

Sociolinguistic Perception of L1 and L2 Spanish in the University Classroom

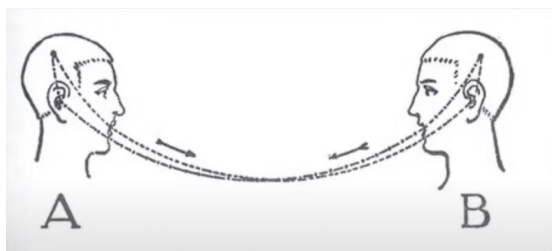
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Introduction & Background

What is Sociolinguistic Perception?

- The study of the relationship between language variety and social meaning
 - As users of language, when we hear someone speak, we make inferences about their social characteristics and personality traits.
 - The use of particular linguistic features can elicit different evaluations from listeners.
 - Social information also influences the perception of language, such that listeners perceive different things depending on who they believe the speaker is.
- While language variety is a neutral entity, attitudes toward those who speak certain varieties may exist (Gutiérrez and Amengual, 2016).
 - Impact of perceived speaker ethnicity and language experience of monolingual and bilingual listeners on perceptions of standard and nonstandard English varieties.
 - Participants were presented with three different language varieties (Standard American English, Chicano English, and Spanish-accented English) combined with photographs of individuals of three perceptually different ethnic identities (Non-Hispanic, Neutral, and Hispanic). Listeners completed a questionnaire and Likert scale rating of their perceptions of the presumed speaker.
 - Results:
 - Speakers using a standard variety of English were judged more favorably in terms of proficiency and competence
 - Acoustic cues rather than perceived ethnicity were used primarily to determine speaker's language variety
 - Ratings by Heritage speakers of Spanish differed from those by monolingual English speakers, showing language experience plays a significant role in shaping language attitudes and conditioning the perception of standard and non-standard English varieties



Why focus on university classrooms?

- Language courses are often taught by instructors for whom Spanish is their second language (L2).
- Because of widespread attitudes toward non-standard language varieties, these instructors might be evaluated differently than those who grew up speaking Spanish as their first language (L1), based solely on their speech.
- These language evaluations can affect how students score their professors in course evaluation surveys, which are used by universities to determine merit evaluations and promotions.
- We aim to find out if the variety of Spanish spoken by instructors influences their perceived comprehensibility, proficiency and other characteristics. We will test, in addition, whether the language background of the listener significantly affects their evaluations.

Research Questions

- Which characteristics do students value in a language instructor?
- How does the variety of Spanish spoken by instructors influence their perceived comprehensibility, proficiency, and the other valued traits?
- Does the listeners' language experience significantly influence their evaluations?

Methods

Two-Part Perceptual Experiment

Survey 1

Stimuli and participants

- One question asking for top 10 desired positive characteristics in an instructor
- Participants: Marquette University undergraduate students (50 responses)

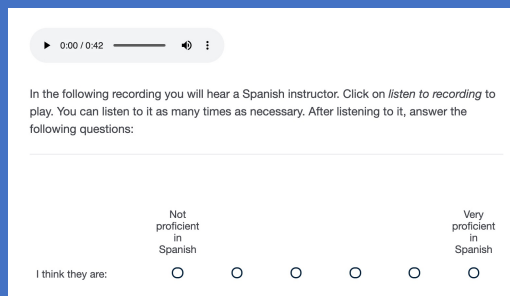
Survey 2

- Matched Guise Technique (Lambert et al. 1960)
 - Elicited (read) utterances + Acoustic analysis
 - 2 L1 speakers of Spanish (1 male and 1 female) and 2 L2 speakers of Spanish (1 male and 1 female)
 - Participants only hear one male speaker and one female speaker
 - Randomized order.

- At the end of the survey, participants are also asked to provide demographic information and information regarding their use of Spanish in their household and high school.

Stimuli and participants

- Two audio recordings each followed by the same 17 Likert scale questions
 - Students will evaluate the audio on perceived comprehensibility, proficiency, and the 15 most frequently mentioned characteristics from the first part of the study.



- Marquette Students, both Heritage learners and L2 students, taking Spanish courses 3001 and above in Fall 2021

Results

Survey 1

- The top 15 most common answers are listed below in the word cloud and are the traits measured in the Likert scales of Survey 2.



Survey 2 Hypotheses

- Hypothesis 1:** Speakers of L2 Spanish that have English as their L1 will be judged as less comprehensible and less proficient than L1 Spanish speakers.
- Hypothesis 2:** Speakers of L2 Spanish that have English as their L1 will be judged significantly differently in the enumerated list of the valued characteristics.
- Hypothesis 3:** Listeners' language experience will have a significant effect on evaluations of L1 and L2 Spanish.

Discussion & Next Steps

- Our next steps include:
 - Statistical analysis of data
 - Presentation of results in linguistics conferences
 - Writing and publication of an article
 - Follow-up study based on results
- The results of this study will further contribute to our knowledge of how listeners use linguistic cues to evaluate language competence and other social traits.
- They will also help determine to what extent student course evaluation are biased toward speakers of standard language varieties.

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