[kuʒe] ‘old woman’ vs. [kuθe] ‘damn/wicked old lady’  
b.[posko] (< Quechuan) ‘yeast’ vs. [poθko] ‘disgusting yeast’

Using the newly-developed *Corpus of Historical Mapudungun* (Molineaux and Karaiskos 2021), in this paper we examine the historical evidence for these alternations, their lexical incidence and productivity in the 400-year written record for the language. Key to our findings is that the palato-alveolar surfaces in the historical materials only as a result of affective palatalisation and that a number of words which are found with [θ] as their default today are historically attested as [ʒ], particularly if their original semantics already has negative connotations (e.g. [weθa] <[weʒa] ‘bad’; [poθ] <[poz] ‘dirt(y)’). These findings suggest a long, productive early history of affective alternations, with pejorative dentalisations occasionally becoming lexicalised in the recent past.

Another crucial finding is that the alveolar [s] is originally attested only in borrowings from Quechuan and Spanish (see 1b,2b). This raises the question of how this segment was integrated into the Mapudungun contrastive system, particularly since it does not appear to fall in with the existing dental-alveolar contrasts, where alveolars are apical, while dentals are laminal (see Table 1, based on Sadowsky et al. 2013).

Table 1:		
	Apical	Laminal
Aveolar	/t,n,l/	/s/
Dental		/t̪, n̪, l̪ θ/

We propose that the integration of typologically unmarked [s], as well as the consolidation of affective [ʃ] in the inventory of Mapudungun led to substantial restructuring of the contrastive hierarchy (Dresher 2009) for the language, promoting the features [strident] and [low].

More broadly, the study shows the value of testing theoretical models on minority, typologically diverse languages — such as Indigenous American ones — which are underrepresented in the literature on historical phonology and sound change.

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