



Sounds of Change: Exploring Spanish Phonetics in the Evolving Linguistic Landscape of St. George

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Abstract

St. George, UT, has seen a rise in linguistic and cultural diversity, largely due to an influx of Spanish-speaking immigrants. This demographic shift offers a unique opportunity to explore the city's linguistic landscape, which refers to the visibility and prominence of languages in public spaces. In a Spanish Phonetics course, students typically examine dialectal differences and compare Spanish and English phonetic systems, and this project deepens their learning by grounding these concepts in the local context. The project allows students to identify and analyze Spanish phonetic features in everyday settings, document Spanish's sociolinguistic presence, engage with the community to explore linguistic identity and immigration, and develop a GLOCAL perspective on language use. The project unfolds in three stages: First, students observe and document Spanish in public spaces—such as signs, advertisements, and murals—by analyzing phonetic features, translation quality, and language contact phenomena. In the second stage, students engage with the local community by interviewing Spanish-speaking residents, business owners, and leaders, gaining insight into how language reflects identity, integration, and cultural preservation. Finally, students use digital tools to create an interactive map that compiles their findings, including photographs, phonetic analyses, and interview excerpts, illustrating the multifaceted role of Spanish in St. George. This project not only enriches students' understanding of Spanish phonetics but also highlights the intersection of language, culture, and community in a rapidly changing American city

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1. Introduction

The study of language offers profound insights into cultural identity, community dynamics, and the intricate ways global phenomena manifest locally. This paper, based on a presentation by Dr. Lucia Taylor, explores a pedagogical experiment to better understand the linguistic landscape of Washington County, Utah, through a unique **GLOCAL approach to Spanish phonetics**. It was an innovative educational project designed for a Spanish phonetics course that combined active learning, active listening, and the creation of a 'zine' with a comprehensive final project. The core of this methodology lied in the GLOCAL framework, which sought to reveal how broad linguistic patterns interact with and are shaped by the specific nuances of the local community. By focusing on Washington County, Utah, and particularly St. George, this initiative provided a context for understanding the Hispanic population and its impact on the local linguistic environment.

2. Understanding the GLOCAL Approach

The GLOCAL approach is a foundational concept for this linguistic exploration. Originating in 1980s Japanese business practices, this methodology merges global and local viewpoints to understand how worldwide patterns manifest uniquely in specific communities.

2.1 Global Perspective:

This initial layer focused on identifying broad linguistic patterns of Spanish, following the content in the course OER Spanish phonetics textbook. It involved understanding universal phonetic features, established dialect patterns, and overarching trends in language evolution. By first grasping these global standards, students were able to establish a baseline for comparison.



2.2 Cultural Integration:

The second layer delved into how languages adapt across borders. Students examined the processes of language contact, language shift, and the integration of linguistic features from various source languages within a new cultural context. In the context of Spanish, this involved looking at influences from indigenous languages, other Spanish dialects, or even English.

2.3 Local Application:

The final and most specific layer concentrated on community-specific language variations. This is where the observed global and integrated patterns were analyzed within the unique context of a particular local community, such as St. George city or other town within the county. It aimed to identify distinct phonetic markers, vocabulary shifts, and grammatical adaptations that are characteristic of the local speakers.

By employing the GLOCAL framework, the project moved beyond a simple global-to-local analysis, recognizing the dynamic interplay where global patterns are not just imposed but are actively shaped and reinterpreted by local contexts, thereby creating a rich environment for linguistic research.

3. The Local Context: Washington County and St. George

The specific locale for this linguistic inquiry is Washington County, Utah, with a particular focus on St. George City. As of July 1, 2024, Washington County has a total population of 207,943. The county encompasses several cities, including St. George, Washington, Hurricane, Ivins, Santa Clara, and others such as Central, Pine Valley, Toquerville, Leeds, and Springdale. This geographical setting provides a specific backdrop for examining the local application of broader linguistic patterns.

Crucially, the demographic composition of Washington County reveals a significant and growing Hispanic population. According to data from census.gov, Washington County's Hispanic population stands at 12.4%. Within the various cities of the county, the percentages vary: Ivins City has 6%, Hurricane City 9.6%, Washington City 16.7%, Santa Clara City 10.1%, and St. George City 12.7%. Notably, Washington City exhibits the highest percentage of Hispanic residents among the listed cities, while St. George City, the largest city in the county, also has a substantial Hispanic presence.

St. George boasts a thriving, diverse Hispanic population. The community is characterized by a strong predominance of Mexican heritage, which forms the largest segment of the Hispanic population. However, the influences from Central American countries are also growing, adding further layers of linguistic and cultural diversity. Other notable contributions come from South America, the Caribbean, and Spain. This rich tapestry of origins is visually represented in local restaurants, markets, and various businesses that showcase this cultural richness. This significant and diverse Hispanic population creates an ideal environment for in-depth linguistic research, particularly for studying the nuances of Spanish phonetics and the broader sociocultural integration of language.

4. Pedagogical Implementation: Course Project and Methodology

The theoretical framework of the GLOCAL approach was put into practice through a comprehensive final project in the Span 3080 "Spanish Phonetics and Pronunciation" course. This project was designed to foster active learning, encouraging students to engage directly with the linguistic landscape of their towns. The project involved both linguistic analysis and sociocultural reflection, providing students with a holistic understanding of language in its community context.

4.1 Data Collection and Analysis:

Students engaged in specific tasks divided into two main areas, linguistic analysis and sociocultural reflection.

As part of their project, students identified local people and establishments where Spanish is actively used—such as restaurants, markets, community centers, or service providers. They visited these locations to conduct interviews, engaging directly with Spanish-speaking individuals to learn about their experiences, backgrounds, and the role of language in their daily lives. These interactions provided students with authentic linguistic and cultural insights, helping them connect classroom learning to real-world contexts and deepen their understanding of the local Spanish-speaking community.



Students were tasked with listening for key phonetic markers in their recordings. They compare their local findings with established dialect patterns, which aligns with the global perspective and cultural integration layers of the GLOCAL approach. A critical part of this analysis was noting where speakers maintain native linguistic features versus where they adopt new ones, reflecting language adaptation and change within the local environment.

Beyond the purely linguistic aspects, students also reflect on the presence and integration of the Hispanic community in Washington County. This involved researching the broader impact of immigration in the daily life of these areas. This component ensured that students understand the human and cultural context behind the linguistic data, linking the local language variations to societal factors.

A central output of this project was the creation of an interactive map. This map was envisioned as a "living archive" of the area's Spanish linguistic landscape, where each "pin" told a unique story of language and identity.

The process involved marking each recording site on Google Maps or ArcGIS, using precise coordinates to geo-locate their data and embedding Audio/Video Samples to bring the linguistic data to life.

This hands-on methodology allowed students to actively participate in linguistic research, applying theoretical knowledge to real-world contexts and developing a deeper appreciation for language diversity and its sociocultural underpinnings.

4.2. Project Presentation, and Assessment:

The culmination of the Span 3080 project was a comprehensive final assignment, where students present their findings and reflections. This assignment involved several key components:

- **Showing the Interactive Map:** Students presented their interactive maps to the class, playing the embedded recordings to illustrate their phonetic observations.
- **Actively Listening to their Peers:** Students also engaged by listening to their peers' presentations while creating a 'zine', which is a self-published, small-circulation booklet that typically reflects the personal, artistic, or political interests of its creator. Unlike traditional magazines, zines are produced independently, often using simple tools like photocopiers or home printers, and distributed in limited quantities. They are rooted in a DIY ethos and are valued for their raw, unfiltered expression. Zines can include essays, poetry, visual art, photography, and commentary, and they often serve as platforms for voices and perspectives that are underrepresented in mainstream media.
- **Reviewing the 'zines' created by their classmates,** this project fostered a collaborative learning environment and encouraged peer feedback.
- **Submitting a Final Paper:** A written component required students to synthesize their work, covering both the detailed linguistic analysis and their sociocultural reflections. This paper served as a formal documentation of their research findings and insights.

5. Conclusion

This project represented an exemplary application of linguistic theory in a pedagogical setting. By embracing the GLOCAL approach, the project successfully bridged the understanding of broad linguistic patterns with the unique, community-specific variations found within the area's Hispanic population. The immersive, active learning methodology, culminating in the creation of interactive linguistic maps and detailed sociocultural reflections, empowered students to become keen observers and analysts of language in their own local environment. This initiative not only enhanced students' proficiency in Spanish phonetics but also cultivated a deeper appreciation for the complex interplay between language, culture, and community, reaffirming the vital role of local research in understanding global linguistic phenomena.