

## **ABSTRACT**

This doctoral thesis focuses on the study of the dialectal perception of the major geographical varieties of Spanish by foreign students from Bilingual Sections (BS) in Central and Eastern Europe. Thus, this study is based on the theoretical and methodological concepts of cognitive sociolinguistics and perceptual dialectology, as well as on the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language (SFL).

This project aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the educational context and the perceptual-dialectal paradigm of learners from BS in six countries: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. We apply the concurrent triangulation mixed method design, in which we integrate the analysis of legal and didactic sources used in BS with quantitative and qualitative data obtained through two methods: the matched-guise method, using the PRECAVES XXI project survey (indirect methodology), and the use of semi-directed in-depth interviews (direct methodology). For this purpose, we set up a sample of 180 students from BS. These were divided into two groups: 130 students from one of the BSs (20 from each country mentioned and 10 students born in Spain and recently returned to their country of origin -mainly Romania-), and 50 BS graduates, studying Spanish-related university programmes ( Spanish philology, translation, didactics, etc.). The sampling applied was non-probabilistic and, depending on the phase of the project and the group, it was either volunteer, accidental or snowball sampling.

Data collection was carried out in two phases. In the first phase, all informants completed the PRECAVES XXI project survey, in which they listened to 16 recordings of the main geographical varieties of Spanish, namely: Castilian, Andalusian, Canarian, Mexican and Central American, Caribbean, Andean, Chilean and Austral or Rioplatense. Once they had listened to the recording, they were asked to provide the possible origin of the speaker, the degree of similarity between their own pronunciation and that of the recording, and they evaluated the auditory samples directly (by assessing the pronunciation itself) and indirectly ( by assessing the speaker, their region of origin and the corresponding culture). Subsequently, a quantitative analysis was carried out.

In the second phase, half of the informants participated in a semi-directed interview with the author, in which they were asked about the informants' geographical and dialectal knowledge, their relationship and experience with Spanish, and their assessment of the different geographical varieties. For this purpose, we applied questions typical of direct methods used to study linguistic attitudes, viewing images that designate concepts with possible lexical variation and the use of silent maps. The data were analysed qualitatively.

Once the individual results had been discussed, data triangulation was carried out, revealing a clear predominance of the Castilian variety in the field of SFL in the BS: not only is it the variety which appears most frequently in teaching materials and which is almost always the model variety in class, but it is also the one which students perceive as the closest to their own, and the one which they consider the easiest and most prestigious of all. The participants based their answers primarily on concepts such as the linguistic correctness, purity and conservatism of Northern-Central Spanish, and its position as the preferred variety in the classroom.

In the final sections, we discuss the implications of these results for language policy in SFL and for learners' perception and comprehension of the varieties, taking into account the plurinormative reality of the language and the contact between speakers of different origins in the Spanish-speaking world.

Finally, we discuss future research suggestions in this field and briefly consider the application of these results to the teaching practice of Spanish as a foreign language.

**Keywords:** linguistic attitudes, Spanish as a foreign language, Spanish varieties, PRECAVES XXI, language policy