

Sociolinguistic Perception of L1 and L2 Spanish in the University Classroom

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Introduction & Background

Sociolinguistic Perception

- Sociolinguistics is the study of the relationship between language variety and social meaning
 - Listeners use language to make judgments about the social identities of other speakers (Giles et al. 1977; Ryan et al. 1982; Carranza, 1982; among others).
 - Speakers of stigmatized non-standard language varieties are rated more negatively in categories of linguistic ability, status and competence, and have reduced levels of listener cooperation (Bresnahan et al. 2002; Fuetes et al. 2012; Gluszek and Dovidio, 2010).
 - Listeners also tend to more positively evaluate those that are part of their own community (Ryan and Carranza, 1975; Preston, 1993).



Social perceptions of non-native speech

- Ryan et al. (1977) → Perceptions of Spanish-accented English
 - Slight increases in accentedness were associated with relatively increasingly negative ratings of status, solidarity, pleasantness and fluency.
- Bresnahan et al. (2002) → Perceptions of American English, intelligible foreign accent and unintelligible foreign accent.
 - American English rated more intelligible than the foreign accents
 - American English and the intelligible foreign accent were rated more positive than an unintelligible foreign accent.
- Gutierrez and Amengual (2016) → English monolinguals and Spanish-English bilinguals evaluated voice recordings of Standard American English (SAE), Chicano English, and non-native Spanish-accented English paired with photographs.
 - Non-standard English, regardless of the perceived ethnicity and the language background of the participant, was judged less proficient and less comprehensible.
 - Language experience of the participants was found to influence judgements of comprehension.

Outcomes of linguistic discrimination

- Individuals who speak with a nonnative accent are likely to experience discrimination (Nguyen, 1993; Wated and Sanchez, 2006; Weyant, 2007).
- Student evaluations of teachers have long been found to be influenced by the perceived age and gender (Arbuckle & Williams 2003) and ethnicity of a professor (Williams 2007).
- The language variety employed by instructors also has an effect on their evaluations (Rubin and Smith, 1990; Rubin, 1992; Gill, 1994; Boyd, 2003).

Our study

- In the United States, Spanish language courses are taught by instructors who have Spanish as their first language (L1) and instructors who learned Spanish as a second language (L2).
- This study investigates how the variety of Spanish spoken by an instructor influences perceived comprehensibility, proficiency, and other social and professional characteristics.
- The results contribute to understanding the extent to which student evaluations of teaching in Spanish language courses could be biased with respect to the linguistic variety employed by instructors.

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

Experiment 1

Stimuli and participants

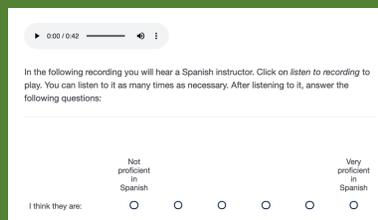
- One question survey eliciting a list of traits that students valued in their instructors
- Asked to provide 10 adjectives that describe a good college instructor based on their experience.
- Participants: Marquette University undergraduate students (52 responses)

Experiment 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)

Stimuli and participants

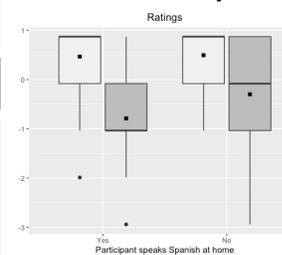
- Participants listened to a male and female speaker and were randomly assigned to the L1 or L2 guise for each
 - After listening they rated each speaker on 17 Likert scales in a randomized order: comprehensibility, Spanish proficiency, the 15 most frequently mentioned characteristics elicited in experiment 1
- Sociodemographic information survey asking about use of Spanish in the household



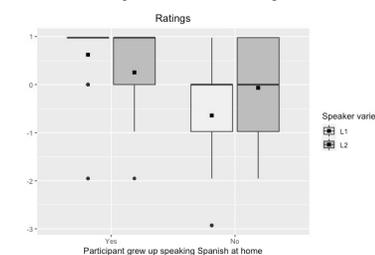
- 71 Marquette Students taking Spanish courses 3001 and above in Fall 2021
 - 42 L2 learners, 30 Heritage language speakers
- Factor analysis in R to consolidate ratings variables and eliminate correlations:
 - Relational qualities: passion, open-mindedness, empathy, funniness, niceness, patience
 - Teaching competence: flexibility, understandingness, knowledgeability, helpfulness, and organization
 - Kindness: kindness and caringness
 - Approachability
 - Respectfulness
- Mixed effects linear regression models in R
 - 7 dependent variables (each rating)
 - Independent variables: speaker variety, speaker gender, listener linguistic background, academic year

Results

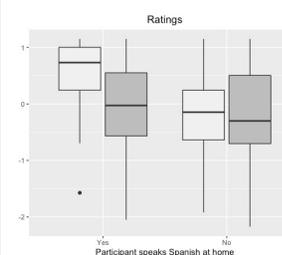
Proficiency



Comprehensibility



Teaching competence



- L2 voices were rated as significantly less proficient than L1 voices by both groups of participants
- Native listeners rated L1 voices as significantly more comprehensible than L2 guises, while nonnative listeners rated the L2 guises as more comprehensible.
- L2 voices were also rated lower in teaching competence. The differences in the evaluations of L1 and L2 voices were larger when the listener grew up speaking Spanish at home.

Discussion

- Our findings on proficiency are consistent with Gutierrez & Amengual (2016) and previous research in which speakers of non-standard language varieties are rated as less proficient and less competent.
- The significant interaction between comprehensibility and student language background differs from previous research which found comprehensibility to be independent of language background. Students have been found to rate the teachers with whom they relate more favorably (Gill 1994) and language background has been found to influence identity (Gutierrez and Amengual 2016).
 - Increased exposure to a language variety increases comprehension of the language variety (Rubin & Smith, 1990).
- L2 voices being rated significantly lower in teaching competence is consistent with the inverse relationship found between evaluations of perceived proficiency and teaching effectiveness qualities such as classroom environment, depth of vocabulary, and frequency of grammatical mistakes (Rubin 1992; Boyd 2003).
- L2 participants gave overall lower ratings in teaching competence than Heritage learners, similar to all other categories, while Heritage learners rated with great differences between language varieties.

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