ATTITUDES TOWARDS VARIETIES OF PORTUGUESE IN BRAZIL

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Abstract

This study investigates the attitudes of Brazilian university students in the states of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo to three different varieties of Portuguese: that of Rio de Janeiro, that of São Paulo, and that of an American. The results suggest that speakers from São Paulo are more favorably judged than are those from either Rio de Janeiro or from abroad in relation to solidarity or attraction, independent of the origin of the judges, which would suggest that the speech of São Paulo tends to be the national prestige dialect; moreover, foreign speakers receive the highest status rankings. These results should be interpreted with caution, however, due to problems in the design of the study.

1. Introduction

Brazil is a country of continental proportions characterized by great diversity, although for years the dialectal differences were ignored. In the 1970's, interest in the differences between the speech of educated speakers in the various regions of the country was aroused, and the Project NURC and others like it were born to study them. Hundreds of hours of interviews with various kinds of speakers in various contexts were taped, and the analysis continues up to the present. But these analyses largely furnish descriptions of usage and linguistic aspects, without consideration of the social effects of the speech or

attitudes towards it on the part of the Brazilian population as a whole. In recent years, a few theses and studies have, however, begun to show an interest in attitudes towards regional varieties in the country (Melo, 1985; Bortoni-Ricardo, 1985; Bisolotti, 2001; Barbosa, 2002, for example).

Research around the world has shown the negative effects of sociallystigmatized or non-standard dialects, as well as the solidarity evoked in relation to speakers of the local variety. The research of Seligman et al. (1972), for example, points out that speech style is a crucial factor in teacher evaluation of students, even when apparently contradictory information is also present, with students with the most 'deviant' varieties being evaluated much less favorably.

The study of explicit attitudes towards speakers of non-local dialects has been studied in Brasilia, as the national capital has suffered a large influx of individuals from around the country. Although there seems to be no single prestige dialect in Brazil, the study of Hanna (1986) showed a trend towards the loss of strong regional markings in the speech of individuals settling in Brasilia, leading Barbosa (2002) to suggest a possible trend towards the development of a 'neutral, non-accented' speech in the Federal District, generally leading to the non-identification of its speakers outside their own region. Such studies (including that of Melo, 1985) have shown a general prejudice in relation to speakers of the Northeast, which is generally interpreted as a reaction to the economically precarious situation it represents, but both São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro are located in the economically privileged Southeast.

Moreover, Barbosa mentions the culturally prestigious situation of the speech of Rio for residents of Brasilia, accompanied by a lack of rejection of the speech of São Paulo. Attitudes towards these two varieties have not been subjected to detailed investigation, however, and the comments of interviewees alternately view each of them positively and negatively. The speech of São Paulo has great national prominence due to the economic projection of the area and the use of this variety in the national media, whereas Rio de Janeiro has been cited as the cultural center of the country for decades.

Attitude studies are common in situations with clear situations of interethnic conflict, such as Wales, Catalonia, the Basque countries, and the United States, but Brazil has generally given an impression of linguistic harmony.

1.1 Brazilian dialect studies

Brazilian linguists have long shown that there is no national linguistic unity and that there are numerous regional standards. Whether these varieties are regionally or socially marked, they serve more to mark differences than similarities. No one, for example, notices that the sound systems of the varieties of Rio and São Paulo are almost the same. Rather in the Rio variety people notice the distinctive realization of voiced and voiceless fricatives (/s/ and /z/) in a palatalized form ([sh] and [zh] prior to a high front vowel), as well as that of the post-vocalic vibrant /r/ as a velar fricative (Callou Leite, 1990). These modifications are obvious to all Brazilian listeners, even those with no special experience in phonetics, and are known to be characteristic of the speech of Rio de Janeiro.

Although various other differences have been studied, these will not be detailed here, as the main objective involves more the impressions and reactions of various listeners upon hearing texts being read in the two dialects.

1.2 English as a foreign language in Brazil

The linguistic situation in Brazil is complicated by the massive presence of English, an internationally hegemonic language, in the country, whether in the songs heard in the media or the books and other materials read at the Brazilian universities. In fact, reactions to English as a foreign language have probably been subject to more attitude studies than have those to Brazilians from different regions of the country. Various studies have investigated such topics as the imputed racism of English teachers or English teaching as a vehicle of cultural imperialism (see, for example, Moita Lopes, 1982). Other studies, however, have shown generally favorable opinions towards such speakers in one way or another (El-Dash, 1985; El-Dash and Busnardo, 1996; Busnardo and El-Dash, 1993; El-Dash and Busnardo, 2001; de Sousa, 2001), — a sort of love-hate reaction mentioned by various authors and which for many Brazilians has led to a general tendency to attribute a relatively high status to English speakers while simultaneously expressing unfavorable opinions about these same individuals.

The high social status associated with English speakers might have been mitigated if their attempts to speak Portuguese led to markedly negative reactions, but the transfer of some of the most common American intonation patterns to Portuguese leads to an impression of surprise or a lack of certainty (de Sousa, 2001), neither of which would be expected to arouse strong feelings of rejection in the Brazilian listener. (In contrast to what happens when Brazilians transfer their intonation patterns into English, often causing the impression of sarcasm, criticism, or a lack of interest, all impressions evoking strong negative reactions in American listeners.)

The present study was thus designed to compare the reactions of university students in São Paulo to the speech of São Paulo and that of Rio de Janeiro, as well as the highly accented Portuguese of an American.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 The matched guise procedure

The classic indirect approach used in attitude studies is the matched guise technique (Ryan et al., 1982). In this technique, developed by Lambert and colleagues (1967; 1960), people who command two or more varieties of a language (or different languages) are taped while speaking in each of these guises. Subjects, not realizing they are evaluating the same person, rate each of the samples independently. Since the idiosyncratic features of voice quality are assumed to be identical for the same person, the reaction can be taken to be to the guise language or dialect itself, rather than to other aspects of voice quality. To avoid reactions to the topic of conversation, the standard procedure is the reading of the same text by all of the guises.

Instruments. The instruments used for the matched guise test consisted of a classic audio tape and a booklet of evaluation forms, one page per guise. These will be discussed below.

Tape. One of the greatest problems in the use of the matched guise technique is the difficulty in locating speakers who control the dialects of interest. In the present study, two young Brazilian males were located who were able to speak the Portuguese variety of both São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, as well as furnishing a believable imitation of an American speaking Portuguese. Their renditions of all three guises were judged convincing by an initial panel of lay Brazilians.

Another problem in the use of the matched guise involves the choice of text for the speakers to produce. The classic procedure (Lambert, 1960) involves the reading of the same text by each of the speakers in each of the guises, but under these circumstances, the task facing the subject listeners can be quite boring. Various modifications have been proposed, including the use of free speech on controlled topics (El-Dash and Tucker, 1975), but topic and details of content tend to exert undesirable effects; the use of a longer text divided into short segments seems to be a better solution (de Souza, 2001), and that was the approach used here.

Each speaker read the entire text in each of his guises. The text selected involved a topic (living together before marriage) which seemed appropriate for the target population of university students, and it had already been tested and adapted by de Souza (2001) so that it could be divided into 9 approximately equal segments of approximately 1 - 1.5 minutes each. The final tape was compiled using one segment in each of the guises of each of the speakers, and other individuals from São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro also read the text to provide the necessary fillers to complete the reading. The reactions of the subjects to these speakers were not considered in the analysis.

The segments included on the final tape were distributed so that no two guises of the same speaker were presented close together, although the limited number of distractors made this difficult and the final two renditions of one of the speakers were separated by only a single speaker. (Three subjects did question whether they were the same individual, but were not at all sure.)

Speaker evaluation forms. Evaluation involved responding to a series of semantic differential scales especially constructed for this study. An original list of 18 pairs of adjectives, based on earlier studies and informal discussions, was pre-tested and the results submitted to factor analysis with varimax rotation (using the SAS statistical system, version 8.4). This analysis revealed four factors. In addition to two factors apparently equivalent to those of status and solidarity which have been discussed in the literature, two others were identified, the first of these corresponding to what we identified as reliability and the other to some sort of financial wealth and its outward manifestations, such as elegance. Since the weightings on this latter factor were not high, however, the adjectives involved were eliminated, as well as several others which failed to receive a weighting above 0.6 for any of the factors and those weighting relatively heavily on more than one factor. These remaining 10 descriptive adjectives, with 1 corresponding to a more positive ranking, were included on the final answer sheet: 5 for status (Factor 1), 3 for solidarity (Factor 2) and 2 for what we defined as reliability (Factor 3). These results are presented in Table 1, with the adjectives retained in bold-face type.

Table 1. Factors underlying descriptive adjectives.

	FACTOR 1	FACTOR 2	FACTOR 3	FACTOR 4
Intelligent/stupid	-0.78	0.04	-0.05	-0.13
Insecure/self-assured	0.76	0.02	-0.07	0.09
Uneducated/educated	0.74	-0.09	0.12	0.24
Lazy/hard-working	0.73	-0.07	-0.21	-0.21
Successful/unsuccessful	-0.62	-0.06	0.07	-0.28
Careful/careless	-0.59	0.15	0.33	0.19
Weak/strong	0.54	- 0.17	-0.02	0.06
Polite/impolite	-0.51	0.23	0.38	0.22
Gentle/aggressive	-0.01	0.82	0.10	0.00
Harsh/kind	0.02	-0.78	-0.12	-0.04
Generous/stingy	-0.29	0.64	0.22	-0.11
Rude/considerate	0.43	0.55	-0.09	-0.05
Pleasant/unpleasant	0.03	0.44	0.45	-0.28
Reliable/unreliable	-0.15	0.03	0.76	0.01
Insincere/sincere	0.13	-0.23	-0.70	-0.10
Friendly/unfriendly	0.16	0.46	0.58	0.22
Poor/rich	0.09	0.09	-0.13	0.69
Elegant/tacky	-0.11	0.16	-0.13	-0.52

2.2 Subjects

The study was conducted with similar groups of judges (public university students) in the states of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. In São Paulo, the subjects were 189 students enrolled in regular language classes in Campinas; in Rio de Janeiro, the students were majoring in Language and Literature in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Although the subjects remained anonymous, information about their age, sex, and geographic origin was collected.

2.3 Instrument Administration

The instruments were administered during regular class periods. After a standardized introduction to the task, emphasizing how people draw inferences about individuals when they hear their voices on the telepone or radio and

explaining how the evaluation booklets should be marked, the first segment was played to make sure the subjects had understood the instructions. The rest of the tape was then played, pausing after each speaker until all had completed their evaluation. The entire procedure took approximately 40 minutes. In São Paulo the authors of the study administered the instruments, whereas in Rio de Janeiro, it was the regular teachers of the classes.

2.4 Analysis

Separate analyses were made for the two groups. In both situations, all students reporting having been raised outside the state of interest were eliminated. A single score for each of the three factors was calculated for each speaker guise by summing the scores for the individual adjectives of that factor and dividing by the number of adjectives included (5 for Factor 1, 3 for Factor 2, and 2 for Factor 3). The responses to the two examples of each of the varieties of Portuguese were then averaged to yield three separate scores for each speaker guise: a score for status, solidarity, and reliability for the Portuguese from São Paulo, for that from Rio de Janeiro and for that from the American). A series of independent Student t-tests were made to compare each pair of averages (Table 2).

Table 2. Averages of reactions to speakers of the three guises in terms of status, solidarity and reliability. All of the differences between each of the pairs are significant at the level of 0.0001.

	AMERICAN ACCENT	SÃO PAULO ACCENT	RIO DE JANEIRO ACCENT
Solidarity			
São Paulo	x = 2.87	x = 2.44	x = 2.66
Rio de Janeiro	x = 2.76	x = 2.41	x = 2.56
Status			
São Paulo	x = 2.25	x = 2.37	x = 2.93
Rio de Janeiro	x = 2.12	x = 2.14	x = 2.73
Reliability			
São Paulo	x = 3.03	x = 2.57	x = 3.28
Rio de Janeiro	x = 2.85	x = 2.29	x = 3.15

3. Results and Discussion

The results show that for solidarity the speakers of the foreign outgroup are given the lowest ratings. These results suggest a greater affinity and feelings of approximation or attraction in relation to their fellow countrymen, which was to be expected of mature adults. This reflects a certain national unity and identity as well as the 'hate' or rejection aspect in relation to Americans mentioned above. At the same time, the residents of Rio de Janeiro are judging the speakers from São Paulo more favorably than those from Rio de Janeiro. Although residents of São Paulo do, as expected, rate their fellow residents higher than the outsiders from Rio, the fact that residents of Rio share this opinion suggests they identify with the speakers of the variety of São Paulo.

The results for status, however, show that the status of the Americans speaking Portuguese is evaluated as higher than that of either of the Brazilian groups, although for the university students in Rio de Janeiro the status of the speakers from São Paulo is nearly the same. These results are in agreement with those found by El-Dash (1988) for adult Brazilians, typical in relation to the status of a hegemonic language such as English. These higher status attributions for Americans reflect the attraction or 'love' aspect involved in Brazilian reactions to English mentioned above. For the Brazilian speakers, the same tendency is observed for the individuals living in both states - higher rankings for speakers from São Paulo than for those from Rio de Janeiro. This is a clear suggestion that the variety of São Paulo is more prestigious than that of Rio de Janeiro.

The reactions to the third factor of reliability have not been investigated in previous attitude studies in Brazil. Again, the residents of the two states rank the three guises similarly, with the speakers from São Paulo receiving higher scores than either of the two other sub-groups. What is surprising is the ranking of the reliability of the Americans as greater than that of the speakers from Rio de Janeiro, but again it is the speakers from São Paulo that are more favorably judged, confirming the suggestion that the variety of São Paulo is a national standard.

These results, however, were based on an average of two guises of each of the accents. Several of the student judges from São Paulo reacted quite strongly to the voice of one of the speakers when speaking the variety of Rio de Janeiro, so we decided to check whether their apparent rejection of this specific guise had been reflected in their reactions to the other guises of this same speaker, who had a somewhat higher voice. We found that the averages

for all three of the guises of this speaker were lower than those for the speaker with the deeper voice for two of the factors (status and reliability), suggesting that the general voice quality of this individual was less attractive or appealing, which reinforces the justification for the use of such an indirect technique which makes it possible to distinguish between responses to dialect aspects and to other aspects of voice quality. However, in the guise of Rio de Janeiro, where the subjects from São Paulo had reacted negatively on an overt level, the speaker with the higher voice was evaluated even more positively than the other speaker in his Rio guise in relation to solidarity. Thus it seems that the higher voice makes the speaker seem more appealing or approachable, while detracting from his status and perceived reliability.

These results must be interpreted with caution, however, as there is another possible interpretation. The original instructions included a request for the subjects to indicate the probably origin of the speakers, but both of the speakers were actually from the state of São Paulo. Even though both they and listeners from São Paulo felt their simulations of the variety of Portuguese spoken in Rio was realistic, the judges actually from the city of Rio may have felt uncomfortable with these renditions for some reason. There may, for example, be clearly discernible differences between the speech of various towns or neighborhoods in the state / city of Rio, even though none have been discussed in the literature, and the version on the tape may have portrayed a variety evoking specific negative reactions or not have accurately reflected any of these varieties. The possibility of regional differences should be investigated further.

Only 80% of the subjects from Rio de Janeiro answered the question about the possible origin of the Rio guises, and the responses in general suggest very little linguistic sophistication. However, nearly 10% seemed to question these guises in some way. It is possible that these judges (who study language at the university) may have been conscious of subtle differences even though they were unable to identify what was wrong. Some suggested that one or the other of these speakers might be from Portugal or that they were from another part of the state pretending to be from the city of Rio, while still others suggested that at least one of these speakers was a homosexual. Since homosexuals bear a heavy social stigma in Brazil (as well as in other Latin countries), this may represent a rejection of someone perceived as different. It thus seems possible that even those who did not realize that the guises were not genuine individuals from the state of Rio de Janeiro may have felt uncomfortable with these renditions and reacted negatively.

In an attempt to investigate this issue a bit further, the authors returned to the voice of the speaker from Rio which had originally been included as a filler. The status, solidarity, and reliability scores of this individual were obtained and compared to those of the two Rio guises of the speakers from São Paulo Fig. 1).

First, it should be noted that in all cases the evaluation of this third Rio guise was significantly different from that of the other two Rio guises (which were also significantly different from each other, with the subject with the deeper voice being judged more highly than the one with the higher voice). In the case of status, the picture which emerges when the scores for the genuine resident of Rio are used to represent reactions to individuals from Rio de Janeiro is different. With this change, the status of speakers from Rio emerges as higher than that relegated to the Americans, which is in contrast to what happened with the SP subjects, who ranked the foreigners more positively than the speakers from São Paulo (and certainly higher than those from Rio). This suggests that foreigners are not so highly evaluated in Rio de Janeiro (traditional cultural capital of the country) as they are in São Paulo (the financial capital).

In relation to reliability, the situation is also modified. Although the speakers of São Paulo are still seen to be more favorably evaluated in terms of reliability characteristics of 'confiável' and 'sincero', the speakers from Rio are judged more favorably than the foreigners. Presumably this reflects differences between individuals in São Paulo and Rio, but again there is another issue which must be taken into consideration.

The testing in Rio was done some four months later than that in São Paulo. Since the events of September 11. however, Brazilians' views of the United

Figure 1. Final ranking of preference profiles for status, solidarity, and reliability using genuine speaker from Rio de Janeiro.

	HIGHEST	LOWEST
STATUS	Rio de Janeiro > USA > Sã	o Paulo
SOLIDARITY	São Paulo > USA > Rio de	Janeiro
RELIABILITY	São Paulo > Rio de Janeiro	> USA

States (or perhaps their willingness to express true views) have been actively changing, with ever more explicit rejection of Americans and their politics. Even though both groups were tested over a year after the terrorist attacks, the lapse of even a few months between the two studies could have captured some of these changes.

Various recent studies eliciting opinions in relation to Americans and the English language since the terrorist attacks and, more recently, the war in Iraq, have found that explicit opinions have become much more anti-American (El-Dash, 2004). Reactions to voices in matched guise studies, however, have continued to show a preference for the language of foreigners in general, including English speakers (Figueiredo, 2004). The fact that the reactions to the speakers of German, French, Spanish, and English are all more favorably judged by adolescents than are speakers of Portuguese, however, may suggest that what is being judged so favorably is the 'otherness' of the speakers.

The unfavorable reactions in relation to the Rio in-group with respect to solidarity became even more accentuated when the guise of the true resident of Rio was used, with scores being even more negative than those of the two Rio guises of the speakers from São Paulo (2.93 vs an average of 2.56; t=36.97, p<0,0001). The residents of São Paulo were still more favorably evaluated than the Americans in terms of solidarity, but now even the Americans were more favorably evaluated than was the speaker from Rio. Thus in the area where the most positive in-group evaluation was expected, the reality was an extremely negative rating. Even though the evaluation of speakers from Rio was improved by the disconsideration of the guises of the original speakers in relation to status and realiability, the evaluation was even more negative in relation to solidarity.

No immediate explanations for these findings were found, although various individuals from Rio de Janeiro have confirmed that residents there do not 'trust' each other and point out that subtle differences in neighborhoods (although not specifically in the speech of these neighborhoods) make a tremendous difference for the natives. It is thus possible that the speaker from Rio de Janeiro was interpreted as representing one of the less 'desirable' neighborhoods, although such a possibility remains to be verified.

There were also what we considered to be minor differences in subjects, since those in Rio were all enrolled in the courses of Language and Literature, whereas those in São Paulo were more varied in relation to major field of study. It is possible that individuals who are studying a foreign language may be more accepting of foreigners than are university students in general, but this

does not explain their negative in-group evaluations. Moreover, if it is true that such students in Rio are so opposed to their own peer group in terms of solidarity, this may underlie the extremely positive evaluations of Americans by English teachers (who have obviously graduated from courses of Language and Literature) which were identified in Rio de Janeiro by Moita Lopes (1982). Further studies are urgently needed.

This study has shown that there is much to be done in Brazil in relation to the social implications of language varieties.

4. Concluding remarks

This research has taken steps towards the untangling of the myriad threads involved in the complex knot of attitudes towards language which are found in Brazil. Given the complexity of the situation, however, the results are far from conclusive and suggest just how much more is left to investigate. Although this matched guise study with university students from the states of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro has suggested that the variety of Portuguese spoken in São Paulo has become (or is on its way to becoming) more of a national prestige variety than one spoken in the state of Rio de Janeiro, it is obvious that this must be interpreted with caution. Before it will be possible to ascertain whether the variety spoken in São Paulo does indeed invoke more positive reactions than do any of the varieties found in Rio, it will first be necessary to investigate whether there are various distinctive varieties depending on exactly where in the state (or even city) of Rio a person lives; moreover, if this proves to be the case, what are the relative prestige (or power) and attraction involved for residents in various locations. Furthermore, the lack of solidarity revealed by fellow residents to those speaking the variety of Rio also requires further study as it is possible that this might reflect the rejection of a specific local variety. Without knowledge about whether or not there are more locally recognized speech varieties within Rio, it is impossible to interpret the results obtained here adequately.

Moreover, the situation is further complicated by the international importance of the ever-present English in the wider globalized society and its importance in the economic and academic communities. Despite conscious political divergence and a growing explicit rejection of Americans on the part of many Brazilians, many of the younger generation are still enthralled by the glamour of pop music and the Hollywood movies ever-present in their lives.

This tension between rejection on one level and fascination on another certainly colors attitudes towards foreigners in Brazil and their control (or lack of it) in relation to the local Portuguese language. This initial study has thus only succeeded in scratching the surface of the complex attitudes towards language found in Brazil, and there is urgent need for much further investigation.

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