Do Diminutives Make the Vowel Shrink?: An Account of Monophthongization in Spanish

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**Problem**

-Spanish Words with original diphthong -ei [e;j] become monophthong -e [e] between the 13th and 15th centuries.
-Does not happen everywhere. Mostly in diminutive suffix -illo > -illo.
-Also happens in words that look like the suffix and words that belong to both groups.

**Goals**

-Attempt to illustrate the adoption of the monophthong due to sociolinguistic factors
-Analyze how the development relates in three classes of words over time

**Examples**

Diminutive: castilla > castilla "little house".
Form of Dim: castello > castillo "castle".
Both: tortiella > tortilla "little cake".
"Spanish omlet".

**Goals and Methods**

**Main Methods**

-Selection of Words (Lexemes) based on common cases cited in the Menéndez-Pidal (1950), Penny (2002), and González Olite (1962).
-Diminutives, Diminutive Shaped Words, Diminutive and Lexical
-Corpus Research in the Corpus Diacrónico del Español by the Real Academia Española
-Record the years and occurrences for Lexeme:
  -must have a definite date
  -include alternate orthographic conventions and capitalization
  -include gender and plural marking, unless the variant has a specific meaning to it
-Lexeme Pairs (Word Types) ranked on Frequency (Low, Medium, High) in comparison to each other
-Occurrences /per year (Word Token/Year) Frequency of Growth Ranked 1-5
  1 Low
  2 Med
  3 Mod-High
  4 High
  5 Very High
-Stage 3, 4, 5: Common existence
-High Frequency
  1-: below ten occurrences, 5+ years between use
  2-Below ten, between -5 years
  3-at least 1 year of near or at 10, mostly every year
  4-Multiple instances above or at 10, mostly every year
  5-: mostly all above 15 or more, usually every year
-Medium Frequency
  1-: below 8 occurrences, 5+ years between use
  2-Below 8 occurrences, -5 years between use
  3-at least 1 year of near or at 8, mostly every year
  4-Multiple instances above 8, mostly every year
  5-mostly above 12 or more, usually every year
-Low Frequency
  1-: below 6 occurrences, approx. 5+ years between use
  2-Below 6 occurrences, approx. between -5 years
  3-at least 1 year of near or at 6, mostly every year
  4-Multiple instances above or at 6, mostly every year
  5-mostly above 8, usually every year
-Plot Ranges of Ranked Frequency of Growth of Year Occurrences on a timeline

**Results**

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**Key for Timelines**

Modern Word

**Analysis**

-Some -illo forms appear before -illo (not pictured).
-Many -illo forms start to increase in growth near the time of Alfonso X.
-After decreasing from Stage 3, -illo forms rarely increase more in growth.
-Reconfirm similar phonological shape, similar change (Bybee 2001).
-The most frequent form (Castiella, not pictured) is the most resistant to being lost, both variants coexist the longest; similar ideas of change expressed in Bybee, 2001.
-No written form 'habbiella' ever exists. Shows that by the time of "h" adoption the -i adoption was already mostly complete.

**Importance and Further Directions**

-Relates to lexical strength of an item
-Strong lexical items can still persist for a long time despite writing

Further Directions

-How does meaning of the word in context influence this change?
-How does the change spread on a geographical scale through time?
-How do documents from estimated periods fit in with this change?
-How does this change affect forms of the diminutive with -i-?
-What other aspects of the Spanish language have changed due to sociolinguistic influences?

**References**

Hypothesis

-During and After the reign of Alfonso X, the -i forms became associated with prestige and are adopted by Spanish speakers.
-Similar to what would happen slightly later and partially contemporaneously with "t" and "b"