

Between local and standard varieties: horizontal and vertical convergence and divergence of dialects in Southern Spain

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Abstract

Research on dialect loss and vitality in southern Spain has particularly focused on phonology proving that the original separation between two sets of regional varieties of Castilian Spanish, namely the northern/central conservative dialects including the standard variety (Madrid) and the southern innovative dialects (Seville), is being filled up through the formation of an intermediate regional variety acting as a buffer between them (Hernández and Villena 2009; Villena and Ávila 2014). This new variety has gradually been emerging in the urban centres of east Andalusia (Granada, Malaga), particularly among young educated speakers, and is gaining prestige in the media. Actually, it has been seen as a sort of koine of central and southern varieties, melting innovative unmarked phonological traits with standard features, some of them representing phonemic split and reallocation (Villena 2008).

This levelled koine includes northern and standard marked /s/ vs. /θ/ contrast, and slows down frequency of use of most of the salient southern phonological variants (particularly, the so-called ‘ceceo’ and ‘seseo’ patterns, /f/ fricativization, /x/ deletion as well as other morphological features). However, unmarked erosive consonant changes involving grammar constraints (deletion of final /s/ and intervocalic /d/, the so-called ‘Andalusian plural’, etc.), as well as certain morphosyntactic variables (use of pronoun clitics) tend to be preserved. As the two supra-regional varieties are undergoing the same changes, it is anticipated that they will meet halfway because they started changing from the opposite edges of a scale of innovation. As expected, bearing in mind the general conditions of this process, the most striking similarities (qualitative and quantitatively) between both varieties can be found mainly in informal styles by urban working class speakers from central dialects, and in formal styles by urban middle class speakers from southern dialects. So, a sort of overlap between the respective ends of the stratification scales from both areas is ongoing.

Of course, as expected, convergence or stability is constrained here by stratification and social network variables, but the most relevant factors turn to be small-scale variables (marché linguistique, social history, community of practice, etc.) that act as intermediate variables between the former variables and the individual speech use. The speaker’s orientation towards the community prestige has shown to be the most outstanding factor so far. Lexical evidence on dialect words attrition tends to show very similar patterns (Villena and Ávila 2014).

References

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