Language attitudes and migration: A perceptual dialectology approach

American-English speakers, when asked to draw dialect regions on maps of the United States, demonstrate agreement on salient regional varieties and their location (Gould & White 1974; Preston 1986, 1989, 1996). Prior work has not studied the attitudes of immigrants in the United States towards regional varieties of English; thus, it is not known whether they reproduce the attitudes of the majority, perhaps having learned attitudes and ideologies as they learned English. Of particular interest are the attitudes of second and 1.5-generation immigrants, raised in transnational spaces, in which languages other than English are the norm. In this presentation, we compare the mental maps of Hispanics raised in the US to mental maps of Anglo-Americans with the objective of examining the geolinguistic salience and location of regional varieties for the two groups.

Following map-drawing methods in perceptual dialectology (Preston 1986), participants were asked to mark on a blank map of the United States where they believed different speech regions existed and to add a label or commentary about them. As a reference, participants were shown a map of the US with state boundaries and names. The maps of 150 Anglo-Americans and 75 Hispanics were analyzed using ArcGIS. The Anglo group identified English as the first language and the language spoken at home; they indicated ‘white’ as their racial/ethnic background. The Hispanic group self-identified as Hispanic/Latino and identified their first language as Spanish or Spanish and English, with Spanish or Spanish and English spoken in the home. Hispanic are 1.5 and second generations. All participants are college students between 18 and 24 years of age.

The most remarkable finding thus far has been the difference in the identification of salient regions for the Anglos and Hispanics. The Southern US is the most important region marked in the Anglo maps, but it is frequently absent from the Hispanic maps. When indicated in Hispanic maps, the South does not match the proportion or location of the Anglo maps. We found that the Hispanic maps had fewer regions, details and labels than the Anglo maps. We also found that the Hispanic group’s maps centered on Spanish and regions with large Hispanic populations.

It is argued here that although immigrant children acquire the majority language, they may not acquire the ideologies, stereotypes, and attitudes of the majority group. Children learn their first attitudes and stereotypes in the home from their parents (Anisfeld & Lambert 1964). Ethnic and racial attitudes and stereotypes are transmitted explicitly and implicitly from parents to children before age three (Castelli, Zogmaister & Tomelleri 2009; Segall, Birnbaum, Deeb & Diesendruck 2015) and at five, children have stereotypes of nationality groups, even though they may not fully understand the concept of nationality (Weatherhead, White & Friedman 2016). Evident in our findings are the consequences of socialization in homes in which first-generation immigrant parents do not transmit linguistic and social stereotypes about American English.