LIAS - Project
Linguistic Identity and Attitudes towards Spanish
UNIVERSITY OF BERGEN, NORWAY
September 2009- December 2012

SUMMARY
Linguistic attitudes result from a complex interplay of social forces and express how language serves individual and collective interests. The LIAS-project aims to study how Spanish-speakers identify with their linguistic variant, their loyalty to it, and the social prejudice, acceptability or stigma associated with it. This research-based knowledge is essential for policy makers, business, industry, NGOs, translators, teachers, scholars and students in any communication exchange with the Hispanic countries.

A pre-project carried out in the Fall of 2008 (in 12 Latin-American countries\(^1\)) found that there is a great interest for research on linguistic attitudes, judged by the amount of local studies identified. However, these studies had a local perspective and were carried out with different methodologies and small samples rendering them difficult to compare. As the first of this kind, the LIAS-project started on September 1\(^{st}\) 2009 aiming to use a global perspective and apply a common methodology. This approach will allow cross-national comparisons in order to identify general tendencies in linguistic attitudes towards the Spanish variants spoken in the capitals of the Hispanic world (including Miami in the United States\(^2\)). The data will be gathered by 28 researchers in the capitals of their native countries using structured interviews. Researchers will apply a structured questionnaire to a stratified sample of 400 speakers per capital and will write a paper about the findings by the end of 2011. A PhD fellow (2010-2012) will analyze the global findings of the project in a doctoral dissertation that will be completed by the end of 2012.

The findings of the LIAS-project will be presented internationally, in scholarly articles, in a book and on a website. The project findings will be available to researchers and students when the project has been completed.

PROJECT ORGANIZATION

Advisory Board:
Dr. Humberto López Morales, Director ASALE
Dr. Atanasio Herranz, RAE
Professor Juan Luis Mejía, Colombian Language Academy

Project Direction
Professor Miguel Ángel Quesada Pacheco
Associate Professor Ana Beatriz Chiquito

\(^1\) Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Uruguay, Puerto Rico and Venezuela.

\(^2\) Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Spain, Uruguay, United States (Miami) and Venezuela.
Research Advisors
Professor Lourdes Montero and Dr. América Menéndez

Project Affiliation
Institute of Foreign Languages
University of Bergen, Norway

Funding
Research Council of Norway (RCN): Latin America Research Program

PROJECT RESEARCHERS

PhD fellow: (to be selected)
A Ph.D. fellowship was announced on October 17th, 2009. The selection process will be completed at the end of the year. Once selected, the PhD fellow will be appointed and will start working at the beginning of 2010. The PhD appointment is for three years and the dissertation will be held at the end of 2012. The PhD fellow's main responsibility is to carry out a cross-national study of all the data collected in order to describe the linguistic attitudes towards Spanish in the Hispanic World from a general perspective. Together with the project researchers, the PhD fellow will also contribute to identify concrete applications of the project findings.

Country Specialists

Argentina: Lilián Carolina Pinardi, Gabriela Llull
Bolivia: Maria Juana Aguilar, Reina Doris Ayala Carrasco, Lillet Jovana Huanca Ortuño
Chile: Darío A. Rojas G.
Colombia: Julio Alexander Bernal
Costa Rica: Annette Calvo Shadid
Cuba: Roxana Sobrino,
Dominican Republic: Glennys M. Severino
Ecuador: Esthela Flores
El Salvador: Erick Rivera
Guatemala: Ana Luisa Acevedo
Honduras: Hilcia Hernández
Mexico: Sonia Elisa Morett
Nicaragua: Zobeyda Catalina Zamora
Panama: Taray Tinoco
Paraguay: María Celeste Saldivar D.
Peru: Ana Gloria Arias
Puerto Rico: Carla M. Mojica
Spain: Aitor Yraola
Uruguay: Elizabeth García de los Santos
Venezuela: Hecsil Yosibel Coello
USA: (To be determined)
PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Relevance
Spanish is the native language of around 500 million speakers, almost 90% of them, in Latin-America. It’s remarkable, therefore, that only partial, local and methodologically limited studies have been carried out about linguistic identity related to Spanish in the region. This is the first study of attitudes towards Latin-American Spanish from a Pan-Hispanic perspective, and also the first in which the whole Spanish-speaking region will be studied, including Spain (Madrid). All the stages of the project and all sub-projects (including master and PhD thesis) will follow the same theoretical research approach and methodology. This will assure that the research results will be valid for all the Spanish-speaking countries, including Spain, and that all results will be mutually comparable. The pre-project carried out in October and November 2008 revealed a great interest for this topic, but the results also show that the current research needs a global and comparable methodology since the existing studies lack comparability and their results can not be generalized.

The unifying forces of the prevalent linguistic norm in the Spanish-speaking regions have been strong for centuries (Mar Molinero, 1995) and the debate about their pervasiveness is surprisingly limited. However, there are clear signs that this situation is changing. We aim to identify in which way it is transforming attitudes towards Spanish and the linguistic identities of Latin Americans and Spaniards. The results of the project will contribute to acquire in-depth and systematic knowledge about the linguistic identity of Spanish-speakers in Latin-America by studying their attitudes to their own Spanish variant and that of others. With this background knowledge, native speakers as well as other users and learners of Spanish will be able to better understand how linguistic identity, attitudes and strategies are formed and used to achieve successful communication. This may have an important impact on policy making in general, on education sectors, international and business relations within Latin America and in all forms of communication exchange with the Spanish-speaking world.

2. Objectives
The main objective of the project is to identify the linguistic attitudes towards Latin-American Spanish and their impact on individuals and society. The specific objectives are: 1. Identify attitudinal tendencies towards specific linguistic Spanish variants, how users identify with them and how attitudes contribute to form linguistic identities. 2. Determine the degree of Spanish-speakers' identification with their linguistic variant, given the changing centralized unified norm for Spanish. 3. Determine the degree speakers are loyal towards their linguistic variants and whether attitude-bearing groups have changed their views about the unifying linguistic norms. 4. Study how electronic media technologies and international broadcasting in Spanish affect these changes. 5. Make recommendations for stakeholders on how to use the findings in their communication exchanges with Spanish speakers. 6. Publish an annotated bibliography, a book, a website and scholarly articles.
3. Background and Status of Knowledge

The main focus of the LIAS-project is centered on the attitudes towards the Spanish language in relation to different varieties encountered within it and on how they form the linguistic identity of its speakers. In the social sciences, the concept of attitudes is a central one. It has served as a variable of great importance in numerous sociolinguistic studies (Cooper & Fishman 1974:5). In addition, general attitudes towards language practices represent a cultural collective focus, which can be seen as the outcome of social forces serving the needs and interests of individuals and society. Hence, the study of individual and collective reactions towards the use of different varieties of a language may lead to a better understanding of how speakers of these varieties see themselves and are perceived by others as individuals and as members of a group or a community.

The study of linguistic attitudes as such emerged within the discipline of sociolinguistics and cognitive sociology in the 1940s, primarily related to the English language. At first a large part of the studies focused on sociolinguistic problems related to bilingualism. Similarly in the field of peninsular Spanish, the majority of studies that have been undertaken focus on the bilingualism and attitudes between Catalan, Valencian, Galician or other minority languages, and Castilian-Spanish. In Latin America, the topic that has been most studied is the relationship between indigenous languages and Latin American Spanish.

The interest in the study of linguistic attitudes in Spanish speaking America dates back to the 1960s, to the work of R. Borello (1964) who studied Argentinean attitudes towards the Spanish language. During the 1970s the academic interest in the topic increased. In this decade a few studies were particularly prominent. M. Alvar (1971) is recognized as a pioneer in the study of linguistic attitudes in Colombian Amazonia, taking as his point of departure the attitudes that are based on the linguistic contact between native languages and the Spanish language. For example, in 1973, Wölck mapped linguistic attitudes of Spanish speakers and indigenous people in Peru, in a study that according to Miguel A. Carranza (1982) was a major contribution in the area of linguistic attitudes. In addition, the attitudes towards Spanish-speakers in the United States, the largest minority in that country, have also been studied, especially with regard to attitudes towards speakers of Mexican origin and their identity as a minority. Other important contributions are Rojas et al. (1983) work in Argentina about Argentinean attitudes and the linguistic norm and the study by A. Cohen (1974) about American Mexicans.

During the 1980s one could discern an interest in studying attitudes along two different directions, at the national level one the hand, and on the other at the regional level. The major part of the former is, with few exceptions, empirical. Among the exceptions are for instance, an article by L. Bartos (1971) on the attitudes of Spanish speakers towards their native language and the work by J. Umaña (1990) which is of a strictly theoretical nature. The empirically oriented research includes field work with informants, or using the technique called matched guise, which means that one uses “judges” who express their opinion about a way of speaking after listening to a recording.

A pioneer study in the field of student attitudes towards their native language and towards different languages in their environment was undertaken by R. Amparo (1988) among Bolivian secondary school students. This is a study that would receive
certain attention several years later. Other limited studies have been done about attitudes towards speakers of major native languages in Latin America, such as Guarani in Paraguay, Quechua in the Andean countries, Nahuatl and Mayan in Mexico and Guatemala, as well as English in the Caribbean coastal regions and islands. However, empirical studies on the attitudes of Latin-American Spanish speakers about attitudes towards their own language varieties and to other varieties of Spanish are extremely scarce and geographically very limited. We will take into account the results of two important studies: the first, by Sedano & Bentivoglio (1999) about linguistic attitudes in Colombia, Venezuela and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, and the second one by X. Jaén (1991) about linguistic attitudes in the province of Guanacaste, Costa Rica.

During the pre-project, a large number of studies on linguistic attitudes were identified locally in the 12 capitals studied and fifty page bibliography has already been compiled. These studies are not very accessible and difficult to identify outside their local domain. So far, these results also show that the academic study of linguistic attitudes in Latin America has been characterized by a strong interest and scarce resources. Empirical studies are therefore often locally oriented with few informants and do not provide a solid basis for generalization of the findings. The opportunity to make this literature visible and accessible adds an important dimension to current project. This bibliography was collected in twelve countries during October-November 2008 and its relevance gives us reason to move ahead and collect more valuable scientific literature on this topic in the whole region with the aim of publishing a more complete bibliography later on.

4. Approaches, Hypotheses and Choice of Method
Ladegaard (2002:15) considers that there are at least two definitions of \textit{attitude}. The behaviorist, which maintains that it is possible to deduce the attitudes of a person just by observing her or his actions. The second one, that can be called mentalistic, considers attitudes as mental states, according to which the subject is inclined to act in a certain way (Ladegaard, 2002:16). The latter (used by many sociolinguists) has three main components: the cognitive, the affective and the attitudinal (Ajzen et al., in Baker 1995: 13). The \textit{cognitive} component represents a person’s knowledge and previous experiences, which affect the individual’s formation of attitudes. The \textit{affective} components are the feelings and the emotional states of a person. Finally the \textit{attitudinal} component indicates the intention of the individual to act in certain ways in a specific context (Baker 1995: 13). An attitude is then the outcome or the interplay of: a) personal knowledge and experience, b) the inclination to act in a certain way, and c) of personal feelings. Consequently, the linguistic attitude is the emotive action and reaction that a language or a language variant may provoke in an individual. Because of this fact, linguistic attitudes are not interpreted as only related to language, but as how language serves the individual and the community as a whole in forming their linguistic \textit{identities}. The study therefore will take into consideration social and cultural conditions as factors that may have an influence on attitudes. Age, gender, country of origin and social strata are examples of such factors.

When social and cultural conditions are taken into account, it’s possible to assume that linguistic attitudes are closely related to \textit{social acceptability} (Bourdieu, 1992). Whilst one linguistic variant may be positively valued in one group, another
variant is less accepted. The least accepted varieties are often confronted by attitudes charged with *prejudice and stigma*. Molina et al. (1986: 114) call this phenomenon *linguistic inequality*, and present three different types: a) subjective inequality, b) linguistic inequality per se and c) communicative inequality. This study will focus mainly on the first kind of inequality, namely, on how people think about other peoples languages, in other words, it will describe the phenomenon of *linguistic prejudices*. The linguistic varieties that are confronted by negative attitudes or prejudices often coincide with non-standard language varieties. According to St. Clair (1982: 164), a language is just one of many dialects that are spoken within a linguistic community or nation. However, what distinguishes a *language* from other *dialects* is the fact that it is the variety legitimated by the state and/or society for use in education, in public mass media, in literature and in the governmental apparatus. This is the linguistic variant that is found in dictionaries that play a major part in the idealized language (St. Clair 1982: 165). Related to acceptability, other concepts are also relevant, such as *status*, *prestige* and the attainment of social advantages or *power*.

*Status* is the relative position that a member of a social unit occupies due to the value assigned to this person by other members of the group (Haller & Portes 1973: 51). Therefore, the status of an individual will always depend on the perceptions and evaluations by others. An important aspect in this case might be the way in which a person speaks (Cargile et al. 1994:112), which assigns a person a specific linguistic status. According to Winsa (1998: 122), the level of stigma coincides with linguistic status and consequently, the way a person speaks affects a person’s status positively or negatively depending on the social acceptability of the language variant used.

A person’s *prestige* is related to the respect and admiration enjoyed as a member of a social group. Prestige is a concept related to status and consequently also counts on social acceptability. Traditionally the factors of prosperity, power and prestige have been considered determinants of the status of a person (Haller & Portes 1973: 51). Accordingly one may speak of prestige as a sub category of the concept of status. As regards the level of formal education, it has not been considered a factor in the establishment of the position in a social unit, but as a determinant of the three factors mentioned above (cf. Haller & Portes 1973: 55). Therefore, a person’s level of education does not necessarily determine his or her status. Nevertheless, it may serve as an indicator of the prosperity, power and prestige of this person, because it provides indications of his or her status. Therefore in the present study the level of education will be used as a social variable, together with age and gender.

Attitudes do not always result in action. Nevertheless, when an attitude towards a linguistic variant is translated into action, it may entail consequences for the person who uses this variant, especially if this is done from a *power* position. In this case, a person may have advantages or disadvantages in certain situations depending on the status and prestige of his or her linguistic variant. An important outcome of this study will be to identify how this power-depending situations are viewed by Spanish-speakers, something that has not yet been done for the whole Spanish-speaking world.

**4.1. Hypothesis.** Spanish-speakers have been pressured for several centuries to adopt a Euro-centered linguistic identity (Mar Moinero, 1997) and a supra-national unified linguistic norm for Spanish. Given the fact that this situation is changing, it is
reasonable to believe that Spanish-speakers feel an increasing self-esteem for their own linguistic variant. We could then formulate the following hypothesis: 1. Spanish-speakers in Latin-America experience today a stronger identification and pride for their own linguistic variant than earlier generations. 2. Spanish-speakers today are more loyal to their linguistic variants. 3. Groups that have been traditionally bearers of linguistic attitudes have changed their linguistic ideals in such a way that today, Spanish-speakers are aware of new relative concepts of the Spanish language in contrast to the centuries-old one, Euro-centered, academic and normative. 4. Spanish TV programs such as *telenovelas* have been a catalyst for an increased awareness of Latin-American Spanish identity.

### 4.2. Methodological Framework.

Studies of linguistic attitudes usually follow three types of methods, both with quantitative and qualitative data: (a) The *societal treatment approach*, a content analysis of languages and linguistic varieties, such as historical and sociological observation, like the ones we may find in ethnographic studies. (b) *Direct approximations*, including surveys, questionnaires and interviews. (c) *Indirect approximations*, in which the research object is not made explicit (Ladegaard 2002:36, Garret et. al 2003: 14) and no questions are asked directly about the qualities of a certain way of speaking. Within this category, the most frequently used method is the “matched-guise” (MGT), in which a group of “judges” listens to the recording of a text read by the same person using two or more linguistic varieties. Using the MGT technique, the value judgments are made about the attitudes towards the person reading the specific language variant (age, gender, level of formal education and social class, for example), and not the language per se.

The selected methodology for gathering the quantitative data is a survey approach (*direct approximation*) with structured interviews. Samples are drawn in each capital as stratified random samples and their size is determined based on a 95% level of confidence (400 informants in each one of the capitals, except Guatemala City, with 396), with a total of eight thousand structured interviews applying a pre-defined questionnaire. The impact of gender and age is studied, as well as education and socio-economic status of the subjects.

Twenty indepth interviews (individually or in groups) will also be undertaken with representatives of certain sectors considered carriers of linguistic attitudes, such as teachers and media representatives. The objective of these interviews is to identify attitudes about concepts such as linguistic norms for Spanish, linguistic policies for large social sectors, and the models one believes should be applied in Spanish language education, mass media, etc.

### 5. Brief History and Project Plans.

The LIAS-project preparation started with a Seminar on Linguistic Attitudes funded by the Department of Foreign Languages and held at the University of Bergen on September 18th 2008. Professors Humberto López Morales (ASALE, RAE) and Atanasio Herranz (RAE) gave two conferences on the subject at this seminar. In June the same year, a grant application was sent to the Norwegian Research Council in order to fund a feasibility study of a larger project on this topic in all the Spanish-speaking countries. This pre-project received a grant from the Norwegian Research Council (NRC) in August 2008 and the feasibility study was carried out in September-October 2008 by the project directors, a professional administrator.
and 12 linguists in 12 capitals in Latin America (Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Uruguay, Puerto Rico and Venezuela). The pre-project estimated the budget, the data gathering logistics and assessed the feasibility of a larger project. Based on these results, a grant proposal was sent to the NRC’s Latin America Program on November 26th, 2008.

The LIAS project received funding in May 2009 and its initial objectives were redefined because the sum received was lower than the one applied for. Due to the lower budget, Belize and Brazil will not be included in the study as initially planned. The number of in-depth interviews has been also reduced to twenty (from the 120 that had been planned). As a consequence, interviews with important policy makers (government and industry) will not be done this time unless additional funding can be secured.

The LIAS-project started formally on September 1st 2009 and an opening Conference was held at Eafit-University, in Medellín, Colombia, in September (16-20). Most of the LIAS-project researchers attended the conference and worked together revising the questionnaire for the structured interviews and discussing the theoretical and methodological issues related to the project. In October and November of 2009, the questionnaire will be reviewed by all project researchers and two pilot interviews will be conducted in each capital. At the beginning of January 2010, the final questionnaire will be ready to use.

The data will be gathered in the capitals of the following Spanish speaking countries in 2010: Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Spain, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Uruguay and Venezuela. In addition, Miami (Florida, EEUU) will be included in this project because of the special conglomerate of native speakers of Spanish from all over the continent. (With additional funding, interviews in Los Angeles will also be carried out.) The data analysis will be the main task in 2011 and a final conference will be held in 2012 to present the main findings and the reports from the studies in each country, as well as the first draft of a book summarizing the project results.

References


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