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**INTRODUCTION**

“To be ignorant of how the non-linguistic community characterises linguistic facts is to hamper one’s own usefulness in talking with that very community about the subjects we know most about.” (Preston 1989: xi-xii)

Traditionally, dialectologists were almost exclusively concerned with identifying and analysing variables and variants which define the geographical varieties of a language, independently of speakers’ intuitions about geolinguistic variation. Since Preston’s studies in the 1980s, however, there has been a growth of interest in dialect studies examining speakers’ perceptions, beliefs and attitudes regarding diatopic variation. What is interesting about perceptual dialectology is its focus on non-linguists’ insights about language (folk linguistics). Studies within this framework reverse the traditional roles, putting in the foreground speakers’ knowledge about language variation in the spatial dimension. The present study aims to fill a lacuna in Galician language studies and contribute to the growing body of work relevant to perceptual dialectology and research on language attitudes.

**OBJECTIVES**

This study’s chief objectives have to do with two related subjects: the identification and geographical position of different Galician dialects, and subjective judgments about the language’s geographical variations:

- To identify and analyse non-specialist Galician speakers’ opinions and beliefs about dialectal variation in the Galician language.
- To compare the dialect areas they perceive with those traditionally recognised in Galician studies.
- To record speakers’ judgments about the different dialects of Galician and, by extension, their speakers.

**METHOD**

With Preston’s and Montgomery’s methodological approach as our starting point, a set of procedures was established combining an aural perception test with a questionnaire.

1. Perceptive test: The informants were first presented with a variety of oral stimuli and asked for their perceptual judgments. Seven different audio tracks were played to each participant, and using a computer application they were asked to assign each voice to a specific geographical area.

The tracks consisted of six recordings of dialect speech and one of standard Galician. Each dialect recording is representative of a particular geographical area and they all contain a number of features that identify the area in question.

**INITIAL HYPOTHESES**

- Speakers are aware of dialect variation in the Galician language area but lack mental images with clearly defined geographical borders.
- Their identification of dialect areas is the result of a combination of intralinguistic and extralinguistic criteria.
- The most strongly identifying linguistic features are those that are most stigmatized socially (in the case of Galician, gheuda and seseo, for example).
- Informants’ level of education is one of the main variables determining their responses.
- Informants’ own dialect is assessed in terms of its value as an identifying mark and as a symbol of belonging to a particular community.
- Speakers’ ideas concerning linguistic correctness uphold this relational model: the higher the level of an informants’ education is, the more correct they think it is.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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