

Sociolinguistic variation and *pluricentricity*: postface to *Case Studies in Honor of Anna Maria Escobar*

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## **Beyond contact**

The seven original papers included in this volume provide a valuable perspective on the rich array of linguistic variation that characterizes Basque-, Peruvian-, Catalan-, Mexican-, and Latino Spanish in contact with other languages and dialects around the world. Rather than trying to summarize the multiplicity of linguistic phenomena and individual contact situations presented in these papers, however, I would like to focus on some new insights that these papers bring to discussions of *pluricentricity* in Spanish.

## **Pluricentricity**

Since Kloss' (1978) work on the modern history of literary German, sociolinguists and language historians have been referring to the existence of multiple coordinated language norms within large language communities as *pluricentricity*<sup>1</sup>. In his classic treatise, Kloss proposes that German is a 'pluricentric high language' that developed into today's literary High German during the modern period through the (inter)action of multiple norm-setting regional and supra-regional centers that competed for the codification and societal acceptance of local forms. In Clyne's (1992) edited book, titled *Pluricentric languages: differing norms in different countries*, the concept of pluricentricity was extended to other languages. Clyne and his co-authors also added two key observations to Kloss' initial insights: they introduced the concept of dominance among varieties of a pluricentric language and elaborated on the importance of, what they called, 'interacting centers' in the formation of supra-regional norms.

Thompson's (1992) paper, *Spanish as a Policentric Language*, included in Clyne's (1992) edited volume, was the first in a long series of articles that showed the historical formation of multiple centers that defined the norms characterizing Spanish as a pluricentric language today. Seven diagnostic criteria have been recognized for pluricentric languages (see also Clyne 2004 and Muhr 2012):

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<sup>1</sup> *Polycentricity* and *pluricentricity* are used synonymously in the literature, although the latter seems to be the preferred choice in the most recent discussions of this question today (see Muir 2012).

- (1) *Occurrence*: The language is recognized in at least two nations that represent two poles of societal language norms and that might define these norms in mutual negotiations and competition with each other (see also point 4).
- (2) *Linguistic distance* (Abstand): All supra-regional varieties of the language are linguistically distinct and socially unique, which guarantees that they are able to act as distinct symbols of collective identity.
- (3) *Status*: The language has the status of an official state or regional language in more than one state.
- (4) *Acceptance*: The status of the language as a pluricentric variety is recognized by members of the speech community. Multiple norm-setting national and regional centers develop to codify and disseminate information on supra-regional norms.
- (5) *Social relevance*: Each local and supra-local norm is overt and fully relevant for social identity practices for speakers of the language.
- (6) *Codification*. Supra-local and national norms in the language are established and used by the social elite and state institutions.
- (7) *Dissemination*. The language is transmitted at home and in the public sphere. It is taught at all levels and is promoted abroad.

In the last two decades, interest in pluricentricity grew considerably. The socio-political histories of many pluricentric languages were analyzed and research on pluricentricity developed into a full-blown theoretical construct known as ‘pluricentric theory’. The goal is to provide a framework for modeling the codification and maintenance of norms in standardized varieties of the same language that have some degree of official status and are more or less dominant with respect to other varieties. At times, however, discussions of the socio-political implications of pluricentricity seem to be in need for more empirical observations of speakers’ attitudes and actual language use. Papers in the present volume provide us with valuable, first-hand observations of the social dynamics of norm selection and norm diffusion in several varieties of Spanish and, as such, contribute to the empirical grounding of the notion of pluricentricity.

### **Social relevance, community input, and the role of parental transmission**

By dividing the heavily bilingual region of the Basque country into low and high contact areas, each exemplified by a city (Bilbao and Bermeo, respectively), Maria Puy Ciriza examines the interplay of multiple social factors in the transmission and diffusion of the “extended” or “vibrant” trill, one of the salient phonetic characteristics of Basque Spanish. Her results indicate that bilinguals from low contact areas where Basque is more predominant than Spanish do not use the Basque Spanish extended alveolar trill much at all. Surprisingly enough, the greatest likelihood of the use of this flagship feature of Basque identity is to be attributed not to parents’ Basque origins, but to the consistent frequency of the input in previous generations’ speech: unless the parents also originate from high contact areas, the input received through parental

transmission is insufficient for the authentic acquisition and subsequent transmission of this feature.

The effects of transmission as a home language and exposure to local speech are also at play in Justin Davidson's speaker groups in his study of a well-known marker of Catalan identity in Barcelonan Catalan Contact Spanish: the voicing of the intervocalic voiceless alveolar fricative [s] to voiced [z]. As an answer to his question whether [z] has entered the formal registers of this local variety of Spanish, he finds that [z] has not yet become a norm for speakers with ancestry and everyday exposure to Barcelonan Catalan but, together with some language internal factors, contact influence is an important factor in the social relevance of this feature in Barcelona's vibrant urban bilingual community.

Isabel Velázquez's paper on Spanish use and viability in nineteen first-generation families examines social relevance and parental transmission in the city of Lincoln, Nebraska. It provides an extensive analysis of children's reported use and perceptions of competence in Spanish contrasted with reported parental strategies for language maintenance. Velázquez shows that in this low vitality context where first generation immigrant families tend to live in low density networks that lack the intricate social stratification of the English-speaking majority language community, neither consistent input in the home language, nor parents' positive attitudes is sufficient for the successful transmission of the language. Literacy (according to the parents) and bilingualism leading to upward social mobility (according to both the children and the parents) are singled out as desirable means to make the home language relevant for the social lives of the upcoming generations.

These three papers provide unique insights into the relevance of local community norms in the identity practices of speakers of Basque-, Catalan-, and Latino-Spanish. They show that parental transmission of the minority language only leads to authentic pronunciation practices and language maintenance beyond the first generation when it is simultaneously aligned with community influence reinforcing that transmission. Such community influence can take the form of access to bilingual speakers who can act as models of literacy and social mobility as well as systematic Catalan-, Basque-, or Mexican-Spanish language use in formal and informal registers by members of the wider community.

### **Social relevance and acceptance along the US-Mexican border**

Drawing upon Anna María Escobar's notion of cultural communicative needs (Escobar 1997a, 1997b, 2001), Claudia Holguín examines the use of innovative quotatives *y yo*, ('and I'), *así* ('like') and its variants among Mexican urban youth (15-29 years old) in the US-Mexican border community of Juarez, Mexico. She argues for the social relevance of "a particular current Mexican identity" linked to "an elite white style and culture" that is developing among upper and middle class youth and appears to be spreading in this US-Mexico border region. She shows

convincingly that innovative quotatives in her corpus echo linguistic innovations north of the border and yet they are defined in a particular adolescent social structure (network A) and evaluated in contrast with adolescent practices from dissimilar social networks (B and C).

Seventeen immigrant women provide questionnaire-based and interview-type information on the social and linguistic integration of highly-educated Mexican immigrants in Patricia MacGregor-Mendoza's study of *profesionista* wives. While these socially advantaged bilinguals and their families stand in stark contrast to Velasquez's working class families, their attitudes towards bilingualism are quite similar: they unanimously recognize a strong instrumental value to English and they have strong emotional ties to Spanish that they pledge to maintain within their families and community. The main difference lies between the instrumental qualities attributed to Spanish: while Velasquez's Nebraska families do not associate positive cultural capital with the language, *profesionistas* consider it an important tool for social and economic progress within their own social circles.

Although operating in different societal contexts, both of these papers shed light on the cultural acceptance of local language practices and attitudes in two bilingual Spanish-English communities on the US-Mexican border. Holguin's youngsters and MacGregor-Mendoza's respectable *profesionista* wives are trend-setters: by defining the linguistic and cultural identities of 'white elite femaleness' and that of the 'upwardly mobile Latino bilingual', they echo the dominant culture while simultaneously acting as catalysts of social integration in the community.

### **Social relevance and linguistic distance in Andean Spanish**

How do how grammatical features such as evidentiality, tense, and aspect come together to form larger structures in local varieties of Andean Spanish in contact with Quechua? Based on elicited Spanish oral narratives from adult Quechua-Spanish bilinguals from two regional varieties of Peru, Liliana Sánchez's thorough semantic analysis addresses the above question in a combined formal and fieldwork-type analysis. Sánchez unveils new evidence of convergence with Quechua features and their morphosyntactic configuration from three innovative verb forms, but she suggests that the observed reduction of linguistic distance—possible convergence—between the two varieties could be due to speaker-specific socio-pragmatic factors: the less educated Huánuco group approached the picture-based story telling task as a description, while the more educated speakers in the Cuzco group performed actual oral narratives. With both groups story-telling strategies activating different semantic features that provided the input for empirical analyses, contact-based explanations should be disfavored.

Pragmatic-semantic values are also at play in Susana de los Heros and Margarita Jara's paper that investigates *así* as a discourse marker in Peruvian Andean Spanish. Featuring three sociolinguistic groups, highly educated Limeños, native speakers of Andean Spanish from Lima, and Spanish-Quechua bilinguals, the authors find that *así* holds epistemic functions in *Limeño*

Spanish when combined with stative verbs. These epistemic functions, however, appear to have a broader scope in the speech of monolingual Spanish and Quechua-Spanish bilinguals. The authors find that their results can be interpreted in terms of reduction of linguistic distance due to contact: they argue for a dialectal continuum in Peruvian Spanish where monolingual Spanish speakers serve as a hinge between the Coastal (e.g. Lima) and Andean varieties (e.g. Ayacucho).

Taken together, these two papers inform discussions of pluricentricity by showing the inherent tension between language-internal, speaker-specific, and/or external explanations of contact phenomena. With the other five papers offered to Anna María Escobar, they will be recognized for their contribution to an enviably rich body of research on contemporary varieties of Spanish.