


Chapter 6

An Analysis of Primary and Secondary Education Students' Attitudes Towards English and Galician

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ABSTRACT

This comparative study seeks to contribute to the existing literature on attitudes in multilingual contexts by exploring attitudes of 99 students towards two varieties of Galician (standard and non-standard) and two varieties of English (native and non-native) at the end of primary and secondary education. Results on age revealed the influence of this variable and that some stigmas are still attached to the non-standard variety of Galician while participants showed a preference for standard varieties, in particular the native variety in foreign language teaching. Furthermore, the findings unveiled a female preference for standard varieties of Galician and English, although female students presented more positive attitudes than males in most of the items of the quantitative part of the study. Finally, some conclusions and underlying pedagogical implications of the current investigation will be put forward with a view to fostering positive attitudes towards all the languages involved in multilingual schools.

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of language attitudes and multilingualism has been the core of many sociolinguistic investigations for decades in the field of social psychology. Pioneer investigations like those by Lambert et al.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-5034-5.ch006

(1960) and Labov (1966), or later work by Ajzen (1988) and Baker (1992), have set the basis of the study in the field. Speakers' ideas, opinions or prejudices about a language have traditionally given researchers a perception of speakers' real thoughts about their language identity and speech production due to the non-neutrality of language (Dewaele & Pena Díaz, 2018), while providing new insights about language teaching. More fine-grained analyses have revealed that age and gender are important variables that may exert an influence on those beliefs, as proved in Baker (1992) and Lasagabaster (2017) in regard to age and in Chan (2018) concerning gender-differences.

Language attitudes research is even more important in the case of minority language contexts as attitudes play a paramount role in language revitalization and survival of the minority language (Lasagabaster, 2015 and 2017; Loureiro-Rodriguez et al., 2013). This is the case of the context of this study, Galicia, a multilingual context in Spain where two official languages coexist (Spanish and Galician) together with two foreign languages (English and French) in the educational system. Surprisingly, the study of attitudes towards both Galician (standard and vernacular) and English (native and non-native) in this context has been overlooked by previous researchers. For that reason, this chapter delves into students' attitudes towards different varieties of Galician and English while paying special attention to the impact of the participants' age and gender.

Attitudes Towards Galician

Galicia is a region of Spain with about 2,800,000 inhabitants, located in the north-west of the Iberian Peninsula and it is one of the 17 autonomous communities of Spain. The official language of this territory is Galician, together with Spanish, since 1981 as a result of the *Galician Statute of Autonomy* after the restoration of democracy. Although Galician is an official language in the territory, over the years it has presented a decline of speakers due to its minority language status, mostly amongst the youth population (O'Rourke, 2017; O'Rourke & Ramallo, 2015), who tend to choose Spanish over Galician, consequently leading to problems when learning the latter at school. A second layer of language contact can be observed in this region, as Galician has different varieties (non-standard Galician varieties and the standard variety) that are in continuous contact (Sousa, 2020), even resulting in diglossic relations.

Taking a closer look at the Galician linguistic domain in Spain, Galician is not spoken in the same way across the territory. We can differentiate three major areas where three different language varieties of Galician are spoken, (1) Western, (2) Central and (3) Eastern varieties, consequently divided in three major areas by the isoglosses (Sousa, 2020). These varieties are known as non-standard Galician (NSG) or vernacular varieties in contrast with the standardized variety, standard Galician (SG).

The Galician Sociolinguistic Map (González González et al., 1996) was the first major attitudinal study concerning the Galician language, relying on a questionnaire, interviews and the matched-guise technique (MGT, an instrument employed to unveil covert attitudes using a recorded stimuli) amongst 38,897 participants, divided in four groups according to age. For the younger age group (16-25) data elicited from the MGT on Spanish and Galician showed the highest favorably attitude towards Galician (3.75 on a 5-point scale). Results from González González et al. (1996) also suggest that these favorable attitudes towards Galician are linked to a view of the minority language as the representative of identity (Bouzada-Fernández, 2003; Hoare, 2001; Loureiro-Rodriguez, 2008; Pieras-Guasp, 2002). In the same vein, O'Rourke's (2011) study confirms that identity is very important amongst the youth and states a strong support for the maintenance and transmission of Galician. Nevertheless, despite these findings, Galician youth still prefer speaking Spanish over Galician (O'Rourke & Ramallo, 2015).

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