

Biographical indexicality in *comunidades hispanas*

300-word abstract

Given the diversity of *comunidades hispanas* in the US, it is hardly surprising that members' linguistic profiles demonstrate this same diversity. To account for how personal histories can shape social meaning, Sharma (2021) proposes that biographical indexicality, or an individual's style history with different variants or lects, can influence stylistic choices and also social meaning. Bidialectal and bilingual speakers "...can exploit... contrasts in their personal style history for interactional meaning" (p. 245). For example, Fareed Zakaria uses Indian English, his first lect, primarily for a set of stances related to frankness, personal commitment, or "realness." To better understand how personal history shapes our social mapping of others in Hispanic communities, this talk reports on the qualitative evaluations of 150 participants (75 monolingual Spanish-speaking and 75 English-dominant respondents) as they listened to both Spanish-dominant and English-dominant voices providing directions in a map task.

The respondents' comments reflected, to a great extent, their own experiences with language and identity. For individuals who operate exclusively in Spanish, language was perceived as a largely separate phenomenon from background and identity and was more likely to be associated with moral and class-based judgments, while individuals who regularly navigate between English and Spanish more readily addressed complex concepts like context-governed language use, language dominance, and communicative competence as they reacted to new voices. I conclude that in addition to personal history, contextualized language use (and exposure to the ideologies embedded within those contexts) conditions the indexical field (Eckert, 2008) of linguistic variants linked to monolingualism, on the one hand, and bilingualism, on the other.

50-word abstract

This talk explores how personal history shapes monolingual and bilingual participants' social mappings of other Spanish speakers. Respondents' comments largely reflected their own experiences with language and identity, and I conclude that their personal histories with contextualized language use (and embedded ideologies) condition the social meaning ascribed to bilingual voices.

Learning objectives

- Define "biographical indexicality" (Sharma, 2021)
- Analyze how personal histories shape sociolinguistic perception
- Investigate the ideologies embedded in contextualized language use

References

- Eckert, P. (2008). Variation and the indexical field. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 12(3), 453–476.
- Sharma, D. (2021). Biographical indexicality: Personal history as a frame of reference for social meaning in variation. In L. Hall-Lew, E. Moore, & R. J. Podesva (Eds.), *Social meaning and linguistic variation: Theorizing the third wave*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.