

Attitudes toward Contact Varieties in Lima, Peru

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This paper investigates attitudes of middle-class Limenians towards two contact-influenced varieties of Spanish, in comparison with standard Peruvian Spanish. These contact varieties include a Quechua-influenced variety of Spanish that predominates in the Andean highlands, and an English-influenced variety that appears among foreigners and their contacts.

Since colonial times, Spanish in Peru has been the prestige language. Even though Quechua became an official language in 1975 (Escobar 1981, Hornberger 1987), Spanish remains more acceptable than Quechua for official communication (Zavala and Córdova 2014). Contact between Quechua and Spanish has led to the emergence of the Andean Spanish variety that includes unique features. Many phonological traits of this dialect, such as unstressed vowel devoicing (Hundley 1983), <r> assibilation (Caravedo 1987), and consonant strengthening (Escobar 2011) can be traced to Quechua. While many Peruvians speak Andean Spanish natively (Escobar 2011), it is popularly understood as an “uneducated” dialect of Spanish (Zavala 2010).

More recently, contact between Spanish-speaking Peruvians and English-speaking foreigners has led to an English-influenced variety of Spanish, which includes nonstandard phonological features such as unstressed vowel reduction, <r> liquidization or assibilation, and pronunciation of voiced fricatives as stops (Hurtado and Estrada 2010). While English has never been an official language of Peru, foreigners are very highly respected in the country. Thus, though many nonstandard traits of English-influenced Spanish are similar to traits of Andean Spanish, the former appears more acceptable for public use.

In the study, Spanish-speaking professionals from Lima hear three male speakers read an article in fluent Spanish. In this case, listeners make judgments only based on phonological characteristics. One speaker is a native standard Peruvian Spanish speaker, one is a native Quechua speaker, and one is a native American English speaker. While listening to the recordings, participants are asked to make judgments about each speaker's character, education level, and employment potential, then explain their responses and describe the speaker's presumed native language and place of origin. Specifically, this study aims to determine if there is a correlation between the speaker's pronunciation and the listener's perception of that speaker.

Overall, participants' perceptions of the three speakers fall on a scale, with the more positive characteristics (above-average intelligence, neutral language description) and highest abilities and accomplishments (graduate education, employment in finance) being attributed to the American English speaker; the more negative characteristics (below-average intelligence, negative language description) and lowest achievement (secondary school, non-professional employment) to the Quechua speaker; and the standard Spanish speaker being considered on a level between the other two speakers. Since participants made these judgments based solely on speech, the results of this study suggest that these three varieties vary in prestige in Peru. The speakers of the two nonstandard varieties are perceived differently and on opposite poles, even though both varieties include similar nonstandard phonological features. While all speakers used varieties of Spanish, each one has a different social value.

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