Perceptions of Spanish language varieties and language attitudes among Spanish-French bilinguals in Francophone Switzerland.

In the decade of the 1960s the population of Spanish immigrants in Switzerland raised from about 14000 to more than 121000. From that date, the numbers would continue falling in the subsequent years, but then in the decade of the 1980s it followed the arrival of immigrants from American Spanish-speaking countries. These past immigration waves of Spanish speakers, who had children and passed their language to them, allow us to talk nowadays of the existence of a Spanish contact variety in Switzerland.

It is my aim to investigate how these second generation Spanish speakers in Francophone Switzerland perceive the different varieties of the Spanish language, and how their own (contact) variety fits in the bigger picture. In doing so, I will pay special attention to their attitudes towards both monolingual and contact varieties and we will verify if, as the literature on language attitudes and on heritage language speakers have shown, the language produced by bilingual speakers in language contact situations rouse negative attitudes from the speakers of these same contact varieties.

In this study I have interviewed 24 second generation Spanish speakers in Francophone Switzerland, 12 with Spanish parents and 12 with Colombian origins. They have faced 4 different stimuli: two recordings of two monolingual speakers (one from Spain, one from Colombia) and two of French-Spanish bilinguals (one with Spanish parents, the other with Colombian ones). Then, they have completed a written questionnaire with scales of semantic differential, from 1 to 10, where they evaluate the speakers as more or less educated and friendly; and their way of speaking as more or less clear, nice and correct. I am also concerned with knowing how they relate to them, so they have compared themselves to these speakers and have named the one they identify with the most. It is interesting to test which links are stronger, if they relate closer to their dialect of origin or to the contact variety with French, regardless of the Spanish variety in contact.

The results of the first wave of interviews, which covered the 12 heritage speakers with Spanish origins, show that the peninsular variety was indeed considered as the most correct, and that the interviewees identified to the two speakers they perceived to be monolinguals from Spain. In the second wave of interviews, this time with second generation Colombians, I expect to find more positive attitudes towards the monolingual Colombian variety, as well as higher ratings in identification with this speaker.

The final objective of this study is to analyse and interpret the perceptions of these two groups of Spanish speakers, their attitudes and their linguistic identity as heritage speakers, taking into consideration the aforementioned insights given by the studies on language attitudes and heritage speakers, which would predict more negative attitudes towards the contact variety and lower ratings in identification, as these speakers do not value it and may consider themselves closer to the monolingual variety.

Basic bibliography:


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