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## The long-term average spectrum in forensic phonetics: From collation to discrimination of speakers

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### ABSTRACT

The present work aims to provide more data regarding the comparison and discrimination of speech samples in the field of forensic phonetics. The methodology used was an acoustic method called long-term average spectrum (LTAS), by calculating its spectral decline. The informants were grouped into a total of four female speakers of the same age by close geographical origins. The extracted data were presented qualitatively and quantitatively. In view of the results, the identification of speakers was not successful in all cases. After discussing the results, implications for judicial phonetics and recommendations for future studies were collected.

### KEYWORDS

forensic phonetics; identification; long-term average spectrum; alpha ratio;  $L_1-L_0$  ratio

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## **L'espectre mitjà a llarg termini en fonètica judicial: De l'acarament a la discriminació de locutors**

### RESUM

Aquest treball té per objectiu proporcionar més dades sobre la comparació i la discriminació de mostres de veu en el camp de la fonètica forense. La metodologia utilitzada consisteix en un mètode acústic anomenat espectre mitjà a llarg termini (LTAS), que parteix del càlcul de la seua declinació espectral. Els informants són quatre parlants femenines de la mateixa edat i amb origen geogràfic similars. Les dades extretes es presenten de manera qualitativa i quantitativa. A la vista dels resultats, les parlants no s'identificaren amb èxit en tots els casos. Després de discutir els resultats, es recopilen diverses implicacions per a la fonètica judicial i diferents recomanacions per a estudis futurs.

### MOTS CLAU

fonètica forense; identificació; espectre mitjà a llarg termini; proporció alfa; proporció  $L_1-L_0$

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## 1. Introduction

The most recent studies in applied linguistics have tended to focus on offering a panorama of the role of language, in particular phonetics, in legal tasks and varied legal processes. In this sense, one of the endeavours of linguists has focused on trying to decipher the enigma of recognition, identification, or discrimination of speakers and their respective voice samples. It is for this reason that, although it is commonly held that a speaker can be recognised by their voice, even without being seen, it would imply that “each speaker’s voice is personal, unique; as specific to each individual as their fingerprints or the structure of their iris” (Marrero, 2017, p. 11).

With such popular assertions, there is a tendency to assume a very risky concept: that of voice ‘individuality’. Admittedly, to affirm this would necessarily imply a belief that the voice contains “some parameters which differentiate us from all other human beings; features which our ear perceives and stores as unique to each person we meet” (*Ibid.*). Consequently, those who maintain that there exists a vocal print which characterises each speaker tend to disregard the fact that the voice is much more inconsistent than is believed. One thing which is certain is that, regardless of this, it is possible to discern who the voice belongs to:

However, the identification of these parameters is still a mystery to many researchers. Experimental phonetics shows, time and again, that two similar recordings are acoustically distinct, at times more so than those produced by a different speaker. However, the identification of the speaker continues... (Marrero, 2017, p. 12, our translation).

As a result, many authors have ventured to postulate more or less accurate voice identification methods from a single part of the phonic face or course, be it articulatory, perceptive, or acoustic. It goes without saying that this is not the claim of this study, rather the intention is to contribute to the investigative field as meaningfully as possible by using empirical, measurable data. It should be kept in mind that any

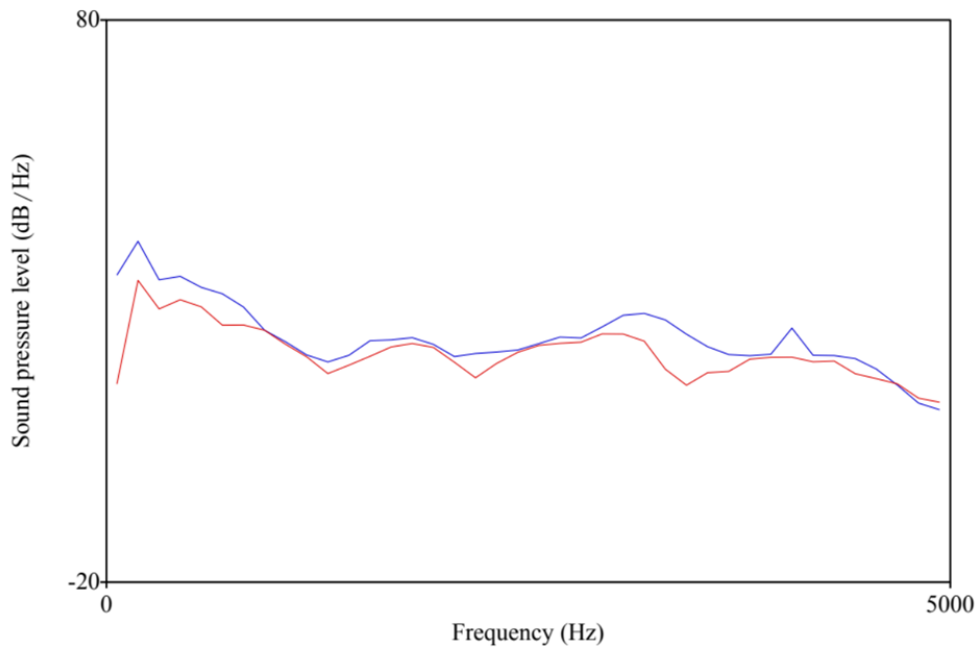
data which can be submitted as “identifying” material before a jury must be interpreted as a whole and with caution, that is, by way of small contributions which permit, all together, the contribution of somewhat solid data regarding speaker recognition.

### 1.1. Background

Be that as it may, one problem which hinders the course of legal investigations arises too regularly: the clarity and purity of the evidence is usually poor. Additionally, in the majority of cases, the speaker under police instruction may not (and tends not to) produce “enough idiosyncratic features” (Hollien, 1990, p. 220). The dilemma faced by any forensic expert who works with the human voice is inter- and intraspeaker variation. As a legal ideal, the probabilities of finding inconsistent data (that is, variability) must necessarily be greater among different speakers (interspeaker) than for the same speaker in different instances (intraspeaker); however, this is often not the case. The reason for this is that there do not yet appear to be forensic “universals”. On this topic, Hollien (1990, p. 190) comments:

Chief among them [the problems], of course, is the fact that we simply do not know, as yet, if intraspeaker variability is always less than interspeaker variability—in all situations and under all conditions. Simply put, we are not at all sure that you will always produce speech that is more like your own than it is like anyone else’s, no matter how you talk, no matter how you feel, no matter what the speaking conditions. I recognize that this dilemma constitutes a functional nightmare for anyone attempting speaker recognition. However, even if the speech of a particular person is not totally unique under all conditions, there may be ways of identifying differences among talkers anyway.

In any case, it seems that in recent years a new technique for phonetic analysis has become popular, one which provides higher levels of resistance to all



**Figure 1.** An example of the LTAS of two different speakers, taken from Gil & San Segundo (2014, p. 11).

types of disturbance in the sound signal: the *long-term average spectrum* (LTAS). This method consists of a representation of the “spectral distribution of the speech signal over a period of time” (Löfqvist, 1986, p. 471), a period of time longer than is permitted by common spectra, for obvious reasons. The LTAS is calculated by taking into account the frequency, in hertz (abscissa axis), and the intensity, in decibels (ordinate axis), which is the result of the functionality of the sound source (the vocal folds) and its modification in the supra-glottal resonators. One advantage, aside from that of tolerating higher levels of background noise, is that it allows spontaneous speech to be studied just as well as a controlled reading or sustained vowels produced in a laboratory. See Figure 1.

In this vein, while a visual comparison of the LTAS does not seem to be altogether effective, another series of measurements exists. These are more objective to make comparisons as they are relative to different calculations of the spectral decline, that is, the progressive loss of energy in the face of high frequencies. One of these is the “alpha ratio”, which determines the difference in spectral energy concentrated in low and high frequencies (below and above one thousand hertz, respectively), related to the glottal pulse rate.

It has been agreed that a greater decline is associated with a flat voice (whose energy concentration above one thousand hertz is rather low) and a lesser decline with brighter voices (with a greater quantity of energy above one thousand hertz). It seems that a greater spectral decline would be associated with a woman’s voice, whereas a lower number in this decline would be identified as a man’s voice. This all seems to suggest that these and other data could help not only with differences in sex and age, for example, but also to further specify a speaker’s vocal characteristics, something which this experiment intended to demonstrate.

The above measurement is usually associated with the calculation of spectral energy concentrated in the regions corresponding to the fundamental frequency and the  $F_1$ . These areas become much more crucial when dealing with idiosyncratic features, but less so when it comes to variables (emotional, due to bandwidth reduction, etc.) in most languages, but particularly in Spanish, not only in LTAS, but also in terms of spectrographic clarity, among other aspects. For this reason, high frequencies relative to the third and fourth formants (among others) offer little information. This measurement, which is related to phonation mode (vocal hypofunction or breathy vs. vocal

hyperfunction or articulatory tension), is known as the “ $L_1-L_0$  ratio”.

## 2. Literature review.

Describing the state-of-the-art on the topic of LTAS as a research mechanism for judicial phonetics can be an arduous task, not so much due to the complexity or quantity of previous studies, but rather to the apparent lack of connections made between them in this context. The starting point will be two books which are essential for a first encounter with judicial phonetic sciences: these are *Introducción a la fonética judicial [Introduction to Judicial Phonetics]* by Victoria Marrero (2017) for its exceedingly applied nature, and the crucial volume *The Acoustics of Crime* by Harry Hollien (1990), for its theoretical ambition. In addition to these fundamental works, the VILE project, whose conclusions on the matter are collected and reviewed in Battaner et al. (2003) stands out.

Other authors have studied voice quality more generally, with references which are mostly specific to LTAS, although not their main focus. These include Atal (1992), Eskenazi et al. (1990), Kuwabara and Tagaki (1991), and Kuwabara and Sagisak (1995), who have previously studied acoustic correlates of voice individuality. Conversely, others have focused more on the relevance of LTAS, such as the dialectal study of Mexican Spanish carried out by Boullosa (1984), or Sundberg and Nordenberg’s (2006) study whose objective was to assess variation in vocal strength. Another, rather more argumentative study is that of Löfqvist (1986), who makes a case for LTAS.

Meanwhile, beyond the classics and the more sporadic works which focus on, according to the authors, masking (Hollien & Majewski, 1977) or distortion (Doherty & Hollien, 1978) of speech, it will not be possible to further specify until the emergence of more current research dedicated to demonstrating the acoustic parameters interrelated between speech and different emotions, such as

that of Sundberg et al. (2011). Furthermore, there are those who, also in an attempt to define vocal quality, but using LTAS, limited their study to university participants, as is the case for Leino (2009).

In any case, the studies of most interest are those focused on demonstrating differences in gender<sup>1</sup> (Mendoza et al., 1996), age (Silva et al., 2011), or both aspects, tied to the voices of professional singers, and non-professionals in regular speech, as well as pathological voices with dysphonia (Master et al., 2006). Roseano et al. (2015) looked for differences in the LTAS between the two native languages of a single bilingual speaker. Similarly, Pittam (1987) found more uses for the LTAS, outside of the judicial use, which will be briefly addressed below.

Here, the works of Delgado Hernández et al. (2017), Master et al. (2006), Mendoza (2017), and Silva et al. (2011) are reviewed, although their contributions come from different perspectives: the use of LTAS in pathological, clinical, and speech therapy specialisations. These studies have been considered here as they contribute to the field of judicial phonetics by providing sociolinguistic information (including biological, sociocultural, and linguistic) which are relied upon for profiling.

## 3. Hypotheses and objectives

The hypotheses this study aimed to scientifically validate were that a sufficiently precise and accurate approximation between two different speech samples from the same speaker could be made, based on the spectral contour and decline of each speaker. In order to do so, the hypothesis was broken down into two sub-hypotheses according to the two methodologies: on one hand, the calculation of the LTAS alpha and  $L_1-L_0$  ratios ( $H_1$ ) and, on the other, a series of comparative measurements ( $H_2$ ), which were proposed so as to show that the difference in spectral decline, in both controlled and spontaneous speech, of a single

<sup>1</sup> The concept of gender should be understood as it is by the authors. White (2001), in his work, set out to detect the

differences between gender and sex in children using this technique.

speaker is smaller than it could be between the two modes (and even the same mode) between different speakers.

Evidently, this manner of proceeding is not intended as the solution to the problem of voice discrimination, either in combination with other methods, and especially not independently; however, it may facilitate a consistent expert (counter)argumentation. However, the intention was to use these data to try to further refine the complicated legal process of speaker discrimination and identification. The null hypothesis to be falsified ( $H_0$ ) concerned the impossibility of finding a fruitful identification between the two samples, regardless of the calculation used.

## 4. Methodology and procedure

### 4.1. Participants

The corpus of recordings used for this phonetic study was not intended to include a significant number of speakers, but rather it was proposed as a starting point for future research. For this purpose, speech samples were taken from four monolingual Spanish speakers (with non-bilingual knowledge of other languages), all of whom were 20-year-old female speakers. Two participants originated from Castilla-La Mancha (Toledo and Albacete), with the remaining two coming from Castilla y León (Ávila and León). Furthermore, they were non-professional voices; not trained in singing, and therefore, the data obtained was expected to be within the usual ranges as, for example, those more recently reported by Delgado Hernández et al. (2017, p. 118), among many others.

Regarding the clinical condition of the participants' voices, none had been diagnosed with a speech pathology of any type. While none of the participants reported harmful vocal habits on a daily basis, one did claim to be a sporadic smoker (her smoking habit had begun less than two years previously). Although there is evidence that smoking harms mainly women's voices, especially

those of young women (see Marsano Cornejo et al., 2019), the participant still met the study's criteria regarding smoking habits as she did not smoke more than one cigarette daily. For this reason, her speech samples were not disregarded; however, it was taken into account where hers did not correspond with the regular values.

### 4.2. Data collection

The data collection procedure was carried out using a ZOOAOXO v200 model digital recorder, which has two built-in microphones that pick up 360° sound and reduce noise interference. The recording was realised directly in *.wav* format.

The recording process took place one afternoon in the living room of a home, with all windows and doors closed so as to minimise possible interruptions as well as background noise. The recorder was placed on the table and was not moved throughout the interview. The participants were seated in a rigid chair so as not to affect their posture. These measures may not seem necessary, considering it was established that LTAS copes quite successfully with noise (see 1.1), and, above all, considering the poor quality of evidence found in the legal process; however, this recording process more closely resembles reality than those carried out inside silent or anechoic chambers.

Otherwise, the recording method began with a brief interview purely for identification purposes, which was discarded in the subsequent analyses to prevent the effects of nervousness on the results. Next, they were given a text (see 4.3) to read up to three times in order to familiarise themselves with it, and to reach an acceptable recording quality; of these three readings, only the last one was considered useful, with the recording of the same number being chosen for all participants. All attempts were consecutive, with no time for reflection, to prevent participants from adapting to the overall intonational pattern of the text.

Finally, they were asked a "trick question", such as "What is your impression of the text having read

it? What in the text peaked your curiosity or caught your attention?<sup>2</sup> with a double purpose: to put them completely at ease, believing that the important part had already been completed and, consequently, to achieve a more natural style in the section dealing with spontaneous speech, for which a more relaxed mode of phonation was sought. As an exception, where the sample obtained was not considered to be sufficiently relevant, the last part was prolonged with a set of semi-directed questions (see appendix, 1). From this final section, the recording that met the following characteristics was chosen:

- a) A recording of substantial duration (minimum of 20 seconds);
- b) The clearest possible recording quality, without external interference which could create disturbance (knocks, background noise, etc.);
- c) And a (part of the) recording which did not contain extralinguistic noises such as laughter, coughing, and, where possible, without filler vowels or false articulations.

### 4.3. Corpus

The corpus used for analysis includes a sample of both spontaneous speech and a controlled reading for each speaker. The reason that a phonetically balanced text was chosen was that, when using LTAS “[i]n order to further minimize variations due to phonetic structure, the analysis can be made of the reading of a standard text” (Löfqvist, 1986, p. 471). Therefore, the data obtained from the repeated reading of the text, which is presented below, were kept for two essential reasons: i) one, to allow greater stabilisation of the data as a control group; and ii) two, so as to imitate the usual procedure in police departments.<sup>3</sup>

The chosen text has previously been put to the test in a study by Gil and San Segundo (2013, p. 339),

among others, aimed at trying to detect voice disguise and masking by means of hyponasality. Although the results obtained did not prove to be entirely satisfactory, it was chosen for this study for two reasons: firstly, as stated by the authors, “with a view to obtain controlled data, so that all speakers produce the exact same linguistic content” (*Ibid.*); the second being that the objective of the study was not to assess whether this, or similar, texts are useful in speaker identification, but rather to compare the two speech styles; spontaneous speech and controlled reading. Below is the phonetically balanced text:

El joyero Federico Vanero ha sido condenado por la Audiencia de Santander a ocho meses de arresto mayor y cincuenta mil pesetas de multa por un delito de compra de objetos robados. La vista oral se celebró el miércoles pasado y, durante ella, uno de los fiscales, Carlos Valcárcel, pidió para el joyero tres años de prisión menor y una multa de cincuenta mil pesetas. Gracias a las revelaciones de Vanero de hace dos años y medio se llegó a descubrir la existencia de una sospechosa mafia policial en España, parte de la cual se vio envuelta en el llamado «caso El Nani».

[The jeweler Federico Vanero has been sentenced by the Audiencia of Santander to eight months of major arrest and a fifty thousand pesetas fine for the crime of buying stolen goods. The oral hearing was held last Wednesday and, during it, one of the prosecutors, Carlos Valcárcel, requested three years of minor imprisonment and a fine of fifty thousand pesetas for the jeweler. Thanks to Vanero’s revelations two and a half years ago, the existence of a suspicious police mafia in Spain was discovered, part of which was involved in the so-called “El Nani case”.]

<sup>2</sup> Yes-no questions were avoided so as not to elicit monosyllabic replies.

<sup>3</sup> In effect, if a suspect is subjected to a police investigation, it is almost exclusively based on cross-checking evidence

collected by means of a controlled reading (known voice sample) compared to the recording constituting the crime (questioned voice sample).

#### 4.4. Analysis procedure

Both qualitative and quantitative analyses were carried out. Logically, the first constituted a visual approach to the LTAS, superimposed according to different combinations, as well as a provisional attempt at a general interpretation; on the other hand, the latter accounted for the majority of the analysis, and was given greater importance and relevance due to the fact that it constituted a useful and real (i.e. ‘objective, measurable’) contribution to the field of judicial phonetics. As the qualitative analysis showed a number of overlaps, the next step was to proceed to the quantitative analysis.

##### 4.4.1. Qualitative analysis

In this section, each of the LTAS which were successfully extracted during the recording process were compared *grosso modo*. To better organise the results of each participant and their respective two takes, each was assigned a colour, to avoid possible data mixing. Table 1 summarises the colour codes with the relevant information (spontaneous speech vs. controlled reading).

Audio	Colour	Type
1a	Red	Spontaneous speech
2a	Green	
3a	Blue	
4b	Purple	
1b	Maroon	Controlled reading
2b	Lime	
3b	Cyan	
4b	Grey	

**Table 1.** Colour key for the LTAS.

This step focused on a superposition of LTAS pairs; 1a was compared with 1b (red shades), 2a with 2b (green shades), 3a with 3b (blue shades) and 4a with 4b (purple and grey). As is evident, each speaker is identified by a number, and each register is represented by a letter. This part showed a quantitative correlation, which was recorded in

the relevant quantitative analysis in the following section via a mathematic formula which allowed for further refinement (see 4.4.2).

Finally, the LTAS of each participant in the spontaneous speech style ( $x_b$ ) was superimposed with each LTAS produced by the other speakers in the controlled reading style ( $y_a$ ). The main objective here was to verify that similarities between the LTAS of different speakers were not greater than those between different samples from the same speaker and, therefore, to ensure that the maximum degree of speaker variability was maintained. Otherwise, this would be a strong *a priori* indication that the results obtained in the quantitative analysis would not be relevant and, therefore, the hypotheses should be disregarded.

##### 4.4.2. Quantitative analysis

In this second data processing step, the previously mentioned variables were calculated. Firstly, the mean LTAS values at different frequency points were recorded and the difference between them calculated. It should be said that, had the notable similarities between the LTAS of different individuals not been observed at the qualitative analysis stage, this numerical comparison would not have been carried out, due to the fact that it would result in excessive, presumably inconclusive, results. This process was carried out using a *Praat* script developed by Roseano et al. (2015),<sup>4</sup> whereby the following was calculated:

$$\text{Given that } LTAS_1 = \{x_1, x_2, x_3, x_4, x_5 \dots x_{80}\}$$

$$\text{and } LTAS_2 = \{y_1, y_2, y_3, y_4, y_5 \dots y_{80}\},$$

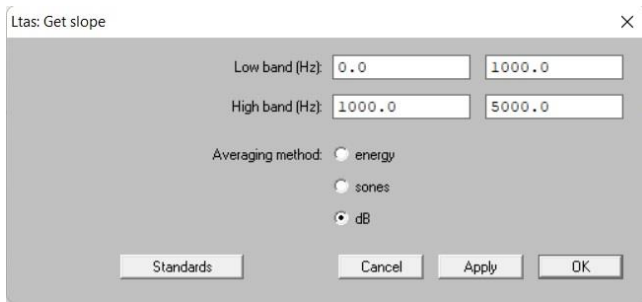
$$\Delta_{LTAS} \text{ was calculated}$$

Secondly, the alpha ratio and the  $L_1-L_0$  ratio were calculated so as to corroborate or discount various doubts which arose throughout the analyses. It is possible to obtain both data using a *Praat* function named *get slope*, which requires the user to specify

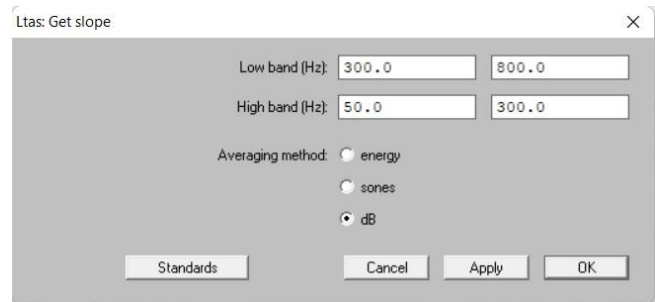
<sup>4</sup> Roseano et al. (2015) includes an explanation of the script and the mathematical formula used for calculation (with

corrections that were not considered here, since all the recordings for this study were made under equal conditions).





**Figure 2.** Calculation of alpha ratio.



**Figure 3.** Calculation of  $L_1-L_0$  ratio.

the desired intervals and means of expressing the information. In this case, following the majority of the studies consulted, it was decided that the data would be recorded in dB. The exact details are the following (see Figures 2 and 3).<sup>5</sup>

Subsequently, a brief statistical analysis was carried out using two approaches: the first, and most significant, was the processing of the data using *Excel*; the second, and more illustrative (but no less relevant), was the preparation of data synthesis figures using *RStudio*, following the cluster analysis methodology. Having collected the data in *Excel*, the next step was the basic statistical calculation with the mean variation of LTAS pairs following the formula presented above, as well as the standard deviation (maximum and minimum) so as to observe which of the absolute change data were non-significant. The mean and median of each LTAS was also considered. Finally, a Student's *t*-test was performed on the data resulting from the pairwise association of the LTAS and their respective eighty frequency points for both intra- and interspeaker combinations.

Regarding the calculation of the two ratios, the absolute change was recorded, for both same-speaker pairs and different-speaker pairs, as well

as those previously mentioned (median and standard deviation). In order to present the data in a more visual manner, a scatter plot of the ratio data was prepared, as well as various dendrograms of both spectral decline and spectral contour. Furthermore, the absolute change was calculated for each ratio, in same-speaker and different-speaker pairs, after which the remainder was calculated, so as to determine extent to which the variation differed from one case to the next. This was done by firstly subtracting the ratios from each other; after which the result of each underwent the same procedure between the results of the alpha ratio on one hand, and the  $L_1-L_0$  ratio on the other hand.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Qualitative analysis

The four LTAS corresponding to the two samples produced by each speaker are presented in Figures 4 to 7. The results of the superposition were, or at least appeared to be, overall satisfactory, with no discordances observed in the curve of the spectral decline, beyond the mismatches in the first frequencies, and some frequency points in the middle and high regions.

<sup>5</sup> There is another small variation in data collection when it comes to the alpha ratio, which entails taking the first reference value of the *low band* from 0.5 Hz instead of the one chosen here, with no reason (or seemingly no reason) for

doing so. Leino (2009) is an example of this, but, as in these cases it is necessary to choose one method or another, here the chosen method was that used by Silva et al. (2011).

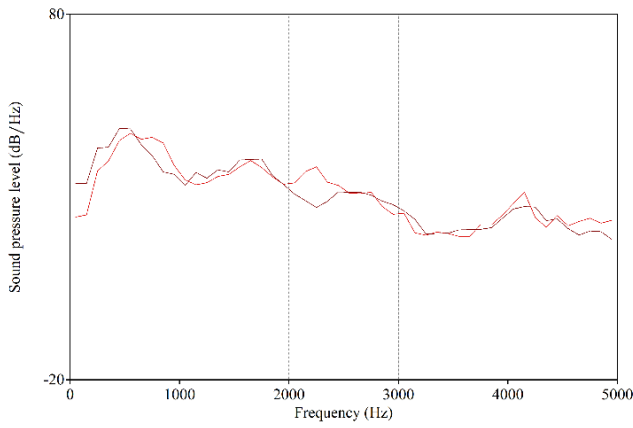


Figure 4. 1a & 1b.

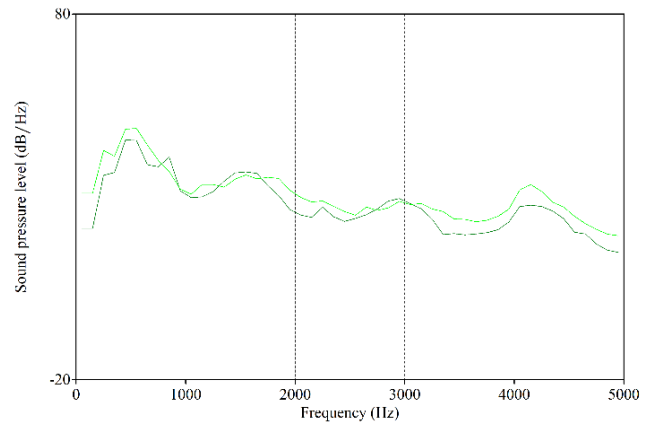


Figure 5. 2a & 2b.

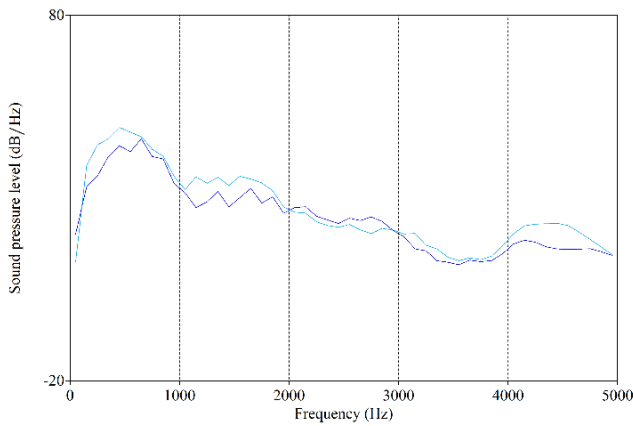


Figure 6. 3a & 3b.

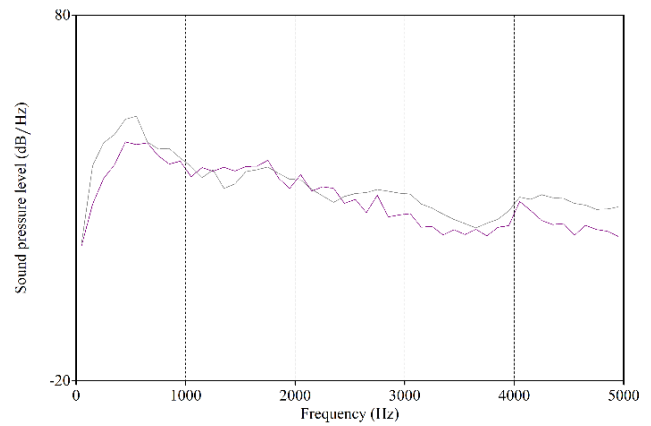


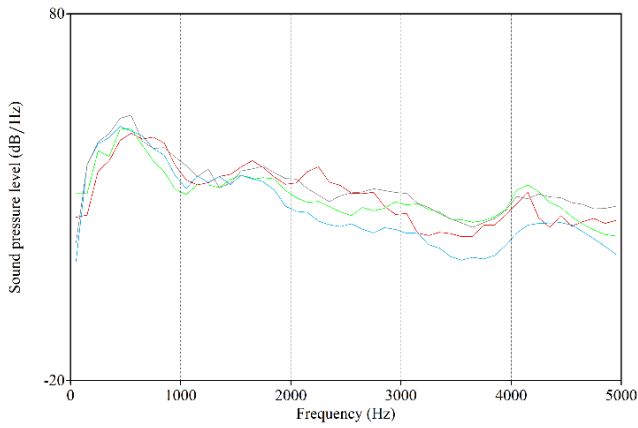
Figure 7. 4a & 4b.

In effect, the mathematical analysis, including the standard deviation, showed that there were some data that exceeded the limit and, therefore, could not be considered representative; these coincided, mostly, in being among the first five data collected. For more information on this subject, please refer to the appendix (2).

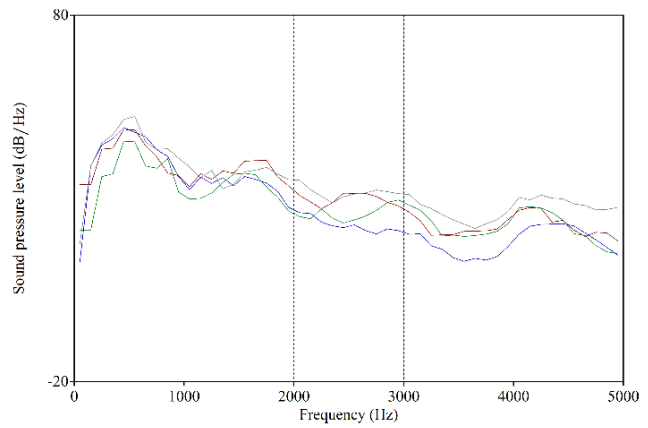
Regarding the contour of the spectral curve, the four LTAS extracted appeared to broadly correspond with their two samples, although not to the same extent. In the majority of spectra there was an almost univocal correlation between the two samples, although Figures such as 5 or 7 showed fewer common points. It can even be seen how the two contours in Figure 5 were practically the same, but with differing intensities. However, despite the similarities in spectral decline, the overlap was far from the desired result.

For example, in Figure 4, the contours in the range of two thousand to two thousand five hundred hertz presented completely opposite contours in both samples (a rise in intensity in spontaneous speech and a controlled declining reading). In contrast, in the LTAS in Figure 6, in the frequency range from one thousand to two thousand hertz, as well as above four thousand, there were fewer points of overlap in the decline. Although the contours were similar, the increase in intensity occurred in the sample featuring the controlled reading style, despite what may incorrectly be assumed. This case is comparable to that shown in Figures 5 and 7. In the latter, moreover, the differences in both contour and intensity were markedly more pronounced.

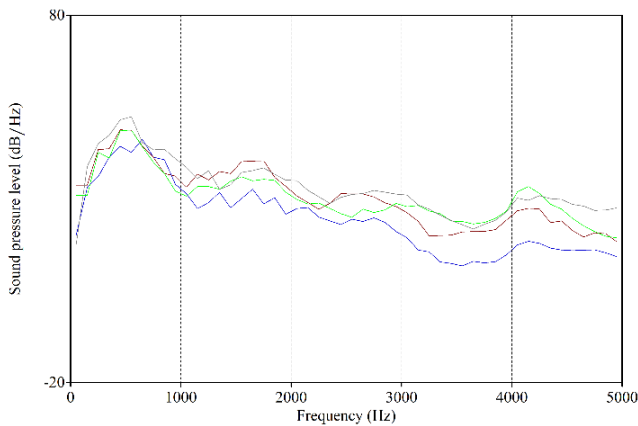
However, from these visual representations of the data, the proportionally direct correspondence



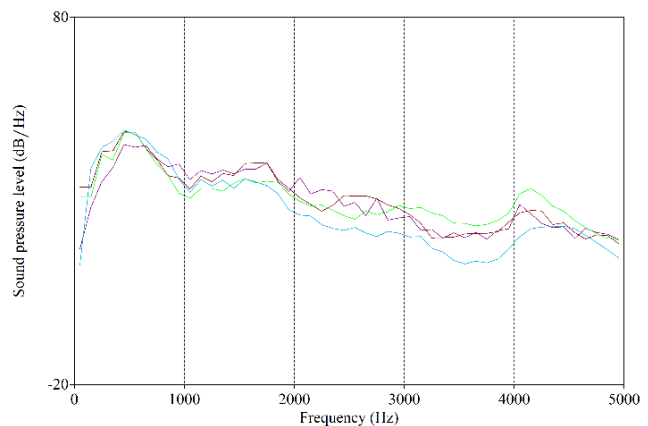
**Figure 8.** 1a & 2b, 3b, 4b.



**Figure 9.** 2a & 1b, 3b, 4b.



**Figure 10.** 3a & 1b, 2b, 4b.



**Figure 11.** 4a & 1b, 2b, 3b.

between the speech style and increase in intensity was not initially evident. Figure 4 showed that the speech style with the highest intensity peaks was spontaneous speech, while the remaining spectra showed the opposite. Although it was not possible to make generalisations with so little information, the differences in intensity (regardless of speech style) were undoubtedly relevant, so it was deemed more appropriate to take into account corrections that would minimise these features for future research.

In any case, the visual approach to the analysis of pairwise LTAS was inconclusive, so it was deemed appropriate to complicate the analysis a little more with various combinations to see to what extent differences or similarities between LTAS could be considered useful. Therefore, four other images corresponding to different combinations of speech samples from the corpus are presented in Figures 8

to 11, generated so as to examine the extent to which these differences or similarities are relevant.

On the one hand, all the LTAS showed that the lower frequency ranges were quite similar across all samples. It can clearly be seen that it was precisely the ranges below one thousand hertz that showed the greatest degree of proximity to each other, even between different speakers. But this did not end here; it had direct repercussions on the calculation of the ratios to be discussed at a later stage. Initially, everything seemed to indicate that the  $L_1-L_0$  ratio calculation would not be especially enlightening, given that the significant differences seemed to be above the first thousand hertz and that the divergent points were located above the first thousand hertz.

In consequence, greater differences in the mid-high frequency range suggested that the alpha ratio could still be considered a good calculation for

speaker discrimination, if not for the fact that, in some cases, the spectral contours of different participants also seemed to closely approach each other, including in the high frequency regions. As shown, for example, in Figure 6, where 2b and 4b, or 2a and 1b (Figure 9), or 4a and 1b (Figure 11) can be seen to overlap almost completely. Logically, these similarities in spectral decline were biased, in the sense that the focus was only on conflicting points, which could have interfered with the final results.

In fact, even if there had been more or less sporadic and more or less generalised overlaps between different LTAS, it would not necessarily prevent the comparison from being productive. Considering that, for example, samples 2a and 1b (Figure 9) converged at high frequencies, the opposite was true at low frequencies; the two contours were quite distinct. In the same vein, it was also noted that 1b and 3b (Figures 9 or 11) closely approached each other in low frequencies, but were rather far apart in high frequencies, meaning that such cases did not seem to carry sufficient weight and basis to rule out H<sub>2</sub>, although it was still useful to take these data into account.

Finally, before continuing to the next section, it is worthwhile to reflect briefly on the use of the long-term average spectrum in the comparison and discrimination of speakers. It is true that any new technique requires the establishment of parametres that demonstrate the plausible concomitance between numerical data and its correlation with

representational data. However, it is also the case that the LTAS method still lacks a literature and clear-cut, categorical tenets, from which it follows that any visual (qualitative) approach to the LTAS method is, presently, at least, orientative. For this reason, quantitative analysis was carried out in order to refine this qualitative analysis.

### 5.2. Quantitative analysis

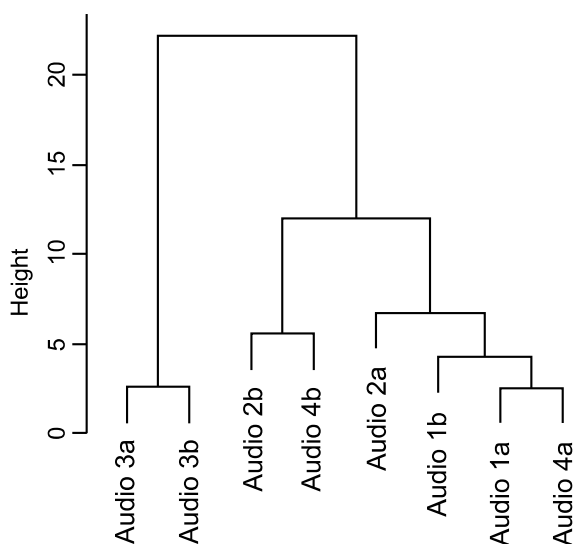
This section will deal with the numerical processing of the data provided by the LTAS and will provide a breakdown of the procedure carried out when assessing if the comparison and discrimination would, in fact, be successful, taking into account all of the above. Throughout this section, summary tables and associative schemes are presented, which intend to summarise, to some extent, the vast quantity of information generated from the comparison of LTAS and the use of ratio calculations.

Firstly, Table 2 summarises the uninominal data for each and every one of the eight audios. It shows the unprocessed results of the ratio calculations, as well as the mean, median and standard deviation of the eighty frequency points. A first approximation indicates from the outset that there were more differences in any of the measurements for the same speaker than between two different speakers; this is the case, for example, of the alpha ratio between 2a and 4a, the  $L_1-L_0$  ratio between 1b and 2a, the mean variation between 1b and 3a, the median between 1b and 4a, etc.

Recording	Alfa ratio	$L_1-L_0$ ratio	Mean variation	Median	Standard dev.
1a	-10.955145245	-15.168100560	25.2141419434	23.1459521069	27.1027978570
1b	-13.176184085	-13.176184085	23.7280434259	21.3458305158	26.2147765416
2a	-9.9170724985	-13.782841214	20.5921812241	20.7308654535	23.3071337675
2b	-11.422762454	-8.8597328820	23.8069717071	24.9111762112	25.9075531579
3a	-16.848607727	-11.498783889	20.5254874758	16.1958609418	22.4956305498
3b	-17.555628059	-10.849447290	21.9491451376	17.0362954510	24.2601136708
4a	-9.612621586	-14.269574461	24.1911375462	21.7235926847	26.1718104040
4b	-12.038900139	-10.937942552	27.2695375838	27.1546459849	28.9512659616

Table 2. Summary table of ratio calculations.

The dendrogram in Figure 12 shows an association between 3a and 3b, on the one hand, and among the other audio samples, on the other. In the second group, recordings 2b and 4b (different speakers in the controlled reading style) were separated from the rest. Within the latter group, recordings 1a and 4a were the most similar (also from different speakers, but in the spontaneous speech style).

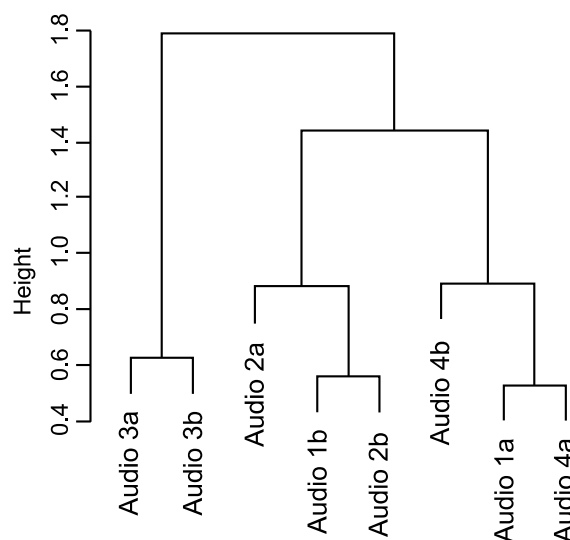


**Figure 12.** Dendrogram of data from Table 2 [euclid hclust (\*, "ward.D")].

Since the overall results were not satisfactory, as is obvious when mixing data obtained from different sources by means of different calculations, it was decided to operate in parts so as to make accurate conclusions with the hypotheses put forward. The results of the Student's *t*-test were not very *meaningful* either, since it appears that none of the pairs reached a relevant level of significance, and greater similarity between different speakers than

in the same speaker could be observed (e.g., 2a and 4b, or 3a and 4b, which were more significant than 2a and 2b, or 3a and 3b). See Table 3 below.

For the same reason as above, regarding the dendrogram, it was necessary to repeat it in this case to assess if it was indeed possible for any of the data to shed light on what was really happening in the LTAS comparison. As can be seen in Figure 13, again, participant 3's recordings were correctly matched to each other, but then two groups were formed with 1b and 2b (with 2a later added), on the one hand, and 1a and 4a (with 4b later added), on the other. This dendrogram, although similar to the previous one, better associated the same-speaker recordings with each other, although the styles continued to be confused, and participant 1 was straddling between two other speakers.



**Figure 13.** Dendrogram of just the 80 frequency points [euclid hclust (\*, "ward.D")].

	1a + 1b	2a + 2b	3a + 3b	4a + 4b
<i>p</i> -value	.124	.092	.092	.114

	1a			2a			3a			4a		
	2b	3b	4b	1b	3b	4b	1b	2b	4b	1b	2b	3b
<i>p</i>	.124	.125	.121	.092	.093	.089	.091	.091	.088	.117	.117	.118

**Table 3.** *P*-value results from Student's *t*-test.

At this point, the next step was to process the data obtained from both ratio calculations; the unprocessed results have already been collected above (Table 2). The data is included in the scatter plot in Figure 14 and in the dendrogram in Figure 15; here it was noted that the pairing of participant 3 was, as it had been so far, correct, but the other recordings were paired incorrectly: 2b with 4b, later joined by 1b, on the one hand, and 2a with 4a, later joined by 1a, on the other.

These same results hardly varied with respect to those obtained in the previous dendrogram concerning the spectral curve comparison. However, the ratios further complicated the matter by not allowing the two expressive styles to be correctly paired; consequently, the two groups, excluding participant 3, only formed one cluster of spontaneous speech recordings and one cluster of controlled reading recordings. In this case, the results suggested that the alpha ratio and the  $L_1-L_0$  ratio were, if anything, less conclusive than the direct comparison, even though all the recordings were randomly mixed without regard to the change in style of a single speaker.

The calculation of the remaining data showed that the same happened as was explained previously for Table 2: not all variations within a same-speaker pair were minimal, nor were they maximal between different speakers. Nevertheless, although the variation values within same-speaker pairs were generally lower than those of different-speaker pairs, it did not go unnoticed that, for example, 1a and 2b or 2a and 1b showed less variation than participants 2, 3 and 4. See Table 4.

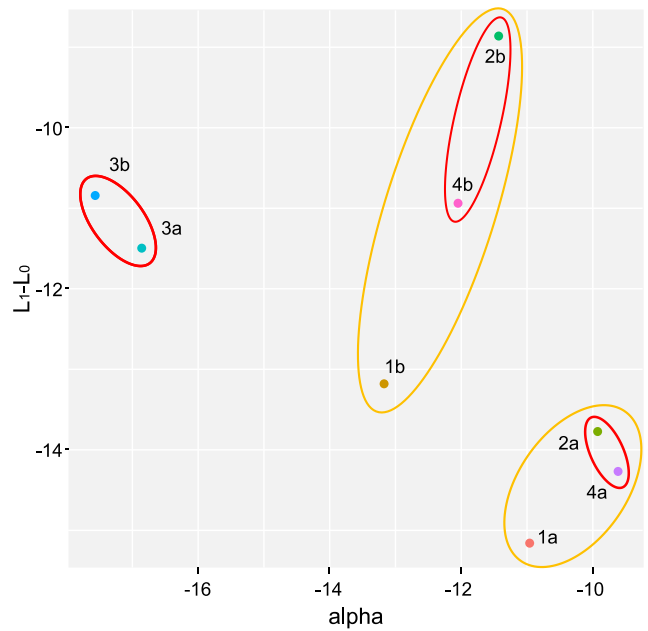


Figure 14. Scatter plot of the ratio calculations.

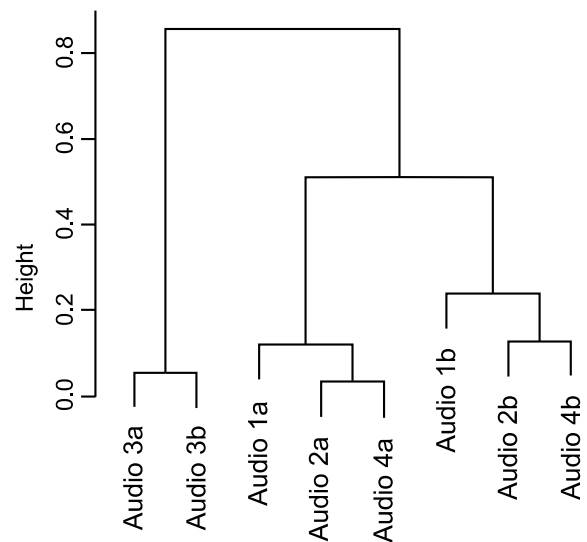


Figure 15. Dendrogram of the ratio calculations [euclid hclust (\*, "ward.D")].

	1a + 1b	2a + 2b	3a + 3b	4a + 4b
<b>Alpha - <math>L_1-L_0</math>*</b>	0.22	1.30	1.35	3.55

	1a			2a			3a			4a		
	2b	3b	4b	1b	3b	4b	1b	2b	4b	1b	2b	3b
*	0.34	4.48	1.12	0.83	2.84	2.76	3.35	2.78	4.24	2.66	2.09	2.04

Table 4. Absolute change in ratios as a product of subtraction.

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1. Explanation of results

With all results extracted, having already been presented in the previous section, it is worth making a preliminary reflection before proceeding to an explanation. It should be considered that the two routes followed in the present study have sought to demonstrate, for each sub-hypothesis, the extent to which the use of LTAS could be effective when it comes to speaker discrimination. Whether this was really the case or not will be confirmed below. Logically, the statistical analysis briefly summarised above should be an incentive for further and more detailed research, for which recommendations and amendments, based on this study, will be detailed in the next section (see 6.2).

That said, firstly the three (sub-)hypotheses will be revisited in order to resolve any doubts arising from the data already provided. All three sub-hypotheses addressed the (im)possibility of distinguishing and matching each of the two samples, presented in pairs, to their respective speakers to determine whether, by doing so, a successful identification could be achieved. Therefore, the first hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) considered was to use ratio calculations (alpha and  $L_1-L_0$ , while the second hypothesis ( $H_2$ ) was based on the direct comparison of LTAS. On the other hand, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) implicitly stated that none of the above would be feasible for such an undertaking. For the sake of clarity, in the explanation that follows, the order of the hypotheses will be modified slightly.

A tangential synopsis could summarise that both hypotheses (1 and 2) have not been significantly conclusive and, therefore, have been rejected; likewise, the null hypothesis confirms that, currently, it does not seem possible to identify speakers using LTAS, contrary to what was postulated by some of the authors previously referenced in the literature review (see 2). Even so, this result may be indicative of two methodological inaccuracies: the first, of content, relates to the calculations used and the indiscriminate treatment of the spectral curve data

with those of the ratios; the second, of form, and derived from the previous one, relates to the undifferentiated processing and, consequently, a lack of specificity or clear distinction.

Therefore, Figure 13 clearly shows that it is not plausible to uphold hypotheses such as the second, if only because, in this case, it has already been proven that intraspeaker variability is not necessarily lesser than the interspeaker variability, as well as having shown that the LTAS contours converge quite frequently at both low and high frequencies. It is true that this does not appear to follow any pattern which could give insight into the reasons behind it. In all likelihood, the results are *anomalous* in large part due to not having considered the corrections which apply to spectral declines so as to reduce the intensity differences that had already been taken into account by Roseano et al. (2015).

Likewise, Figures 14 (the scatter plot) and 15 (the dendrogram) follow the same line marked by Figure 13 and previously by Figure 12, and do not yield positive results for the investigation either. In effect, neither the  $L_1-L_0$  ratio nor the alpha ratio were suitable. The reasons seem to lie in the purpose of the ratios, which were originally meant only as a logopaedic resource when dealing with voice quality. However, the possibility of developing new measurements or modifying existing ones for judicial purposes should not be dismissed. Such modifications can range from applying the same calculations, but correcting for intensity errors which arise due to the recording method, to completely changing the ranges of values used for the calculation, an issue on which there was no consensus among various researchers, even concerning the alpha ratio (see 4.4.2, footnote 5).

Finally, the fact that both hypotheses were rejected confirms that none of the above mechanisms are useful for speaker identification, at least provisionally, in the absence of further research. At the beginning of this section, the causes were hinted at, but there is still one more thing to add: it must not be forgotten that, as mentioned in the introduction,

such specific data cannot be the remedy for such an intricate problem, but rather must be part of a multiparametric comparison system that solves or, at least, alleviates the burden of having to rule for or against a total or partial correspondence of two speech samples, with all the consequences that this entails in a court of law.

However, there is one particular case which cannot simply be dismissed, in which the identification was correct not only when using the calculations, but also with the LTAS comparison. This suggests two things: first, effectively, that the method did not turn out to be trivial, since it was able to match accurately in all cases the two samples of the third participant, which indicates that more detailed research could be done. The second indirectly confirms and expands on the research carried out by Marsano Cornejo et al. (2019) regarding smoking habits, since, despite the fact that said participant did not meet all the requirements, the influence of tobacco seems to play the same role even at relatively low levels of consumption.

## 6.2. Implications for the field of study

Based on what was mentioned at the end of the previous section, it is clear that the field of application of the long-term average spectrum is, essentially, clinical. Although it is the case that the ratios used were drawn from studies in the field of speech therapy, one of the aims of the present study was to try and create a space for them in the area of judicial phonetics. Therefore, this study is presented as a first fully-developed approach to the use LTAS in judicial phonetics. It has been established, then, that the interest in voice quality and its presence in LTAS is an issue mostly focused on rehabilitation or monitoring the treatment of dysphonic voices, contrary to, for example, the statements of Gil and San Segundo (2014) who claim it is in the judicial field, although their focus is on aspects such as *creaky voice*.

Despite this, the implications of clinical advances are also rooted in forensics. Moreover, one of the

founding precepts of judicial phonetics is the characterisation of each individual speaker in an abstract way, which takes the form of identification profiles based on a supposed “voiceprint”. The field of speech therapy is fully dedicated to this exhaustive description of speaker voices, even though their interest lies mainly in anomalies or speech disorders, and even though its purpose is to correct these anomalies, rather than to apply it to speaker identification. Note the direct overlap between the two disciplines; only after an arduous process of clinical *singularisation* can they begin to work on judicial comparison and discrimination (in short, speaker identification).

## 6.3. Ideas for future studies

At this point in the study, the only option is to list the main ideas to be developed in future research, on the basis of this brief study. Although the results do not strongly support the hypotheses, it may be useful to increase the number of participants as well as their characteristics in order to obtain significant results. In an initial pilot study, carried out separately, it was observed that the differences between sexes were substantial enough that it was possible to separate each pair of samples mainly due to the ratios.

It would be interesting, therefore, to test this with slightly more heterogeneous groups of participants, gradually reducing their differentiating features, until the limit between identification and confusion can be determined. This could be done as a test of strength with the inclusion of groups of speakers of different sexes, on the one hand, and within these categories a more diverse age range, on the other. Following this, it would need to be seen in which of them the interspeaker differences are as great, or greater, than those that occur in the intraspeaker comparison. These traits are generally based on biological characteristics such as sex and age, but sociological characteristics such as social status, or linguistic characteristics such as bilingualism versus monolingualism must not be forgotten.



Consequently, another change that could be introduced would be to modify the speaking styles used here. For example, it could be interesting to use two samples of only one of the two styles (controlled reading only or spontaneous speech only), but recorded over time to see whether short-, medium- or long-term vocal changes help or hinder identification. It should then be taken into account that the differences in intensity would be even more accentuated, since the recording process would not be the same; therefore, it would be necessary to work with corrections on the spectral decline if the curve is used, or to use caution when working with the ratios, since aging is a direct cause of voice modulation.

Regarding the recording procedure, the results have shown that it is not yet the time to collect voice samples in everyday environments; it would be more convenient to do so using professional microphones and audio interfaces (e.g., cardioid condenser microphones), in a room with minimum environmental noise (measured with a sound level metre). This would guarantee the quality of the speech samples until the resistance to noise is established, therefore avoiding anomalous results, and also controlling the experimental design as much as possible.

This design should necessarily include a differential treatment of the two hypotheses, and therefore use the comparison of the spectral curve separately from the ratio calculations. Continuing with the results collected and explained here, the first method would appear to be the most suitable for the judicial field; discordances in the spectral decline, due to the action of time, are also foreseen. On the other hand, the second method should not be discarded, at least until it is clear where the critical point lies, if there is one, or if they are simply not useful in the judicial application. In the same way, it is important to consider which of the ratios may be more relevant or whether both may be equally relevant and, depending on this, proceed in one way or another.

Finally, it cannot be overlooked that in a scientific work the statistical treatment is key for the theoretical validation of the hypotheses. Therefore, it is essential that in future research different statistical procedures are considered, as well those carried out here, although with a more intensive approach. Cluster analysis (both the dendrogram and other figures) seems to be the most suitable for comparing speech samples; however, when speakers surpass high numbers, it may not be entirely suitable given that in a judicial setting, the most accurate identification possible is sought. In contrast, the scatter plot may be more appropriate where larger quantities of samples from fewer speakers are taken into account. Regarding processing, since the null hypothesis has been confirmed, it would be beneficial to carry out exploratory data analysis to test the criteria of normality and homoscedasticity of the variables studied if results similar to these are obtained in the future.

## 7. Conclusions

In short, the two nuclear hypotheses, which dealt with the possible speaker identification power of spectral ratios and the immediate confrontation of spectral decline, have been discarded, and the null hypothesis, related to the improbability of successful matching and discrimination of samples, has been reinforced. It was also observed that discrimination was possible for only one of the four participants, the reason for which it is due and the consequence outcome.

Finally, as a corollary, all that is left to be said is that research in this field should continue to further refine the identification process. Since the sample collected for this paper is not significant, and since the results are variable, and even “contradictory” to some extent, depending on the calculations used, it is not prudent to rule outright in favour of one hypothesis or another. Although it has been said on previous occasions, the general impression of the study is that it is not *yet* conclusive and requires further in-depth, consistent research.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A. Questions used in the interview**

This set of semi-prepared questions (which were not completely respected in all interviews for the sake of greater spontaneity) are the following:

- a) Knowing that it is a phonetically balanced text, what do you think might be interesting about it?
- b) When reading the text, were you more aware of how you were modulating your voice or what the text said?
- c) So, do you find the controlled reading methodology useful?
- d) After telling you that no segmental features (no specific sound) are going to be taken into account, do you suspect any other phonetic features that might fit in with this work?
- e) What recommendation would you make as a research subject to avoid possible nervousness when recording someone?

As can be seen, all the questions were about the text, since continuing with a personal interview would make the speaker suspect that the recording was still going on.

Appendix B. Alpha and L<sub>1</sub>–L<sub>0</sub> ratio calculations: spectral decline

Participant 1	Alpha	L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>	Alpha - L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>
Controlled reading	-13.17618408561890	-15.16810056070420	1.99191647508530
Spontaneous speech	-10.95514524527800	-13.17618408561890	2.22103884034090
Absolute change	2.22103884034090	1.99191647508530	0.22912236525560
Change <sup>2</sup>	4.93301353030285	3.96773124371625	0.05249705826032

Participant 2	Alpha	L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>	Alpha - L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>
Controlled reading	-11.42276245433630	-8.85973288203890	2.56302957229740
Spontaneous speech	-9.91707249854376	-13.78284121409910	3.86576871555534
Absolute change	1.50568995579254	4.92310833206020	1.30273914325794
Change <sup>2</sup>	2.26710224297454	24.23699564920060	1.69712927537643

Participant 3	Alpha	L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>	Alpha - L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>
Controlled reading	-17.55562805962180	-10.84944729076610	6.70618076885570
Spontaneous speech	-16.84860772717950	-11.49878388929970	5.34982383787980
Absolute change	0.70702033244230	0.64933659853360	1.35635693097590
Change <sup>2</sup>	0.49987775048682	0.42163801819519	1.83970412420636

Participant 4	Alpha	L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>	Alpha - L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>
Controlled reading	-12.03890013916880	-10.93794255234190	1.10095758682690
Spontaneous speech	-9.61262158656565	-14.26957446133070	4.65695287476505
Absolute change	2.42627855260315	3.33163190898880	3.55599528793815
Change <sup>2</sup>	5.88682761482204	11.09977117699240	12.64510248783830

Data Cross	Alpha	L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>	Alpha - L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>
1a	-10.95514524527800	-13.17618408561890	2.22103884034090
2b	-11.42276245433630	-8.85973288203890	2.56302957229740
Absolute change	0.46761720905830	4.31645120358000	0.34199073195650
Change <sup>2</sup>	0.21866585420747	18.63175099288720	0.11695766074414

Data Cross	Alpha	L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>	Alpha - L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>
1a	-10.95514524527800	-13.17618408561890	2.22103884034090
2b	-11.42276245433630	-8.85973288203890	2.56302957229740
Absolute change	0.46761720905830	4.31645120358000	0.34199073195650
Change <sup>2</sup>	0.21866585420747	18.63175099288720	0.11695766074414

Data Cross	Alpha	L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>	Alpha - L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>
1a	-10.95514524527800	-13.17618408561890	2.22103884034090
4b	-12.03890013916880	-10.93794255234190	1.10095758682690
Absolute change	1.08375489389080	2.23824153327700	1.12008125351400
Change <sup>2</sup>	1.17452467003226	5.00972516128618	1.25458201447349

Data Cross	Alpha	L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>	Alpha - L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>
2a	-9.91707249854376	-13.78284121409910	3.86576871555534
3b	-17.55562805962180	-10.84944729076610	6.70618076885570
Absolute change	7.63855556107804	2.93339392333300	2.84041205330036
Change <sup>2</sup>	58.34753105967620	8.60479990944697	8.06794063253396

Data Cross	Alpha	L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>	Alpha - L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>
2a	-9.91707249854376	-13.78284121409910	3.86576871555534
1b	-13.17618408561890	-15.16810056070420	1.99191647508530
Absolute change	2.22103884034090	1.38525934660510	0.83577949373580
Change <sup>2</sup>	4.93301353030285	1.91894345735679	0.69852736214927

Data Cross	Alpha	L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>	Alpha - L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>
2a	-9.91707249854376	-13.78284121409910	3.86576871555534
4b	-12.03890013916880	-10.93794255234190	1.10095758682690
Absolute change	2.12182764062504	2.84489866175720	2.76481112872844
Change <sup>2</sup>	4.50215253652043	8.09344839566791	7.64418057754063

Data Cross	Alpha	L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>	Alpha - L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>
3a	-16.84860772717950	-11.49878388929970	5.34982383787980
1b	-13.17618408561890	-15.16810056070420	1.99191647508530
Absolute change	3.67242364156060	3.66931667140450	3.35790736279450
Change <sup>2</sup>	13.48669540309320	13.46388483504700	11.27554185710950

Data Cross	Alpha	L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>	Alpha - L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>
3a	-16.84860772717950	-11.49878388929970	5.34982383787980
4b	-12.03890013916880	-10.93794255234190	1.10095758682690
Absolute change	4.80970758801070	0.56084133695780	4.24886625105290
Change <sup>2</sup>	23.13328708216770	0.31454300524061	18.05286441933630

Data Cross	Alpha	L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>	Alpha - L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>
4a	-9.61262158656565	-14.26957446133070	4.65695287476505
2b	-11.42276245433630	-8.85973288203890	2.56302957229740
Absolute change	1.81014086777065	5.40984157929180	2.09392330246765
Change <sup>2</sup>	3.27660996117348	29.26638591303440	4.38451479661703

Data Cross	Alpha	L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>	Alpha - L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>
4a	-9.61262158656565	-14.26957446133070	4.65695287476505
3b	-17.55562805962180	-10.84944729076610	6.70618076885570
Absolute change	7.94300647305615	3.42021271056460	2.04922789409065
Change <sup>2</sup>	63.09135183101190	11.69726986283420	4.19933496191920

Statistics	Alpha	L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>	Alpha - L <sub>1</sub> –L <sub>0</sub>
Mean variation	3.38862443642564	2.72116741518288	2.25213661205283
Standard variation	11.65023178007020	8.65772866009345	7.3114299768998
Minimum	-8.261607343644510	-5.936561244910580	-5.059293365637140
Maximum	15.038856216495800	11.378896075276300	9.563566589742810

## Appendix C. Comparative calculations: spectral contour

The detail of the LTAS corresponding to the same-speaker pairwise comparisons of samples can be found on pages 102 and 103. Later (p. 104), the comparison of two pairs of LTAS based on some spontaneous speech samples with other controlled reading samples is collected, as an example, so as not to elaborate with too much data.

- *Mean var.* stands for the mean of the corresponding 80 values in the *Absolute change* column.
- *Standard dev.* stands for the square root of the corresponding 80 values in the *Change<sup>2</sup>* column.
- *Correct range of values: Min.* corresponds to the subtraction *Standard dev.* – *Mean var.*
- *Correct range of values: Max.* corresponds to the sum *Standard dev.* + *Mean var.*





