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Rebecca Camargo-Diaz
Northeastern Illinois University

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WHAT ROLE DOES FORMAL EDUCATION IN THE US PLAY IN PERCEPTIONS OF 'NON-STANDARDIZED' SPANISH DIALECTS?

Rebecca Camargo-Diaz

Department of Linguistics, Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago IL 60625

In this work, I am exploring the relationship between language, exposure and attitudes towards various dialects of Spanish. To gain a broad and clear understanding of this relationship, I investigated the role that US education plays in perceptions of non-standard dialects of Spanish. Specifically, inquiring if certain factors such as “aesthetic”, “communicative” and “status” play a role in forming perceptions around Spanish variations. The significance of this research is to give insight as to what factors impact the formation of perceptions towards language variations. The research also helps us understand the impact these perceptions hold between interlocutors of the Spanish language.

To execute this project, a sample of 10 consultants who were college educated and Spanish speaking was used. This population was chosen to build understanding of their ideas, opinions on language(s), education, social norms, and life experiences as well as spoken dialect, levels of higher education, exposure to various languages and dialects, etc. Such factors which could impact the formation of social and/or language perceptions. Data was collected via 3 activities (1) a simple questionnaire inquiring about ethnic and language background, (2) listening / rating activity of various Spanish dialects, (3) an interview inquiring consultant’s background and perception of various Spanish dialects. Both thematic and data analysis were used to find relationships between formal education in the US and perceptions of Spanish variations with a focus on non-standard dialects.

The results of this project suggest that language exposure and more specifically exposure to specific language variations plays a role in a listener’s comprehensibility, in addition to the impact held by the ‘example dialect’ used throughout the consultant’s formal education. The data also highlighted factors including motivation to learn, age of acquisition, place of education, example dialect, comfort to communicate with strangers, language experience/ exposure, daily interactions, linguistic experiences abroad, and other languages studied. While the results of this research suggest that an US education can impact perceptions of non-standard Spanish variations it is suggested that more research be done in relation to this topic.