

Language attitudes and vowel lengthening in Córdoba, Argentina: An acoustical approach

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The *tonada cordobesa*, designating the regional variety of Spanish spoken in Córdoba, Argentina, is characterized by a lengthening of the vowel in pre-tonic position (ex. Arge:ntína). Vowel lengthening has been cited as a distinguishing feature of the Córdoba dialect within Argentina by linguists such as Fontanella de Weinberg (1971) and Yorio (1973), and is frequently the focal feature in the imitations and popular descriptions of this dialect at the popular level (c.f. “Curso de Cordobés” websites cited below). More recently, the lengthening of the pre-tonic vowel has been demonstrated to influence perception of a Córdoba identity in a dialect identification task presenting manipulated (pre-tonic vowel) stimuli (Lang-Rigal, forthcoming). The goals of the present study are to discover the stereotypes associated with the Córdoba dialect and to determine if pre-tonic vowel lengthening directly affects the perception of the speaker’s competence and attractiveness. These goals are accomplished with a perception task which combined short audio samples of naturalistic, spontaneously produced speech with a written questionnaire to elicit language attitudes towards a variety of speakers from Córdoba. The speakers used to create the stimuli were 12 natives of Córdoba Argentina, balanced for sex, age, and social class to present a variety of voices, and natives of Buenos Aires and Tucumán (n=4), included as distractor items. Naïve listeners (n=63) from different regions of Argentina evaluated speakers based on a short (approx. 3 second) speech sample as to his or her perceived personality, social status, and attractiveness. Each speech sample was presented along with 10 questions eliciting speaker judgments with scalar, binary, or multiple choice responses. One dialect identification question accompanied the attitude judgments so that dialect identification accuracy could be analyzed in addition to dialect attitudes towards each of the three dialects included: Córdoba, Buenos Aires, and Tucumán. Results show that evaluative judgments of perceived speaker intelligence and occupation correlate with the degree of pre-tonic vowel lengthening in the speech sample (linear mixed model regression $t=4.577$, $p<.01$). The samples in which a longer pre-tonic vowel was produced, meeting or exceeding the duration of the tonic vowel in the same word, were more negatively evaluated for these two traits of status and competence. Conversely, Córdoba speakers were positively evaluated for attractiveness and integrity traits, such as *gracioso* (funny), than for status-related traits, such as *culta* (cultured), in comparison to the Buenos Aires speaker controls. This is similar to the pattern found for regional varieties viewed as non-standard and of lower social status relative to the perceived standard dialect (Labov et al. 1968, Giles 1971, 1973; and Preston 1999). These results support the stereotype linking the Cordoban persona to a well-developed sense of humor and joking (Hepp 1995; Cantinelli 1985) and expose some of the language attitudes held towards Córdoba speakers with quantitative and acoustically based measures.

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