

Stigmatised Linguistic Identities and Spanish Language Teaching

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Abstract. The purpose of this article is to discuss the importance of including dialectal varieties in the Spanish as a foreign/second language (SFL/SSL) curriculum in order to eradicate the prejudices and social stereotypes traditionally associated with some Spanish varieties. Along with globalization and economic migration, the number of heritage students and those who have been in contact with different Spanish varieties has risen, so diversity is now the norm in the classroom. Social prestige is commonly confused (even among Spanish teachers) with language correctness, thus a social issue becomes interpreted as a linguistic one. The negative impact of language stigma is far higher than what could be suspected *a priori*, as it may lead to identifying conflicts and to jeopardizing students' self-esteem. Therefore, teachers have the responsibility to teach students to respect and value the different language varieties in the same way. However, in order to do so, teachers first need to be aware of their own linguistic prejudices, since by being transmitted in the process of socialization, they normally remain hidden in the subconscious mind.

Keywords: Intradialectal Variation, Linguistic Prejudices, SFL, Stigma, Identity.

1. Introduction

According to a report published by the Instituto Cervantes in 2012, Spanish is spoken by more than 495 million people and it is the official language in 21 countries. This demographic growth, together with its vast geographical expansion, increases, even more if possible, the inherent variability that characterizes languages.

Renowned linguistics and a range of organisations and institutional documents, such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2002), consider language diversity as a source of richness, creativity and human capital. However, situations experienced in different educational and social contexts show that there is still a lot to do to normalise the use of linguistic varieties.

Students' questions such as "where have I to go if I want to learn a *good* Spanish?" or "would I be penalized in the oral exam if I sound Chilean?" are living proof of the existence of linguistic prejudices in education. At a social level, the scenario does not help at all. In 2009, Montserrat Nebrera, a member of the Catalan Parliament mocked the accent of the Spanish Development Ministry, Magdalena Alvarez, stating that her Andalusian accent sounded "like a joke". Adding to that, in January this year, the Mayor of Valladolid, Francisco Javier León de la Riva pointed out that Valladolid is the place where "the purest" Spanish is spoken. Wrong-headed statements like these ones only contribute to create greater confusion and to promote the wrong idea that some Spanish dialectal varieties are better than others.

This article aims to shed light on the importance of integrating dialectal varieties in daily teaching practice as a way to eliminate linguistic prejudices and discrimination amongst students and teachers alike. The ill-founded belief that nonstandard varieties are inherently deficient is, unfortunately, quite widespread and well entrenched within society. As a result, there are still those who consider some varieties inferior and unfit for classroom use, even within education circles. This paper offers language teachers linguistic evidence and literature which prove that declaring a language or language variety superior or inferior on an inherent linguistic basis is wrong-headed, as many sociolinguistics have tirelessly repeated.

The article will look firstly into how language diversity has been handled in the classroom over the years. Secondly, it will explore the relation between language and identity and the problems that could emerge from linguistic prejudices. Finally, results from previous studies will be discussed and used to support our conviction that there are still linguistic prejudices towards language diversity within the education community, a situation that must be urgently changed in order to avoid linguistic discrimination.

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2. Language Diversity in Education

Language diversity has long been (and continues to be) studied in education, particularly the role that standard and nonstandard varieties play in many aspects of schooling, since the latter have tended to be stigmatized. Labov's article "The logic of non-standard English" (1970) is a groundbreaking work where he boldly criticizes schools for putting nonstandard English students at a disadvantage due to teachers' incompetence in dealing with the mismatch between the linguistic environment in the community and that in the school (Temple, C. and Christian, D., 2007: 239). The school, as a powerful institution, has traditionally supported and encouraged the use of standard dialects (Edwards: 1985) or, in other words, the forms and uses of those social groups with more power and social prestige (Martín Rojo, 2003). The traditional misconception between dialects and language as well as matters of power and identity are responsible for this situation.

According to Edwards (2009: 63) "a dialect is a variety of language that differs from others along three dimensions: vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation (accent)"; therefore, as different forms of the same language, dialects are of a like value since they "are potentially functionally equivalent" (*ibidem*: 60). That is to say, they are sufficient for speakers to efficiently communicate, which is the essence of every language. Then, just as it would be ridiculous to argue that English is better than Spanish, dialects cannot be seen in terms of better or worse. However, political, historical and social factors have driven a linguistically naïve public to use dialect "to denote a substandard deviation from some prestigious variety or more 'standard' form" (*ibidem*: 65). This fact, in turn, has created the ill-founded idea that some language varieties are inferior to others.

Nevertheless, standard dialects are also part of the many linguistics varieties that define a language and, contrary to what many people seem to believe, the privileged position of a standard variety or dialect does not rest on a linguistic superiority or intrinsic correction, but on the socio-cultural values given by its speech community (Coseriu 1990). To put it another way, we could say that a language variety is considered standard because of its cultural, political and economic tradition. Broadly speaking a dialect is considered to be standard because "[it is] spoken by educated people, [...] chosen in formal contexts [...] enshrined in print [and the one whose] power and position derive from political circumstance" (Edward 2009: 66). Along the same lines, Lázaro Carreter (1997, quoted in Martín Zorraquino, 2001) explains that the idea of standard is very subjective and it is determined by extra-linguistic factors, whereas Edwards declares that "evaluations of different language varieties are not based upon intrinsic qualities but rest, rather, upon social conventions and preferences [...] related to the prestige and power possessed by speakers of certain 'standard' varieties" (2009: 68).

However, despite the fact that linguistic evidence is abundant and worldwide-recognized linguistics (Giles & Powesland, 1975; Trudgill, 1975; Alvar M., 1996; Edward, J. 2009) endorse the idea that there is no linguistic reason to declare that a dialectal variety is better or worse than another, statements like the ones mentioned in the introduction continue to be heard not only in popular speech but, more surprisingly, in education quarters as well.

In the case of Spanish, the peninsular norm (particularly the northern variety, Castilian) has been traditionally associated with the standard. As a result, many teachers use it as the ideal model to be taught to students, leaving out the richness of its social and cultural diversity. Even though teachers do not openly declare the superiority of this norm, a recent research carried out by the author showed that they are still influenced by the linguistic stereotypes associated with the idea of standard and nonstandard dialects, which could explain why the inclusion of varieties in the Spanish curriculum is non-existent in many educational institutions. Besides, due to the prestige of Castilian, the majority of coursebooks and teaching resources used in many Spanish classrooms are strongly based on this linguistic norm, which contributes to reinforcing and spreading linguistic prejudices and stereotypes.

Hence, it seems that scholars' efforts to eradicate this ill-grounded idea have not had the effect on practice that they hoped for, so further dissemination is needed to make teachers fully aware that "from a scientific perspective, no dialect is better or worse than another, and social systems that routinely privilege some dialects as standard [...] do so on the basis of tradition, not science" (Temple, C. and Christian, D.,

2007: 238). Once, the concept of standardness and nonstandardness has been clarified, the following section is concerned with the linkage between language and identity and the potential problems derived from inequities between languages or language varieties in relation to speakers' identity.

3. Language and Identity

Sociolinguistics have long acknowledged that language varieties not only show different linguistic features, but they also carry social connotations. Thus, it is safe to say that language and identity are intricately related to each other (Moreno Fernández, 2009). As Eckert points out, language variation can be used "to signal important information about aspects of speakers' social identity" (1997: 64), an idea equally supported by Dyer who claims that "particularly phonology or accent, may be used as resources by speakers to project their identity in the world" (2007: 101). In the same vein, Mar-Molinero considers that "not only does language have an instrumental role as a means of communication, it also has an extremely important symbolic role as a marker of identity" (2000: 3). Therefore, there is more to language than merely communication.

In regards to this, Edwards differentiates between the "communicative and symbolic functions" (2009: 55) being the former referring to its instrumental value and the latter to its integrative one. This distinction explains, for instance, why people learning a foreign language for functional reasons could be highly competent in the language but unable to participate fully in its culture. In fact, the author also believes that the symbolic function of a language outlasts the communicative one, which happens when a language is not commonly used for daily communication but becomes crucial for the constitution of its speakers identity.

When it comes to talking about language-identity linkage, it is also crucial to refer to indexicality or "the process by which language comes to be associated with specific locally or contextually significant social characteristics" (Dyer, J., 2007: 102). This concept is so important because, depending on how the speaker's dialect is perceived, it could be detrimental or beneficial to the speaker's identity. Such is the case that if the speaker's dialect is evaluated positively, his or her identity would be reinforced. On the contrary, if the speaker's dialect is negatively evaluated, his or her identity might be threatened. Robert Williams, the precursor of the term Ebonics (referring to the language of African Americans), harshly criticized this negative indexicalization by stating "my language is me. It is an extension of my being, my essence. It is a reflection and badge of my culture. Criticism of my language is essentially a direct attack on my self-esteem and cultural identity" (1997: 209, quoted in Vaughn-Cooke 2007: 271).

A vast amount of studies carried out in this field has proved linguistic behavior to show social stratification, which at the same time reveals beliefs and subjective attitudes. These attitudes are thought to be sparked by the linguistic repertoires from which speakers from a speech community habitually choose; therefore, because of their speech, speakers are labelled as more intelligent, confident, competent, etc. Nevertheless, as the information provided in section two fully accounts for, it is not the language that is being evaluated here but its speakers. In Edwards' words "such assessments [arise] via a sort of linguistic 'triggering' in which reactions to speech are, in reality, reactions to speakers [...] and they reflect something of the listeners' stereotypical attitudes or beliefs (2009: 87). Therefore, a social issue is interpreted as a linguistic one because "such languages attitudes are, in fact, attitudes towards certain groups of people" (*ibidem*: 57).

Research has greatly documented that people normally judge speakers' social origin, and even their personality, by the way they speak, so language is one of the most important variables when it comes to classifying those who surround us into social stereotypes (Blas Arroyo, 1999). Normally, the most prestigious and economically powerful social groups are the ones to set the guidelines in speech communities, so their language and uses are the most positively valued (Ryan, E.B. and Giles, H, 1982; Edwards 2009). Conversely, the language and uses of those groups with a weak social status are usually stigmatized. Being stigmatized entails a large number of inconveniences, such as the denial or impediment to enter "into elite stations in life from education to jobs to housing" (Adam D. Galinsky et al, 2003: 225).

These attitudes are thought to be learned through human socialization (Peter Garret, 2007) therefore, it is very likely they emerge not only in popular imagination, but also in some education circles. This is the

reason why identifying linguistic prejudices and negative attitudes amongst teachers is highly important, as most teachers are not aware they hold these negative attitudes due to the fact that prejudices are so deeply rooted in people's mind. As different authors declare "teachers' language practices can reinforce existing inequities among diverse learners (Ramanathan 2005, quoted in Norton, B. 2010: 361)" and "recreate subordinate student identities" (Lee's 2008, quoted in Norton, B. 2010: 361). Hence, it is clear enough that efforts must be made to eradicate linguistic prejudices as they could jeopardize students' self-esteem or even create identity conflicts. According to Adam D. Galinsky et al. (2003: 224):

When one is a member of a consensually valued group one should derive positive self-esteem from membership in that group. Conversely, when one is a part of a group that is derogated by the dominant culture, self-esteem should suffer.

By including Spanish varieties in the curriculum, students will learn to value and respect other ways of speech and to be proud of the language variety they use, regardless of its social status because "a speaker who is made ashamed of his own language habits suffers a basic injury as a human being" (Halliday, 1968:165, quoted in Edwards 2009:95). Nevertheless, to successfully implement this content, teachers must reflect on their own teaching practices and seek advice and training if need be. But, most importantly, they need to make a great and tenacious effort to identify their own linguistic prejudices in order to eliminate them because, as a product of the socialization process, prejudices are resistant to change.

The next section will discuss results obtained from recent research dealing with teachers' linguistic attitudes to language variation and it will compare these results with the ones obtained from previous studies carried out in different locations.

4. Outcomes from a Previous Study

In 2011, the author of this article carried out exploratory research in the area of Yorkshire and The Humber (U.K.) where the linguistic attitudes of a group of Spanish foreign language teachers were compared. The aim was to reveal their language prejudices when teaching and to find out if language diversity was promoted in class.

To this end, speech samples were gathered from four bilingual university students who belonged to a middle-class population. These were recorded and presented to the male and female teachers who constituted the listener-judges. The theoretical framework behind the study was the Sociology of language (Fishman, 1979) where attitude was understood as "a disposition to react favourably or unfavourably to a class of objects" (Sarnoff, 1970, quoted in Edwards, 1982: 20). The work also followed the mentalist approach based on Lambert's componential model (1964) which views attitudes as comprising three types of components: cognitive (beliefs and stereotypes), affective (evaluations) and behavioural (predispositions to act in a certain way). Regarding the methodology, the study was mainly quantitative where collection and evaluation data tools -such as Lambert's ground-breaking method 'matched guise technique' (1960) and Osgood's semantic differential (1976) were used. Sixteen semantic-differential scales were provided, probing for assessments of attributes like intelligence, responsibility and sophistication, amongst others. Moreover, due to the subjective nature of attitudes, a focalized interview was also used to triangulate the data obtained. Finally, for the data analysis, a variance analysis' method using the F-Fisher statistic was applied.

Results obtained agreed with the stereotypes traditionally associated with standard and non-standard languages revealed in the large literature dealing with language and dialects attitudes: nonstandard language varieties always receive a better evaluation in personal integrity and social attractiveness dimensions, whereas standard ones do so in personal competence and socioeconomic status (power).

On the holistic scale, teachers' linguistic attitudes towards the studied Spanish language varieties (Madrid, Cádiz, Buenos Aires and San Juan de Puerto Rico) were positive. However, their social categorization's hierarchy was different. On the one hand, those varieties closer to the one considered as "standard" (Castilian), Madrid and Buenos Aires, were better rated in the socioeconomic status and personal competence dimension, whereas the ones which diverged (Cádiz and San Juan de Puerto Rico) received a lower scoring. On the other hand, those varieties identified as nonstandard (Cádiz and San Juan de Puerto Rico) were better rated in the personal integrity and social attractiveness dimensions.

A high degree of consistency has been found in relevant literature since early investigations to the most recent ones. In relation to varieties of the same language, the studies of Choy and Dodd (1976 and d'Anglejan and Tucker (1973), both mentioned by Edwards (2009) should be noted. In the first case, teachers were asked to evaluate standard or nonstandard English speaking students and, as expected, children who used the standard dialect were consistently favoured in the ratings. In the second case, d'Anglejan and Tucker provided further confirmation of these patterns in their study of French dialects (Quebec, European and Parisian French) where the informants (French-Canadian students, teachers and factory workers) rejected the idea that Quebec French was inferior to the other two or that Parisian French was the 'best' but, when presented with the taped voices, they downgraded the Canadian variety.

Along the same lines, but within a Spanish-speaking context, Álvar (1986) also studied extensively the linguistic attitudes towards dialectal varieties such as Santo Domingo, Puerto Rico and Cuba in relation to the Castilian one. More recent examples can be found in the compilation made by Lasagabaster (2003) such as the work of Álvarez Muro and Medina (1999) which focused on Andean secondary school students' attitudes towards the main Venezuelan dialectal varieties, the study of Cortés-Torres (where he explores the linguistic attitudes of six university students towards the Puerto Rican Spanish) or the research carried out by Boluda Nicolás (2004) who also directed his attention to education. Despite the different location in time and space, all of them yielded similar results.

Studies involving different languages reveal comparable findings. These types of studies usually take place in bilingual contexts where one language is higher in status than the other. An example of a bilingual study is the research conducted by Lambert in Montreal (1960, quoted in Edwards, 1982) involving French and English. Findings revealed favourable reactions towards the language of prestige from both high-status and lower-status members of the groups (minority-group reaction). Another example in a different context is the work of Cheyne (1970, quoted in Edwards, 2009) in Britain, where he found that both Scottish and English judges tended to rate Scottish speakers as lower in status than their English counterparts. Finally, Ryan and Carranza (1975) also found similar results when considering the evaluations of Standard English and Mexican-accented English.

In Spain the majority of bilingual studies deals with Catalan and Spanish. Gómez Molina (1998), for instance, has largely researched the different language varieties used in the urban area of Valencia (standard Spanish, standard Valencian, nonstandard Spanish and "apitxat", a nonstandard variety spoken in Valencia) and in 2009 González Martínez also assessed the linguistic attitudes towards Catalan, Valencian and Spanish in Els Ports (Castellón) and Matarranya (Teruel). Research focused in Spanish and English is abundant in the United States, where the study of linguistic attitudes is normally related to Spanish language maintenance and linguistic shift towards English, such as the research conducted in Texas by Mejías, Anderson and Carlson in 2002 (quoted in Lasagabaster, 2003).

This relevant literature here confirms that, unfortunately, many people still believe that nonstandard varieties are bad, broken or inferior to standard ones. Similarly, Edwards concludes that "the speech patterns of regional speakers, of ethnic minority-group members, of lower- or working-class populations [...] elicit negative evaluations in terms of perceived status, prestige and levels of skill and education" (2009: 93). Nevertheless, as reflected in our study (where nonstandard varieties were not negatively evaluated on the holistic scale of the attitude), it is fair to say that patterns in language attitudes towards Spanish dialectal varieties within education circles seems to be slightly improving in comparison with results found in early studies. However, there is still a lot to do until standard and nonstandard varieties are equally valued.

5. Conclusion

This paper has shown how a comprehensive and scientific understanding of linguistic diversity is highly needed in education to promote equity and respect for every dialectal variety in the language classroom. As noted earlier, experts have amply provided detailed evidence to demonstrate that different languages or dialects are not intrinsically inferior or superior to others, but different in lexical, grammatical, and phonological features and, above all and most importantly, in social status. This alleged social prestige, ("product of the historical vagaries of sociopolitical dynamics", Edward 2009: 82) is, in fact, the real basis for language evaluation and the one which makes society and teachers wrongly believe that some dialectal

varieties are better than others. As results from many recent and not so recent research (including ours) have shown, it seems that scholars' conclusions have not had significant effect upon the wider community nor have they been fully embraced and integrated into educational practices.

Hence, in order to successfully correct educational belief and practice, as different authors such as Temple, C. and Christian, D. (2007) suggest, sociolinguistic training must be provided for all teachers so that the deficit perspective entrenched in schools is countered. Linguistically informed but non-specialist accessible methods for teaching language variation are scarce. Thus, more teaching and learning materials must be created and adapted from extensive dialectological research to help teachers recognize and teach elements of the structure and use (not just vocabulary) of other Spanish dialectal varieties. By doing this, equitable assessment of nonstandard speakers' language development will be ensured and the equal value of every dialectal variety promoted.

Similarly, Boluda (2004) claims that the interest in language diversity and dialectal uses should be fostered in educational contexts instead of promoting what is strictly standard or normative only. In this way, "students [will] develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographical regions and social roles" (NCTE/NCATE Program Standards, 2003: 7, 13 quoted in Temple, C. and Christian, D. 2007: 243). As mentioned above, sociolinguists have claimed that prejudices are transmitted in the process of socialization, consequently education plays an important role in their growth and expansion. Systematic variation is a natural and normal linguistic phenomenon and this idea must be made clear to teachers and students alike. Therefore, language diversity needs to be seen as an added value rather than an impediment. It is the teacher's responsibility to advocate for an attitude of tolerance and respect where students do not feel ashamed to use their particular dialectal variety in class.

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