

What does your accent say about you? An Analysis of Cuban and Peninsular Spanish Varieties

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Individuals have been found to make judgements on a person's personality, income, education, and employment in as little as 30 seconds after listening to their voice (e.g., [1], [2], [3]). However, while this has been extensively studied with varieties in English (e.g., [4], [5], [6]), it has received less attention in Spanish, particularly among highly stigmatized and prestigious varieties, as is the case with the varieties of Spanish spoken in Cuba and Spain respectively. Consequently, this study has two main goals. The first is to investigate the perceptions of Cuban and Peninsular Spanish voices by four groups of individuals with differing levels of exposure and proficiency in Spanish to determine if there is a predominant stigma or notion of prestige attributed to either accent on the basis of perceived personality, income, education, and employment. The listener groups included native Spanish speakers from Cuba (CU) and Spain (SP), in addition to second language (L2) learners with an intermediate to advanced level of proficiency, and monolingual (M) English speakers. The second objective is to compare the ability of these four groups to correctly categorize the Peninsular and Cuban varieties as distinct. Little is known about the latter two groups regarding their categorization rates and perceptions towards distinct varieties ([7], [8], [9]).

The stimuli consisted of a total of 5 Cuban (Havana) and 5 Peninsular (Madrid) voices which were recorded and later rated by 50 adult listeners (i.e., 13 native Cuban speakers, 10 native Peninsular speakers, 13 L2 learners, and 14 monolingual English speakers). The speakers all read the same short prompt adopted from [10] which contained instances where Cuban and Peninsular speakers are known to diverge in terms of pronunciation (e.g., *cocina* [ko'sina] in Cuba and [ko' θina] in most regions of Spain, meaning 'kitchen'). All the speakers were female to control for the variable of gender, were born and living in either Havana, Cuba or Madrid, Spain, and did not speak any additional languages. The methodology for the listeners included the administration of a Bilingual Language Profile (BLP) questionnaire and a survey for evaluating the listeners' perceptions of the voices they heard in terms of personality, income, education, and employment on a scale of 1-5.

Preliminary analysis of the results revealed that listeners make unconscious assumptions about an individual's voice, as the Peninsular variety was often attributed to a higher educational level (62%), income bracket (37%), and was more closely associated with a CEO position in comparison to the Cuban variety for the same measures (40%, 27%, 14%) respectively. The Cuban voices were associated with being more pleasant (average score 3.52 CU, 3.12 SP, 3.64 L2, 4.00 M) and likeable (3.12 CU, 3.08 SP, 3.64 L2, 3.40 M) in comparison to the Peninsular voices in terms of pleasantness (3.32 CU, 2.36 SP, 3.36 L2, 3.32 M) and likeability (2.48 CU, 2.60 SP, 3.36 L2, 3.32 M). Regarding categorization rates, the native Cuban (92%) and Peninsular (70%) listeners outperformed the L2 learners (54%) and monolingual English (14%) speakers in correctly categorizing the voices.

This study offers a novel contribution to the field of accent perceptions through the inclusion of these underrepresented groups, namely, the Cuban and Peninsular Spanish varieties, in addition to

L2 learners and monolingual English speakers. The results obtained also suggest the existence of broader systemic struggles in the lives of speakers belonging to stigmatized language varieties such as the Cuban variety of Spanish - a topic we recommend for future research.

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