

Exploring the linguistics and social perceptions of Andalusian Spanish

Details



e: nhenriks@umich.edu
w: websites.umich.edu/~nhenriks
w: websites.umich.edu/~speechlab
 [@um.speech.lab](https://www.instagram.com/um.speech.lab)

Funding

• University of Michigan SUCCEED Faculty Grant

• University of Michigan Associate Professor Support Fund

Collaborators

- [Lorenzo García-Amaya](#)
- Micha Fischer
- Amber Galvano

Bio

Nicholas Henriksen is an Arthur F Thurnau Professor and a Professor of Spanish Linguistics at the Department of Romance Languages & Literatures, University of Michigan.

Further reading

- Henriksen, N, García-Amaya, L, Fischer, M, et al, (2023) [Perceptions of regional origin and social attributes of phonetic variants used in Iberian](#)

[Spanish](#). *Journal of Linguistic Geography*, 11(2), 119–143.

- Henriksen, N, Galvano, A, Fischer, M, (2023) [Sound change in Western Andalusian Spanish: Investigation into the actuation and propagation of post-aspiration](#). *Journal of Phonetics*, 98, 101238.
- Henriksen, N, Neubacher, M, (2021) [Unmuting voices in a pandemic, linguistic profiling in a moment of crisis](#). In Hass, K, (ed) *Being Human during COVID*, University of Michigan Press.
- Henriksen, N, García-Amaya, L (2019) [Falsetto in interaction in Western Andalusian Spanish: A pilot study](#). *Revista Internacional de Lingüística Iberoamericana*, 17(34), 101–124.
- Henriksen, N, (2017) [Patterns of vowel laxing and harmony in Iberian Spanish: Data from production and perception](#). *Journal of Phonetics*, 63(5), 106–126.



Exploring the linguistics and social perceptions of Andalusian Spanish

- Spanish speakers may associate Andalusian Spanish, the dialect spoken in Southern Spain, with underdevelopment and lower educational attainment, leading to prejudices about the people speaking it.
- Dr Nicholas Henriksen, Arthur F Thurnau Professor and a Professor of Linguistics at the University of Michigan, USA, has been investigating the phonetic innovations of Andalusian Spanish and social attitudes towards its speakers.
- His studies offer a multi-faceted view of this often-stigmatised dialect, diving deep into its history, cultural underpinnings, and linguistic nuances.

Andalusia, the most populous autonomous community in Spain, has a rich artistic and cultural heritage. Many celebrated artists and writers were born in this region, including Pablo Picasso, Diego Velázquez, and Federico García Lorca. Andalusia is also known as the place where the iconic performative art of Flamenco flourished.

Despite its fascinating history and contributions to Spain's national heritage, people living in other parts of Spain often perceive this region as underdeveloped, associating it with a lack of education, farming, folklore, and a more laid-back but festive lifestyle. Compared to more prestigious dialects of Spanish, such as Castilian (spoken in Northern and Central Spain), Andalusian Spanish suffers from stigmatisation.

While Andalusian shares similarities with both Latin-American and European variations of Spanish, some of its more unique innovations resemble sound patterns of other languages, such as Italian, Japanese, Bengali, Swiss German, and ethnic variations of American English. Its novel linguistic features make it a fascinating research topic.

Nicholas Henriksen, a Professor of Linguistics at the University of Michigan, USA, has been studying Andalusian Spanish for years, intending to gather new insight about its linguistic roots and social attitudes towards it.

Sound changes in Andalusian Spanish

There are two primary versions of Andalusian Spanish, broadly categorised as Western Andalusian Spanish (WAS) and Eastern

Andalusian Spanish (EAS). The first is primarily spoken in the Western part of the region, with Seville as the capital city, while the second is prominent in the Eastern part, where Granada is located.

In some of his recent studies, Henriksen examined the phonetics and linguistic features of these two versions of the dialect. In a paper published in 2017, he specifically examined differences in the vowel and 's' sounds of EAS compared to those of the Spanish spoken in North-Central Spain.

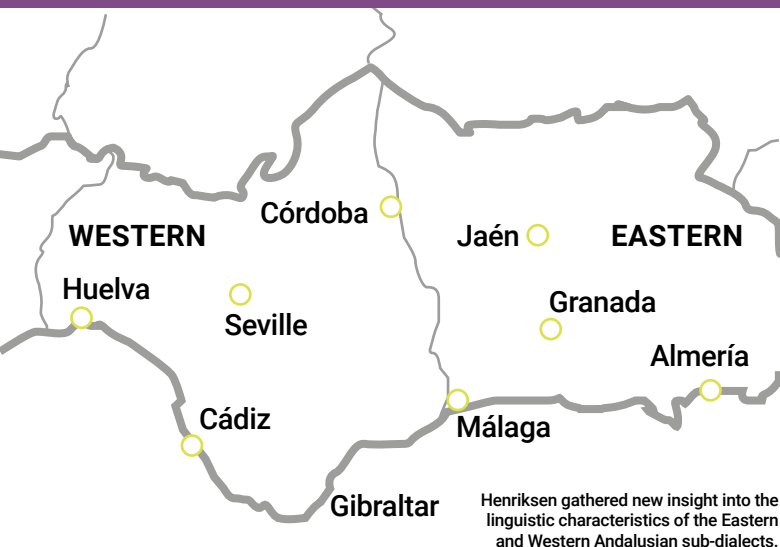
Henriksen analysed the speech of 74 participants, of whom 33 were from Granada and 41 were from Salamanca in North-Central Spain. His analyses showed that participants from Eastern Andalusia tend to soften 's' sounds at the end of words, while opening 'e' and 'o' sounds at the beginning of words (meaning that the sounds are produced with the tongue farther from the roof of the mouth, which thus adopts a more 'open' position). In addition, this group of participants appeared to be more perceptually sensitive to open 'e' sounds.

In another paper published in 2019, Henriksen examined the use of falsetto (ie, the production of sounds at a higher pitch than one's normal voice) by Western Andalusian speakers. This time, he examined the recorded speech of a middle-aged couple living in Jerez de la Frontera, a city in Western Andalusia. His analyses ultimately suggest that in WAS, falsetto is used to highlight salient information and key aspects of what a person is saying.

Henriksen also published a further paper in 2023, where he specifically examined sound change in WAS. Similar to his previous work focusing on EAS sounds, he collected speech from 30 WAS speakers and 30 speakers from North-Central Spain to then compare differences in their pronunciation of specific sounds.

His analyses revealed that compared to North-Central Spanish speakers, WAS speakers gradually change how they pronounce certain sound sequences, specifically when saying words with an 's' sound followed by 'p', 'k', and 't' sounds. In these cases, they do not pronounce the 's', and subsequently add a soft breathy sound after closing their mouth, ultimately resulting in 'ph', 'th', and 'kh'-like sounds.

Some of Andalusian's more unique innovations resemble sound patterns of other languages, such as Italian, Japanese, Bengali, Swiss German, and ethnic variations of American English.



Henriksen's findings highlight the complex interplay between language and social perceptions, suggesting there is strong potential for linguistic discrimination of Andalusian speakers.

Linguistic profiling and biased social responses

In addition to exploring Andalusian Spanish from a phonetic perspective, Henriksen has set out to understand social attitudes towards it and how Spaniards from all parts of the country perceive the dialect. Overall, he found that many people living in Spain, including Andalusians themselves, have biased ideas and potential prejudices towards the Southern part of the Iberian Peninsula. Interestingly, those from Andalusia sometimes showed the harshest judgments of their own dialect, which is known as linguistic insecurity.

The stigmatisation of Andalusia by people from other parts of Spain can sometimes give rise to a form of discrimination known as 'linguistic profiling'. Linguistic profiling entails forming a negative judgement of other people by implicitly associating attributes conveyed by the way they speak, such as their perceived age,

gender, race, sexual orientation, or in this case regional origin, with stereotypes and prejudiced ideas.

Linguistic profiling can prompt people to treat others differently based on their perceived background, perpetuating social injustices and inequalities. In 2021, Henriksen published a book chapter exploring the origins of the linguistic profiling of Andalusian speakers.

In this chapter, he outlines some of the perceptions that Spaniards from Central and Northern Spain have about others born in Andalusia. Andalusian speakers are often stereotyped as unprofessional, rural, lazy, or folkloric.

In 2023, Henriksen conducted a study involving 165 Spanish participants, each of whom was asked to listen to speech recordings and complete a survey about them. The survey asked the participants to identify where in Spain the speakers were from and rate each speaker on various qualities (eg, nice, educated, hard-working, and so on).

When he analysed the results of the survey, Henriksen found that most respondents had correctly classified Andalusian Spanish while also attributing less favourable qualities to Andalusian speakers. His findings highlight the complex interplay between language and social perceptions, suggesting that there is strong potential for linguistic discrimination of Andalusian speakers. To revindicate the Andalusian dialect, Cruzcampo, a brewing company founded in Seville, recently developed an online campaign entitled [#ConMuchoAcento](#) ('With a lot of accent').

Towards a deeper understanding of Andalusian Spanish

In recent years, Henriksen has gathered intriguing new insight into the linguistic characteristics of the Eastern and Western Andalusian sub-dialects. In addition to pinpointing key differences between these dialects and the other dialects diffused through the rest of Spain, his studies unveiled common stereotypes and distorted social perceptions about the Southern Iberian region.

Henriksen draws from the expertise of linguists, historians, and anthropologists while also engaging with an inter-generational group of students who work in his lab at the University of Michigan. By integrating various disciplines and teaching younger generations the importance of understanding the culture behind languages, he is working to fuel innovation in linguistics and speech sciences.

Personal response

What inspired you to conduct these studies?

The inspiration for these studies comes from my fascination with Andalusia's rich cultural and linguistic heritage, contrasted with some misconceptions held by other Spaniards. Recognising the unique linguistic features of Andalusian Spanish and its unjust stigmatisation, I was driven to document its intricacies as linguistic innovations, rather than as grammatical 'mistakes'. My goal was to contribute to our understanding of Spanish dialectology while also challenging the negative perceptions associated with this dialect.

Why do people from other regions in Spain often make assumptions about people who speak Andalusian Spanish?

Assumptions about people who speak Andalusian Spanish stem from a combination of historical socio-economic disparities, regional stereotypes, and lack of awareness about the dialect's complexity. Andalusia's history as an agrarian, less-industrialised region contributed to perceptions of it being underdeveloped. These stereotypes are perpetuated by media representations and societal biases, leading to a simplified and often unfair characterisation of the area. Furthermore, prescriptive bodies such as the Spanish Royal Academy prioritise and privilege one way of speaking by standardising it as the 'proper' form of language – the consequence is that regional varieties lose prestige and can become viewed as socially inferior.

What do you find to be the most fascinating linguistic feature of Andalusian Spanish?

I am constantly intrigued by the use of falsetto voice in the WAS dialect. It is not extremely common in discourse, but is nonetheless a salient, and systematic, property of speech. And although most speakers of Spanish may overlook the communicative value of falsetto, WAS speakers are acutely aware of its nuance. In other words, falsetto communicates depths of meaning that remain unrecognised to most speakers of Spanish – imagine that!

What do you hope will be the primary implications of your recent studies focusing on this largely misunderstood dialect?

The primary implications I hope to achieve are twofold: first, to enrich the academic and public understanding of Andalusian Spanish as a legitimate and complex variety of Spanish, deserving of recognition and intellectual respect. Second, by bringing to light the unjust stigmatisation faced by Andalusian speakers, I aim to foster greater linguistic tolerance and appreciation within Spain and make connections with other stigmatised forms of language. Ultimately, I would be thrilled to witness a broader societal shift towards challenging stereotypes by embracing linguistic diversity and promoting inclusivity.



Research Features.

Complex science beautifully accessible

researchfeatures.com

Partnership enquiries: al@researchfeatures.com
Careers and guest contributions: rachel@researchfeatures.com

