

INVESTIGATING LANGUAGE ATTITUDES WITH SPANISH  
HERITAGE SPEAKERS: DIALECT PREFERENCES AND  
PERCIEVED STANDARD LANGUAGE

by

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It could be thought that our internal perception of language doesn't have many significant effects on the world around us however social perception of speech other than our own can translate into linguistic hierarchies and discrimination. The research presented aims to analyze the current sociolinguistic environment of Spanish, specifically in the U.S. The purpose of the research further investigates to what extent social factors, such as parental linguistic attitudes, have an effect on the child's language attitudes later in life. The main questions posed are: what dialect preferences are present for Spanish heritage speakers in the U.S.? What social factors during childhood contribute to linguistic biases? A Qualtrics survey was distributed to heritage speakers through Prolific where they were asked about dialect preferences and ratings of standardness towards four dialects in Spanish as well as their experience with Spanish during childhood. Results found that negative comments from caregivers during childhood, dialect contact and patriotism had significant effects on language attitudes. The implications of this research can be applied to education that challenges non-standard language ideologies. Despite this, further research should be conducted analyzing other social factors and speaker groups. Identifying where negative linguistic attitudes originate from can have us rethink how we teach language both within formal instruction and at home to combat linguistic discrimination.

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## Terminology

### **Native vs. Non-Native Speech**

Native speech is considered a speaker's first language they learned whereas non-native speech would be defined as any language other than their first language.

### **Accent vs. dialect**

Accent is a broader term to refer to how a language is spoken that specifically refers to the pronunciation of the language. Dialect has more room for variety in that there are differences in terms of vocabulary and grammar (Bude 2022). Dialects are more subject to regional variation and are categorized geographically for the Spanish language.

### **Spanish heritage speaker**

Spanish Heritage Speakers are typically Spanish speakers that live in the U.S., that have a personal, familial, or community connection to Spanish. They're typically proficient in both languages, however have a dominant (more proficient) language (Potowski 2011). While heritage speakers are recognized as Spanish-speakers (Rosa 2019), for the purpose of this paper *native-speakers* will refer to speakers who were born and reside in a Spanish-speaking country and *heritage speakers* will refer to bilinguals who were born and reside in the U.S.

### **Hispanic vs. Latino**

A speaker who identifies as Hispanic is someone who's ancestry is from a country where the first language is Spanish. A speaker who identifies as Latino is typically someone who has origins in Latin America (which includes Mexico, Central and South America and the Caribbean). For example, someone from Latin America can be both Hispanic and Latino, whereas someone from Spain is typically considered only Hispanic (Alexander 2022).

## Introduction

For how much language we produce in a day, we seldom think about its broader effects on social structures and perceptions of others. While it could be thought that social perceptions of language just exist within the smaller circle of people surrounding us, how we perceive non-native speech than our own have bigger effects our perception and treatment of others and can often contribute to systemic hierarchies, stereotyping of certain groups and discrimination (Walsh 2021). When talking about systemic issues of racism and discrimination, it is crucial to consider the role of language and how we oftentimes use it to oppress certain groups. The ideology of “standardized language” commonly known as Standard Language Ideology, is oftentimes used to perpetuate linguistic discrimination (Paffey 2012).

The Spanish language is one of the most spoken languages on earth (Ghosh 2020), with a wide variety of dialects from different regions in the world. Spanish is the host language for a large variety of different cultures in Latin America, that all have different customs traditions and values. Within each country, there is typically a specific dialect associated with it (Niño-Murcia 2011). Given it’s linguistic and cultural variety, it is crucial to understand further speaker’s perceptions of non-native dialects, within a broader social and cultural context. In the U.S. more specifically, Latinos make up one of the largest ethnic groups with the most common nationality groups being from Mexico, Puerto Rico, El Salvador, Dominican Republic and Cuba (Moslimani 2023). It is important to understand the social dynamics within Spanish-speakers to truly recognize the root of phenomenon such as linguistic intergroup bias (Assilaméhou-Kunz 2020). It has been found that children that have a complex linguistic biography oftentimes have a more pragmatic view of language (Johnsen 2021), in other words they are more flexible to variation within language. If true within heritage speakers in the U.S., it would be interesting to see if the

same definitions of linguistic hierarchies that occur primarily in Latin America between speakers of different dialects are mirrored with heritage speakers in the U.S.. And if so, how we can educate people to better recognize and reject linguistic stereotypes and discrimination.

**The research questions include:**

- Are there social preferences towards native dialects within Spanish for Spanish Heritage Speakers in the U.S.?
- What social factors from childhood influence language attitudes in young adulthood? Are there any biases that are present?



## Literature Review

### Contextualizing the diversity of Spanish

The diverse nature of Spanish leads to many different varieties of speech, more specifically regional dialects. In the U.S. for example, the native language that most people speak would be English whereas a regional dialect would be Southern American English (a variation of the native language that people speak in a certain region). This is universal for all languages, where Spanish has a vast variety of language with dialects that derive from Castillian (from Spain) as well as indigenous languages (Niño-Murcia 2011). For Spanish-speakers, the differences in speech are normally identified through nationality or geographical region (Niño-Murcia 2011). Certain words or lexicon, serve as “markers” for a certain nationality or identity. For example, the difference in saying “dude” in Mexico (*güey*) versus in Colombia (*parcero*) are fairly easy colloquial indicators of dialectal differences for Spanish-speakers. Given its variety, speech preferences derive from social definitions of prestigious vs. non-prestigious language (McEvoy 2017) as well as preference towards one’s own group membership compared to a foreign group (Imuta 2020).

Spanish heritage speakers in the U.S. possess a unique variety of Spanish, in that they are disproportionately exposed to English and oftentimes other dialects in Spanish that influence their overall speech production and perception (Potowski 2011). This language contact can produce phenomenon such as language accommodation, dialect mixing and code-switching (Potowski 2011). Potowski (2011) explains that Latinos living in the U.S. with different nationalities can end up developing the same lexicon due to contact. This is attributed to linguistic factors like “frequency, semantic weight, and the desire to avoid homonyms and their resulting miscommunications” (Potowski 2011, 582) however is also greatly influenced by class,

education and race that influence linguistic attitudes, which in turn affect the usage of certain words (Potowski 2011). Additionally, it is mentioned that race and proficiency in English have a great influence on the lexicon of the U.S. variety of Spanish (Potowski 2011). Additionally, Spanish heritage speakers, by many English and Spanish speakers, are not viewed as proficient in either language, a concept referred to as languagelessness (Rosa 2019) and are often seen as inferior to native speakers (Loza 2019).

In terms of young heritage speakers growing up in a Spanish-speaking household, current research is unclear on the effect dialect mixing has on the child's speech outcome. Potowski (2011) mentions that if both parents have the same dialect the child is likely to pattern that, however it is unclear if there is a dominant dialect that the child enacts if parents have different dialects, also known as intrafamilial dialect contact (Potowski 2011) Overall, children that tend to have a dialect mixture like this oftentimes create new dialects (Potowski 2011). This social factor could have great influences on the child's preferences towards certain dialects and language attitudes later in life. Additionally, it also emphasizes the complexity of the environment of Spanish in the U.S. in that children are receiving many different varieties of language and produce a new dialect based off of their environment.

### **The role of prestigious language in social perceptions**

*Language Ideologies and the 'Globalization of Standard' Spanish Raising the Standard* (2021) provides insight on the push to standardize the Spanish language through the Real Academia Española (RAE). Standardizing "brings to a language a uniformity and consistent norm and form of writing and speaking" (Straaijer 2019) however oftentimes it can give way to negative attitudes, stereotypes and discrimination towards speakers who don't speak what is considered "correctly" or the prestigious form of the language. The standardization of any

language is largely recognized in the linguistic community as unrealistic (Walsh 2021) as language is multifaceted and has great variety. The Real Academia Española (RAE), located in Spain, prioritizes the idea of unity within the Spanish language which is marketed through their motto *limpia, fija y da esplendor* (unify, clean and resolve). While it may appear that it promotes unity, in reality it promotes a “correct” version of Spanish and can undermine certain dialects that stray from that (Paffey 2012). Paffey (2012) argues that while the RAE has acknowledged that there are inevitable changes in language, the idea is still perpetuated through Spanish media that the standard Spain has created is the golden standard for Spanish and “the spiritual centre where language grows” (Paffey 2012, 98). However, the Castilian dialect (Spanish from Spain) is not obviously representative of Spanish speakers. The RAE has been known for correcting more low-prestige dialects, specifically U.S. Spanish varieties, through the book *Hablando bien se entiende la gente* (Loza 2017). Overall the use of the RAE to correct language contributes to language hierarchies, in that it promotes a correct form of language and demans other dialects. McEvoy (2017) has stated Castillian Spanish as most prestigious, according to native speakers, which partially can be attributed to the involvement of the RAE.

### **Social categorization through language**

Given the influence of the RAE, the *Handbook of Hispanic Sociolinguistics* (2011) explains the dynamics of Spanish speakers both in Latin America and the U.S. Judgements as to where a person is from are made almost instantly when a person starts talking before the brain can even decode the meaning of a sentence (Niño-Murcia 2011). Spanish-speakers typically categorize others based on nation states (Niño-Murcia 2011). This incorporates the idea of in-group vs. out-group bias where consciously or unconsciously when hearing someone with non-native speech, one identifies as belonging to a different group comparatively (Niño-Murcia

2011) which, in the case with Spanish would most likely be someone from a different Spanish-speaking country. This relates to Social Identity Theory (Niño-Murcia 2011), the idea that you favor your own membership group out of two groups. Overall, this establishes how we categorize people through language and that identity and language are complexly intertwined. This crossover between language and identity will be explored in this paper, more specifically to what extent are identification and preferences towards certain dialects related.

In addition to categorizing speakers, language can be used as a form to discriminate against someone more on the macro-level known as intergroup discrimination, through institutions or government, such as English-only curriculum in the U.S. It can also be more on a micro-level, known as interpersonal discrimination, through one's personal membership to a language group (Wright 2007). In the case with the current study, it will be investigating more interpersonal discrimination and focusing on heritage speaker's individual language attitudes. Wright (2007) suggests two main approaches to combat language discrimination; 1.) Intergroup Contact Theory which suggests that with more contact with individuals from different language groups, prejudice reduces overtime 2.) the incorporation of languages other than the dominant language in the classroom can be beneficial socially and academically to heritage speakers. Additionally, Wright suggests the idea of cross-group friendships in relation to language discrimination, in that making friends with people of other groups not only reduces prejudice overtime but increases positive attitudes towards the group (Wright 2007).

### **Current language hierarchies within the Spanish-speaking world**

Niño-Murcia (2011) explains that a factor that contributes greatly to Spanish speakers dialect preferences is linguistic security and insecurity, the perception of a speaker's dialect in relation to their language environment. For example, Niño-Murcia uses the example of a study

where Dominicans compared to Cubans would prefer to speak like Spaniards if given the chance (Niño-Murcia 2011) which attributed to Dominicans having high linguistic insecurity. Although Dominicans have similar linguistic attributes to other Caribbean dialects, they received criticism for dropping the /s/ at the end of words by other Caribbean speakers. This is due to Dominicans being considered an “uneducated class” within Latin America (Niño-Murcia 2011). This dynamic accurately demonstrates what Wright (2007) mentions about linguistic discrimination where language is used as a front to discriminating against someone because of their race, class, etc. Concretely, this is evidence of how social factors such as socioeconomic status, race, etc, can have a large effect on language attitudes and dynamics. The author attributes this as the closest reason as to why some groups have stigmatized language and others don’t even when they possess the same linguistic features (Niño-Murcia 2011).

Contrarily, Niño-Murcia (2011) explains that Colombia tends to have high linguistic security. However, certain linguistic attributes of the Colombian dialect are similar to less linguistically secure groups such as Dominicans, that are discriminated against for their dialect. The author explains that “socioeconomic and racial factors, such as demographic prevalence, periods of immigration, reason for immigration, and inequalities in economic and education conditions, can override linguistic factors in determining relative perceptions of prestige” (Niño-Murcia 2011, 732) and emits the overall idea that social factors and definitions of prestigious language are heavily intertwined. It should be clarified that linguistic security isn’t always necessarily equated to linguistic prestige, however many dialects, such as the Colombian dialect, have linguistic security and prestige. In the figure provided from McEvoy (2017), Colombia would be situated at #2 under Latin American Varieties, having a higher definition of standard language.

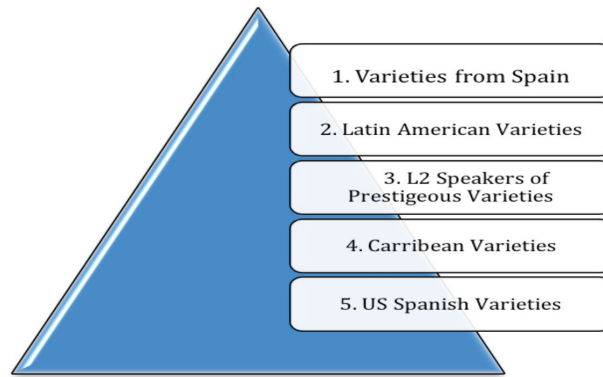


Figure 1. Dialect Hierarchy Chart

Figure 1. Dialect Hierarchy Chart (McEvoy 2017)

As an overarching statement, it has been found that typically dialects from Spain, Colombia, Argentina and Mexico are considered high-prestige due to linguistic features closer to Iberian varieties (Niño-Murcia 2011). Dialects from the U.S. (which includes heritage speakers) and the Caribbean (which mainly includes the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and Cuba) are considered low-prestige (McEvoy 2017) which is due to many factors including nationalism, classism and political tension (Niño-Murcia 2011) as well as underrepresentation within education (McEvoy 2017). *Figure 1* provides a visual hierarchy of dialects within Spanish, that can serve as a general reference for what is considered prestigious Spanish and not. However, given this generalization, what is considered prestigious Spanish can be fairly nuanced, in that it can vary by nationality of the speaker (Niño-Murcia 2011). This thesis aims to see if this linguistic preference in native speakers is mirrored with Spanish Heritage Speakers in the U.S. and whether the same ideas of prestige are present.

### **Children's development of language concepts**

It is also important to understand how language is first developed and how we categorize language at a very young age. Even from a young age, it has been proven that children have

language preferences (Kinzler 2011). By studying how specifically children learn social categorization through language provide insight into how and why adults perpetuate linguistic discrimination and hierarchies. Many of Kinzler's studies focus on language and how it affects social preferences, specifically when making friends. In the study *Children's selective trust in accented speakers* (2011), it was found that monolingual English-speaking children prefer their native language over a foreign language, which suggests both the concept of linguistic conventionality and that children use their native language to serve as a guide to learn culturally relevant information (Kinzler 2011). Given these findings with monolinguals, it would be interesting to see if the same preferences would be reflected in heritage speakers. Building off of Kinzler (2011), *Northern= smart and Southern= nice: The development of accent attitudes in the United States* was conducted testing dialects within the U.S. (Northern vs. Southern regional accents) and found that children have social preference where they would be more likely to be friends with someone from their native regional dialect vs someone from a non-local dialect (Kinzler 2013). Additionally, this provides a timeline of when children develop social preferences towards certain peers through language, which is around 4 to 5 years of age (Kinzler 2013). Additionally, "by 9 years of age, children endorse linguistic stereotypes that are similar to those observed in adulthood, and that these attitudes emerge in parallel among children living in different communities" (Kinzler 1154). This demonstrates that linguistic stereotypes typically carry over into adulthood, however specific stereotypes and the social factors that influence them will be examined in this paper. In regard to social factors, it has also been found that race doesn't have as influential of an effect as language does when children form friendships (Kinzler 2009). Kinzler (2009) found that when children had the choice to make friends with a child of the same race with foreign speech or a child of a different race with native speech, they chose the child of

a different race (Kinzler 2009). This emphasizes the overwhelming influence language preferences has on social groupings over other social factors such as race.

The article *Developments in the Social Meaning Underlying Accent- and Dialect Based Social Preferences* (2020) builds off Kinzler (2013) and explains how children use language when categorizing people socially, especially peers. As early as five years old, children are able to associate geographical origin and accent through identifying different phonetic varieties that carries on through young childhood (Imuta 2020). It also brings up an important finding that “children may be less inclined to engage in social categorization and make discriminatory inferences based on dialects than on accents because they perceive non-local dialects to be more similar perceptually to their own speech variety than foreign accents” (Imuta 2020, 138). When children get to grade school age, they begin to develop societal attitudes, most specifically status and solidarity, based on one’s accent and says that “native accents and a country’s standard dialect are attributed higher social status than foreign accents and regional dialects” (Imuta 2020, 138) which supports the findings of Kinzler (2009). This, like stated earlier in Kinzler (2013), is when children begin to develop linguistic stereotypes and more complexly categorize people through intergroup bias and linguistic hierarchies due to society’s definitions of language value. Imuta (2020) also touches on the idea of speaking “correctly” and explains that young kids (around 5 to 7) identify phonology over semantics when categorizing peers.

However, these findings beg the question as to whether dialect contact has significant influence on social preference and perception of non-native language given groups such as heritage speakers have diverse dialect contact (Potowski 2011). Kinzler (2012) found mixed results, in one experiment finding that monolingual children preferred their native speech despite living in a multilingual community, however in other contexts they preferred languages that were



considered more high-status (Kinzler 2012). Overall it is indicated that “complex interplay between children’s preferences for individuals of high status and for speakers from their native linguistic community” (Kinzler 2012, 228).

However, in terms of bilinguals, previous research has found that bilingual children, despite having more exposure to different varieties of language and possibly have more social flexibility than monolinguals, prefer native-accented speakers similar to monolinguals (Souza 2013). However, this challenges the hypothesis of Wright (2007), so the current study further adds to existing literature testing social preferences in relation to language, specifically with heritage speakers. Differentiating from Souza (2013) the current study investigates whether social preferences and language attitudes established during childhood carry on later in life. Additionally, Souza (2013) tests monolinguals preferences towards two separate languages, not different dialects within the same language.

Although there are mixed results, especially relating to speakers with more variety exposure and their language preferences, through the literature provided, it can be hypothesized that a.) Spanish heritage speakers will prefer speech similar to their own and b.) heritage speakers will harbor less linguistic stereotypes and definitions of prestigious language, given their increased contact with other varieties of language.

## **Methods**

### **Objectives**

The study aims to identify how participants perceive different varieties of Spanish, more specifically whether there's a social preference towards a specific Spanish variety. Overall, it aims to analyze the attitudes held by heritage speakers of Spanish in the U.S. toward language varieties and identify social factors that contribute to strong language attitudes.

### **Participants**

Participants were recruited on the public research site Prolific from a general population. Screeners were implemented to make sure participants were eligible for the study, including an age range of 18-35, bilingualism and residency in the United States. The purpose behind the age screener was to target more current language attitudes in order to examine what language attitudes are acquired in non-explicit instruction during childhood. The purpose of implementing a bilingual screener was to recruit Spanish heritage speakers. The total number of participants that completed the survey was 51 participants, who were financially compensated upon completion. There was an hourly rate established, where participants were typically paid \$5-10 to their Prolific account.

The majority of participants are considered Spanish heritage speakers. Like stated in the terminology section, students from Spanish heritage speakers are considered to have a personal, familial, or community connection to Spanish and are typically proficient in both English and Spanish but have dominance in one language. For this study, it is required that participants are proficient in both English and Spanish and reside in the U.S.. Upon starting the survey, participants were asked about their overall language ability in Spanish and were redirected to the

end of the survey if they answered either “*can understand basic words/phrases but cannot speak*” or “*can understand conversations with some difficulty but cannot speak*”. The intent is that participants are able to comprehend Spanish and have a basic awareness of varieties of Spanish, given certain portions of the survey have the participant listen to audios of Spanish-speakers. The majority of speakers answered that they could either “*understand and speak comfortably, with little difficulty*” or “*understand and speak fluently like a native speaker*”.

The average age of the participants was 28 years old, with 46% identifying as male, 46% as female and 8% as non-binary. In terms of ethnicity, 69% identify as Latino/Hispanic, 16% identify as White, 10% identify as African-American, 2% identify as Asian and 4% identified as other. In terms of education, the most common completion was either a high school diploma (22%) or bachelor’s degree (33%). The majority of participants were born in the U.S. (92%) however the most common country of origin for participant’s caregivers was Mexico. About 32% of participants had at least one caregiver from Mexico and 24% had both caregivers from Mexico. The second most common country caregivers were from was the U.S., where 27% had at least one caregiver born in the U.S. and 17% had both caregivers from the U.S..

## **Measures**

The survey is split primarily into two sections, the first analyzing participants attitudes towards different dialects where they listen to audio clips of Spanish-speakers speaking four dialects from different geographical regions that reflect various linguistic varieties (Mexico, Puerto Rico, Spain and Colombia). These audios were borrowed from the public site Centro Virtual Cervantes and CABank Spanish CallFriend Corpus. This purposefully targets for the variation in regional dialects that have different linguistic phenomena in Spanish, which are commonly known within Spanish linguistics literature: *Mexicano*, *Caribeño*, *Castellano* and

*Andino* (CVC). After listening to each audio clip, participants were asked five follow-up questions after the audio including: 1.) *Where do you think the current speaker is from?* 2.) *If you can be more specific, what country do you think the speaker is from?* 3.) *How standard would you consider the speaker's Spanish?* 4.) *Would you say that the speaker speaks better or worse Spanish than you?* 5.) *In general, do you prefer how the speaker speaks or how you speak?*

These questions aim at identifying participants' linguistic attitudes and preferences towards different dialects in comparison to their own. Additionally, it asks about what dialect they would consider to be the most linguistically “correct” or “accurate” form of Spanish, which relates to bigger linguistic hierarchies.

The second portion consists of a language background questionnaire that contains retrospective questions pertaining to the participant's background with the Spanish language. In other words, this connects how learning Spanish at a younger age impacts their current attitudes of different dialects. Examples of questions are, “*what languages did you hear at home?*” and “*did your parents correct your Spanish?*” and “*did your parents ever comment negatively on how you spoke?*”. While it would be ideal to also survey parents, the aim of the research is to analyze its effects later in life. Overall, it tests for possible parental, travel, cultural, educational and social influences that have possibly affected any biases towards non-native dialects that they might have learned growing up. After this, subjects will be debriefed and guided to the end of the survey.

The audio clips chosen for the study strongly demonstrate linguistic features from each region. For this study, prominent intonation and lexical differences that can be fairly easily recognized by most native Spanish speakers were chosen. Many of these linguistic features can typically be recognized by someone of another dialect (Potowski 2011) and how it doesn't

necessarily compare to the definition of standard features but more so how it compares to the given speaker.

Some typical phonetic features in a Mexican dialect are the use of the *seseo*, diphthong of the e and o, articulation of the word *ese* and the intonation is fairly circumflex (meaning the stress is primarily on vowels). Grammatically, the pronoun *-le* is utilized a lot and the derivations like *-ada* as well as lexically, there is lexical borrowing from English. The audio clip chosen is from Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico which is a central Mexican dialect (CVC).

With Colombian dialects, many common phonetic features are the aspiration of the /s/ intervocally, the absence of unstressed vowels (most typically e and i ). Grammatically, oftentimes double possessives or double pronouns. Like the Mexican dialect, a Colombian dialect also employs both *seseo* and *voseo* phonetically. However, unlike the Mexican dialect, *voseo* is employed grammatically and morphologically as well (CVC). The audio clip chosen for this study is a speaker from Medellin, Colombia, which is known as an *andino serrano* accent (CVC).

In terms of the Puerto Rican dialect, typical characteristics are the elongation of vowels (typically at the end of the word), lateralization of /r/, aspiration of the /x/ and /s/. This dialect also employs the *seseo*. The speakers in the audio clip chosen are from San Juan, however are living in the U.S. and reflect a Caribbean dialect (CVC).

Finally, with the Castilian dialect (from Spain), some characteristics include the distinction between /ʎ/-/j/, the use of θ, altered use of prepositions, the use of the diminutive *-et(e)* or *-eta* and semantic calques. The dialect in the audio clip chosen is considered Northern Castilian Spanish, from the region of Valencia, Spain (CVC).

It can be assumed that participants will recognize some of the linguistic features present and create opinions of the dialect based on the foreign aspect of the speech. Primarily, the study will be analyzing what social factors influence language attitudes including, negative attitudes of language from caregivers, parents correcting language during childhood, travel influences, nationality, patriotism, and education on current language attitudes. While it could be likely there is connection between the two, one of the purposes of this research is to determine as to what extent does parental influence have on language attitudes later in life.

## Results

In the first section testing language attitudes using audio clips, the two most preferred dialects by participants were that of Mexico and Spain. Firstly, Mexico had the highest geographical recognition by participants when asked to identify the specific country of the speaker (65%), had the highest response for considering the non-native language “better” than how the participant speaks (75%) and had a higher preference for the speaker’s dialect vs. the participants dialect (53%). The dialect from Mexico had the highest standardization score of language out of the four dialects, being a score of 89 (Min: 49, Max: 100).

Secondly, Spain had the second most frequent geographical recognition with 56% of participants answering Spain in the fill in the blank. 61% of participants considered the non-native dialect to be “better” than the participants speech. In regards to preferences, 45% preferred the speaker’s speech, 35% preferred their own speech and 20% were indifferent. The dialect from Spain had the second highest standardization score of language, being an average score of 84 (Min: 29, Max: 100).

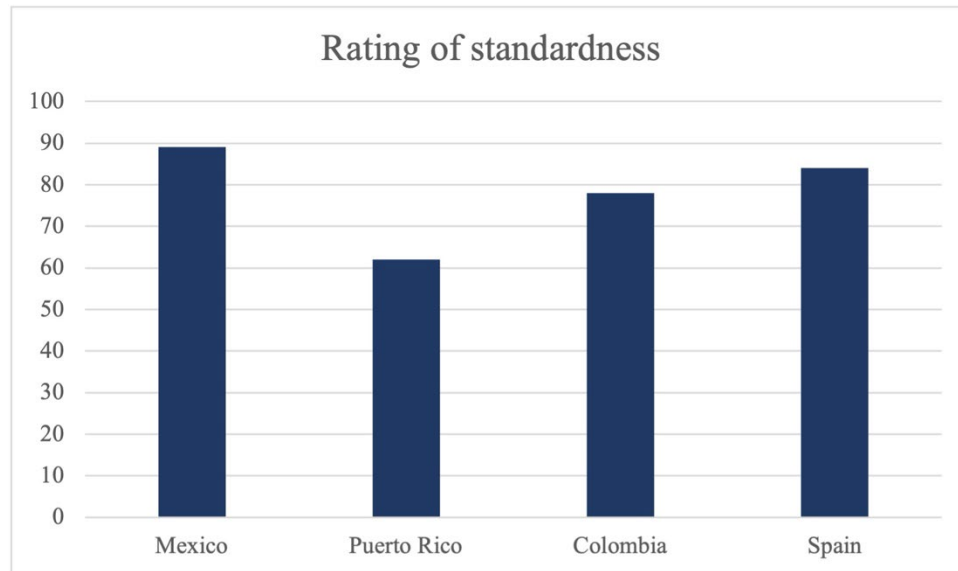


Figure 2: Participant’s ratings of standard language of the four dialects.

In terms of the Colombian dialect, results weren’t as skewed as Mexico and Spain.

Geographical recognition had a variety of responses, with responses being 33% of participants thinking the speaker was from South America, 29% from North America and 27% from Central America. In the free response, the most common response was 29% responded the speaker was from Mexico and 23% thought the speaker was from Colombia. 49% of participants considered the speaker’s language as better than theirs and 35% considered it the same compared to theirs and 16% responded as indifferent. In terms of dialect preference, responses were fairly even throughout the three answers with 35% speaker-preference, 33% with self-preference and 31% being indifferent. In terms of standardization, participants responded with an average score of 78 (Min: 18, Max: 100).

Lastly, the Puerto Rican dialect, like the Colombian dialect, had a variety of responses. 31% of participants identified the speaker as being from North America, 31% responded with the Caribbean and 19% responded with North America. More specifically, Puerto Rico (35%) and Dominican Republic (13%) were the most common nationality responses. When asked if



participants thought the speaker’s speech was better or worse than their own, 37% said worse, 33% said better and 29% said they’re the same. In terms of speech preferences, 71% had self-preference, 16% had speaker-preference and 13% were indifferent. Lastly, the Puerto Rican dialect had the lowest standardization score, being an average of 62 (Min: 0, Max: 100).

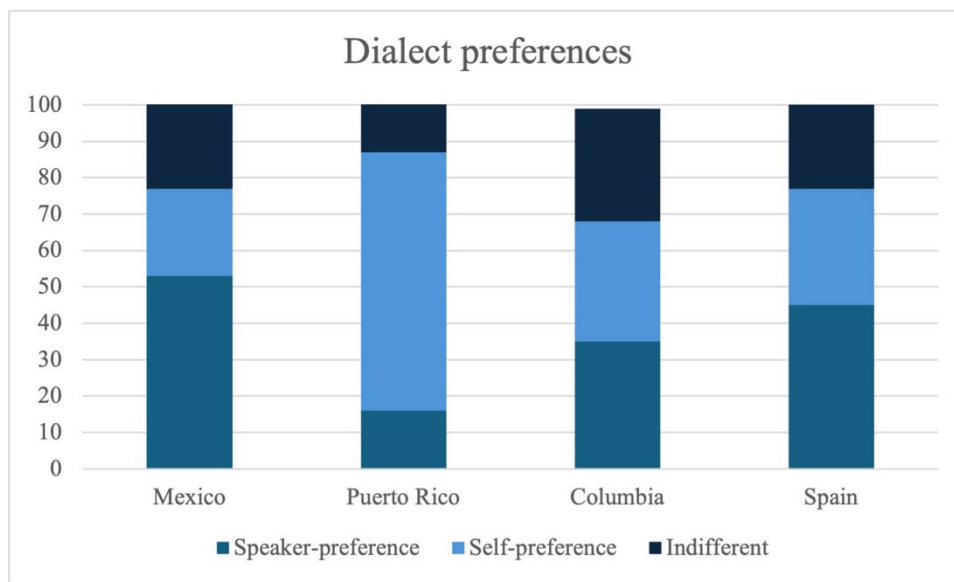


Figure 3: Participant’s opinions on whether they prefer each dialect.

In regard to the second portion of the survey, as stated before the primary variables that will be analyzed in relation to language attitudes are: negative attitudes of language from caregivers, parents correcting language during childhood, exposure to other dialects (through travel or bilingual communities), nationality, patriotism, and education. By isolating the variables and comparing responses, results will be a comparison of these social variables that affect perceptions of different dialects in Spanish.

### **Influence of language corrections and negative comments on perceived standardization**

In the survey, two questions were asked about the caregiver’s influence through their comments on language including “*did your parents correct your Spanish?*” and “*did your parents ever comment negatively on how you spoke?*”. 65% of participants responded that their

caregivers corrected their Spanish growing up and 35% responded no. 35% of participants responded that their caregivers commented negatively on how they spoke however 65% responded that there were no negative comments. This was compared with their scores of standard language. Participants who had caregivers that negatively commented on their Spanish during childhood tended to have higher standard scores for the Spanish and Mexican dialects. In general, there wasn't a strong correlation between a high quantity of negative comments and a certain standard score for the Colombian and Puerto Rican dialects. If anything, those who responded to not receiving negative comments growing up had lower standardization scores for Puerto Rico however fairly average for Colombia.

In terms of the correlation between correction of language during childhood and standard scores, there isn't much variation in the average standard score of the four dialects between participants that were corrected on their Spanish growing up vs. not corrected. However, there was a correlation between higher rates of corrections with lower standardization scores for Puerto Rico. For both corrected vs. not corrected responses, the audios from Spain and Mexico were evaluated as the most standard. However, the overall finding indicates standard scores don't vary from the overall average mentioned earlier and there was no perceived correlation between participants who were corrected vs. not corrected. Additionally, there doesn't seem to be a specific country of origin that has a higher amount of responses for being corrected on their Spanish.

### **The relationship between patriotism and dialect preference**

To analyze if patriotic values had an effect on dialect preferences, responses to the questions "*would you consider yourself proud of where your family comes from?*" and "*where are your caregivers from?*" were compared to their dialect preferences to each of the audios.

Given Mexico was the most common nationality for participant's families, participants who had at least one caregiver from Mexico and identified as patriotic were analyzed. Of those participants, it was found that they preferred the dialect from Mexico more than the other dialects. There were no other significant correlations among other nationalities, given there weren't any other nationality groups large enough to do a comparison.

### **The relationship between dialect contact and dialect preferences**

Additionally, dialect contact was compared with the responses to *“In your community growing up, were you surrounded by people that spoke a different variation of Spanish than you and your family spoke? If so and if possible, write in the blank where the majority of the speakers were from”* and *“Did you travel to Spanish speaking countries throughout your childhood/teenage years? If yes, please state where, when, how long and how often”* were compared with dialect preferences.

In terms of travel, the most common country participants traveled to was Mexico (23 participants) typically to visit family. Other responses included participants traveling to Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic and Peru. Most commonly, participants that traveled to Mexico were more likely to prefer the Mexican dialect compared to the other dialects. Overall responses signify that participants tended to have more dialectal preferences towards the country they had experience traveling to.

In terms of growing up in a community with non-native varieties, there are no significant correlation between exposure to non-native dialects and dialect preferences. Additionally, there was no correlation between between exposure to non-native dialects and scores of standardness. There were few participants that responded they had exposure to non-native dialects and of those, there was no correlation.

## **The influence of education on language attitudes**

The participant's highest level of education was compared separately with dialect preference, ratings of standardness and whether they considered the dialects better or worse than their own. Within the participants that received secondary education, education didn't have a significant effect on dialect preference. The results varied greatly and didn't differ from participants that didn't receive secondary education.

Additionally, with the ratings of standardness, there weren't any strong correlations between secondary education and consistently similar standardness scores. However, many participants tended to rate the audios from Mexico and Spain higher than Puerto Rico and Colombia. This could be just a general trend, given that was the preference of all of participants, so it is difficult to conclude if this is because of education. There was no pattern for participants who didn't receive secondary education and their ratings of standardness.

Lastly, when participants were asked the question "*do you think the speaker speaks better or worse than you?*" there was no overall pattern for participants that received a secondary education vs. not. This could indicate that speakers don't consider their dialect relatively any better than the speakers presented in the study.

## **Overall self perception of language abilities in comparison to other dialects**

Lastly, in conjunction to the last question, the participants opinion on their own language abilities was compared in relation to their opinion of the dialects presented in the study. Once again analyzing the question of "*do you think the speaker speaks better or worse than you?*", it is compared with the question "*compared to other Spanish speakers, I consider my Spanish speaking abilities (speaking, reading, writing, etc.) to be...*". Participants answered on a Likert scale where the options were *Worse, Alright, Normal comparatively, A bit better* and *Way Better*.

The majority of participants that answered *worse* or *alright* to their own language abilities tended to say that the speakers in the study spoke *better* than them. Those who responded *normal comparatively* there were no evident correlations, other than the majority responded that the Mexican dialect was *better* than their own. Lastly, in terms of participants who said *a bit better* or *way better* to their own language abilities there weren't significant patterns either. However the Puerto Rican dialect tended to be rated as *worse* more consistently than the other dialects.

## Discussion

Overall, the findings indicate that Spanish heritage speakers, out of the four dialects, were most likely to prefer their native dialect in comparison to the others. The Mexican dialect and Castilian dialect had the highest preference out of the four dialects and also considered the most standard. Whereas Colombia varied and Puerto Rico was considered the least standard. The factors associated with strong language attitudes (both positive and negative) were patriotism for country of origin, caregivers commenting negatively on speech and contact with other dialects. This was done by analyzing the responses to the retrospective questions and comparing them with their current attitudes towards the audios presented in the study.

### Language attitudes with heritage speakers

Most commonly, given the most participants had origins in Mexico, the dialect from Mexico was preferred the most by participants with origins in Mexico, which is consistent with Social Identity Theory (Niño-Murcia 2011) and Kinzler (2011). Even though many of the participants grew up in surrounded by both English and Spanish that could possibly make them less predisposed to strong language preferences (Wright 2007), it was demonstrated that Spanish heritage speakers harbor the same language preferences as native speakers (Kinzler 2011, Souza 2013).

On a similar note, definitions of prestige very closely follow that of native speakers from *Figure 1*. Participants scored Mexico as having the most standard or prestigious form of Spanish, followed closely by Spain, Colombia and then Puerto Rico. McEvoy (2017) recognizes Castilian as the most prestigious, however the current study found that Spanish heritage speakers specifically, Mexico as having the most prestigious dialect. This could heavily be influenced by the fact the most common nationality for participant's families was Mexico and could be

influenced by the preference of their own dialect, given children typically adopt a dialect of one of their caregivers (Potowski 2011). Additionally, this could be heavily influenced by the cultural and linguistic influence Mexico has on the U.S., given its proximity geographically. In terms of the other dialects, Castilian closely followed the Mexican dialect, which is considered by native speakers the most prestigious form of Spanish (McEvoy 2017). Participants scoring Castilian as one of the more prestigious forms of Spanish is consistent with linguistic attitudes of native speakers (McEvoy 2017). Additionally, the Colombian dialect having a high score of standardness similar to Castilian, is also consistent with native speakers attitudes towards prestigious language, given varieties of Latin American Spanish are considered more prestigious than varieties from the U.S. and Caribbean. Lastly, Puerto Rico is rated as the dialect with the least prestige, which is consistent with *Figure 1*, in that it ranked low in the dialect hierarchy but still higher than U.S. Spanish varieties. This could most easily be explained by the influence of social status that is closely intertwined with levels of prestige. Factors such as nationalism, classism and political tension (Niño-Murcia 2011) could be attributed to these classifications of prestige. Additionally, something that could also affect participant's perceptions of prestige is education, more specifically a lack of inclusive linguistic ideologies, that could promote the hierarchy that is consistent with literature (Loza 2017). Despite U.S. Spanish varieties often being viewed as low-prestige (McEvoy 2017) they prefer certain linguistic attributes related to their family's country of origin. While U.S. varieties aren't completely similar identical to varieties from Hispanic countries, it is interesting to examine that participants prefer language similar to their own.

## **Social factors that affect language attitudes**

Overall, the most prominent social factors during childhood that correlated with language attitudes included: patriotism for country of origin, negative comments experienced by caregivers during childhood and dialect contact.

It has been shown that nationality and language are strongly tied to each other in that speakers categorize others based on nation states (Niño-Murcia 2011). The correlation between participants of Mexican origin's patriotism and preferences towards the Mexican dialect can be explained by in-group bias and Social Identity Theory explained in Niño-Murcia (2011). The idea of expressing patriotism through language categorization can be highly due to in-group bias and preferring the speaker's nation state due to separation of different Hispanic nationalities within the U.S. (Potowski 2011; Niño-Murcia 2011). The correlation demonstrates that heritage speakers highly identify with their country of origin despite being born and growing up in the United States, which it is very common (Potowski 2011). These findings further support literature that speakers use language as a big marker of identity, specifically pride for a certain nation.

However, it is difficult to draw connections between these variables given that the most common countries of origin for participant's families were either Mexico or the U.S., which doesn't directly relate to the nationalities of the speakers in the audios. People from other nationalities also identified as being patriotic, however their dialect preferences were less skewed. Further research would need to be done with participants from Puerto Rico, Colombia, and Spain.

Negative comments on language that participants experienced growing up was correlated with participant's scoring of standardness of the dialects. Negative comments towards someone's



language could be considered negative language attitudes. Participants who had caregivers that negatively commented on their Spanish during childhood tended to have higher standardization scores for the Spanish and Mexican dialects. Given that the dialects from Mexico and Spain were considered the most prestigious (according to *Figure 1*) it could be assumed that commenting negatively on one's language contributes to certain concepts of prestige. This could contribute to linguistic hierarchies defined by native speakers (McEvoy 2017) that define Spain and Latin America as having the most prestigious dialects. Overall, it can be implied that this factor contributes to linguistic hierarchies and certain definitions of prestige. Additionally, it highlights the findings of Kinzler (2013) in that early childhood is a critical time when concepts of linguistic hierarchies are established and emphasizes the importance of teaching language in an inclusive way that combats against linguistic discrimination (Walsh 2021). However, it is difficult to determine due to lack of knowledge of the specific comments participants experienced.

However, there was no perceived correlation between participants who were corrected on their Spanish during childhood and standardness scores. Given the logic presented above, it could be assumed that correcting certain parts of language could be associated with negative language attitudes however, it is unclear what type of corrections participants experienced. An example could be corrections on basic grammar principles, that may not have larger effects on language attitudes and what constitutes "correct" language. Or possibly, it could establish that any sort of comment on language isn't necessarily influential on language attitudes, which would include negative comments.

In regard to dialect contact, which includes travel history and/or growing up around non-native dialects, it is unclear as to what association does exposure to other dialects have on

language attitudes. Based on the Intergroup Contact Theory proposed in Wright (2007), it could be assumed that speakers who were more broadly exposed to different varieties in Spanish wouldn't have strong language attitudes and if anything more inclusive attitudes. However, participants that traveled during childhood to Spanish-speaking countries had higher preferences towards the country they traveled to which, if anything, disproves the Intergroup Contact Theory and further supports intergroup bias in relation to language mentioned in Niño-Murcia (2011) as well as the findings that state despite having broad variety exposure, there are still preferences towards native speech (Souza 2013). This could support the idea that speakers prefer dialects they're most exposed to, despite whether they have membership to that language group or not. Given all of this, a small percentage of participants had experience traveling to Spanish-speaking countries during childhood, so it is difficult to establish the correlation between dialect contact and dialect preferences.

Additionally, there is no perceived correlation between being exposed to different varieties of Spanish and dialect preferences or standardness scores. With standardness scores specifically, this goes against Intergroup Contact Theory in that it would be assumed that with more exposure to different varieties, there would be less strong attitudes towards standard language and therefore reduced prejudices and increased positive attitudes (Wright 2007) however reinforces the findings of Souza (2013). However, there was no apparent relationship between being exposed to more language variety and language attitudes. This requires further research, in that there are mixed results. Additionally, a small percentage of participants had experienced dialect exposure, so it is difficult to establish a correlation.

Lastly, education had no significant effect on language attitudes. Based on current literature, it could be predicted that participants with a partial or full undergraduate degree would

have more progressive views towards language due to more inclusive teachings of language ideologies (Loza 2017). In other words, they would be more likely to be more inclusive to all dialects and forms of language and be less likely to judge a speaker for their specific dialect. It would be predicted that with dialect preferences and standardness, participants would be less likely to have strong dialect attitudes and would respond more consistently neutral when asked about opinions on different dialects. However, there wasn't a difference in responses between participants that received a secondary education or didn't receive a secondary education on perceived standardness. This finding could indicate that education doesn't have as significant of an effect as thought. Loza (2017) mentions standard language ideologies are oftentimes taught in SHL programs, however it is unclear if participants for this study had specific experiences with standard language ideologies during their education. So, it could be that participants experienced standard language ideologies during their education, but it is unclear due to no knowledge of participant's education history.

## **Limitations, Implications and Future Directions**

There were certain limitations while conducting this research, firstly being with the audios. There could be confusion in identifying the country of the speaker due to either unfamiliarity of Spanish varieties or not reflecting the most well-known linguistic from a given country. While Spanish dialects are typically categorized within nation states (Niño-Murcia 2011), there additionally is dialect variety within each country which could affect perceived prestige. Additionally, asking participants retrospective questions relating to childhood could lead to inaccuracies due to recall bias, which “occurs when participants do not remember previous events or experiences accurately” (Spencer 2017). Lastly, this study examines many different social variables and analyzes how they affect each other. While it is important to analyze how different variables affect language attitudes, it is difficult to pinpoint the most influential social variables and to what degree they affect language attitudes. Although previous research has established certain factors have influence on native speaker’s perceptions of prestige, including socioeconomic status, race, immigration, and education (Niño-Murcia 2011) it is difficult to establish the effect of other variables, including the ones tested in this study. Overall, it is difficult to establish causality of the social variables.

Future research could include many studies similar to the current study, using different variations of Spanish. For example, it would be interesting to conduct a study examining the dialects within one specific country given there are also strong language stereotypes within Spanish-speaking countries (for example, the different regional varieties within Mexico). Additionally, in order to establish causality, it could be interesting to conduct a study where the social or demographic variables were more isolated and examining whether it has an effect on language attitudes. An interesting study could look at SES and how that effects speaker’s

perceptions of dialects. Lastly, given this study consisted of participants who were heritage speakers, it would be interesting to see how language attitudes would vary if a U.S. Spanish variety, with linguistic features such as code-switching, was used as an audio in a study similar to the present one.

The overall implications of this research primarily are centered around language ideologies taught to children, both within formal education and at home. Strong attitudes towards certain dialects can lead to linguistic discrimination as mentioned by Wright (2007), Paffey (2012) and Walsh (2021). Identifying social factors such as the ones in this study gives the linguistics field further knowledge as to what specific factors can contribute to linguistic biases and how people can become cognizant to recognize their own linguistic attitudes as well as how that can be reflected in children. In specific regards to this study focused on language ideologies taught during childhood, this study emphasizes the importance of teaching non-standard language ideologies both within formal education and at home. By promoting the idea that all variations of Spanish are valid forms of language, it will reduce linguistic discrimination and in turn, discrimination in general. Loza (2019) explains “the protagonist role, which the standard has in the classroom, is in fact under the premise that Spanish learners’ come into the classroom in need of replacing an “impure” variety of Spanish (59) which emphasizes the need to properly train educators on counter-hegemonic language ideologies (Loza 2019). Loza (2019) advocates for educators to challenge linguistic power structures that support standard language ideologies, which can (not intentionally) be internalized. With this in mind and the current findings in this study, educators should be aware of specific factors that contribute to linguistic hierarchies while teaching language in that oftentimes the concept of standardization of language isn’t commonly addressed (Loza 2019). Additionally, McEvoy (2017) advocates for more educators of non-

prestigious dialects to teach dual immersion and heritage classes given they are underrepresented and can further aid in deconstructing standard language ideologies within education (McEvoy 2017).

Additionally, these findings can hopefully be applicable for caregivers in hopes that they become more cognizant of the effect their words relating to language have on later language attitudes in their children. While obviously not all language attitudes can be attributed to just a few people, early childhood is a very influential time for linguistic concepts to develop (Potowski 2011, Kinzler 2013).

## Conclusion

This study primarily investigates two questions: are there social preferences towards native dialects within Spanish for Spanish Heritage Speakers in the U.S.? What social factors from childhood influence language attitudes in young adulthood and are there any biases that are present? After surveying heritage speakers through a Qualtrics survey, it was found that Mexico and Spain had the most preferred dialects and rated the most standard out of all four. When comparing social factors and how they affect language attitudes, it was found that the variables with the most relevant correlations were negative comments experienced by caregivers, dialect contact and patriotism. However, it is difficult to establish causality given the multitude of variables, small sample size and other confounding variables that could affect language attitudes. This study assumes that there aren't other prominent social variables that could affect language attitudes. In reality, language attitudes and perceptions of foreign speakers is much more complex than one thinks (Kinzler 2012) so it is difficult to rule out other factors that affect a speaker's perception of foreign dialects. Future directions of study could focus on isolating specific social factors that affect language attitudes or conducting a study analyzing the language attitudes within regional dialects of a specific country (for example, examining different dialects within Mexico) and seeing how they differ from the findings in the current study. The findings of this work can be applied to language ideologies both taught in the classroom and at home. For how much language we produce in a day, we seldom think about its broader effects on social structures and perceptions of others. By identifying specific social factors that can affect strong language attitudes (both positive and negative) educators and parents can work to promote more inclusive language ideologies to children, that hopefully would reduce negative linguistic perceptions and discrimination later in life.

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