

Katharina Golitschek Edle von Elbwart

Language regard in the Sunshine State

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To my parents Sigrid and Wolf
and to the memory of my beloved grandmother.

Thank you for your endless support and encouragement.
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whatever I wanted to be in life without limitations.
Thank you for always believing in me, even when I didn't.

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List of abbreviations

ANAE	Atlas of North American English
DMV	Department of Motor Vehicles
EEOA	Equal Educational Opportunities Act
ELL	English Language Learner
ESSA	Every Student Succeeds Act
FAU	Florida Atlantic University
FIU	Florida International University
FL	Folk Linguistics
FLOM	Folk Linguistic Online Mapping
FSU	Florida State University
GIS	Geographic Information System
IAT	Implicit Association Test
L1	Native Language
L2	Nonnative Language
LAGS	Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States
LEP	Limited English Proficiency
LOTEs	Languages Other Than English
MLE	Miami Latino English
NCLB	No Child Left Behind Act
NVTC	National Virtual Translation Center
PD	Perceptual Dialectology
RO	Respondents Overall
RP	Received Pronunciation
RQ	Respondents Questions
SAE	Standard American English
SL	Students Linguistics
ST	Students Tallahassee
TPS	Temporary Protected Status

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1 Introduction

“This is a country where we speak English, not Spanish.”
(U.S. President Donald Trump in a nationally televised debate in 2016)

When I first deboarded the plane in Miami in 2010, I looked for the signs to the baggage claim and ground transportation. To my surprise, I saw signs which read *Reclamo de equipaje* and *Transporte urbano*. After a couple of weeks of adjusting to my new home, I decided to buy new clothes. Waiting in line at the checkout, I overheard a few conversations between the shop assistant and other customers – all of them were conducted in Spanish. When it was my turn, the lady welcomed me by asking how I was and whether everything was ok today. Again, to my surprise, she addressed me in English, when only a moment before she had been speaking Spanish.

These two observations set the ground for this study on language attitudes and perceptual dialectology in Florida. Despite the state’s sole official language being English – a designation which was added to the constitution as the English as Official Language amendment in 1988 – bilingualism seems to be the norm in everyday Floridian life. Official attitudes toward language use, with English being the only officially recognized language of the state, seem to diverge from ordinary language practices. Signage and labels appear in both languages and people effortlessly switch between English and Spanish in daily conversations. The shop assistant in the anecdote above realized that I was not a Spanish speaker and addressed me in English instead. Since we had not exchanged any words before, I assume her quick judgment to be based on my appearance, my behavior, and perhaps my gestures. Her perception of me as a European and her attitudes toward me as a nonnative speaker of Spanish helped her assess the situation correctly by approaching me in English. It is this perception of linguistic and cultural characteristics which allows members of a speech community to organize themselves and their environment, and adjust their language use.

Language is often regarded as a basic human instinct (Pinker 1994), learned almost effortlessly and easily by children at a young age; as such, language plays a key role in human life. Thus, it has functioned as the means of communication among people for centuries, constantly evolving to suit the needs of its speakers. Contact scenarios – for example, those generated through migration – have broadened the field and allowed for languages to spread and fragment further into linguistic varieties and dialects. The more recent notion of an artificially conceptualized language, in which language is regarded as a denotational and finite system of forms, allows – despite legitimate criticism – for an analysis of different varieties of a language which can be distinguished on the basis of core grammatical structures and lexical items (Blommaert 2006: 512). Language fulfills an important role of social behavior (Holm 2004) and as such enables individuals to socially interact with one another. Despite language being deeply anchored in human society, people rarely consciously think about their language use; rather, they employ their tongue in everyday conversation as a matter of course. Thus, concomitant with various social functions of language is a close associa-

tion between language use and construction of identity. The culture a speaker most closely associates with may be regarded as a form of language allegiance (Salaberry 2009a: 1); language functions as a main component in finding one's place in society. Language allegiances, then, are an essential part of identity construction which are constantly negotiated as speakers "use speech to signal their sense of themselves as belonging to group A and being different from group B" (Cameron 1995: 17). In essence, this connection can be assessed from various standpoints which are summarized in Salaberry as follows. In his view, language can be regarded as:

- a) a true essential property of identity;
- b) a belief about an essential property;
- c) a symbol that denotes cultural affiliation;
- d) a fluid parameter subject to social construction (Salaberry 2009a: 5).

What all perspectives have in common is a shared effect on the construction of identity, as well as a focus on the individual rather than the universal aspect. The notion of language allegiances becomes especially apparent in contexts of language contact where cultural identification is inextricably connected with language (Cornell & Bratton 1999; Salaberry 2009a). As a matter of fact, research has shown that – due to processes of assimilation and acculturation – giving up and losing linguistic skills in one particular language goes hand in hand with losing ties to that identity (Brodie et al. 2002; Sears et al. 1999). The same can be said for language varieties or linguistic choices, which are marked in a certain context due to their unexpectedness or otherness. Marked language varieties or linguistic features are strongly connected to the speaker identity because they signal one's membership in a speech community. These language varieties and styles, then, trigger beliefs about a speaker and their social group membership and thus organize and categorize social interactions (Garrett 2010; Tajfel 1981).

However, with every spoken word, people may be judged based on their idiolectal language choices. Even though some authors disagree with a clear connection between language and identity (Gracia 1999; Gutmann 2003), it does not entail that speakers would not perceive a connection (either factually or symbolically) between the two entities. That is, speakers have certain beliefs about language at all levels: phonology or 'accentedness', lexicon and different lexical decisions, dialects, and languages in general. These judgments may be based on regional, cultural, social and/or ethnic grounds, among others, and are often transmitted through a specific and varied use of language. This is especially true for bilingual and multilingual settings where multiple language varieties coexist and oftentimes interact with one another. Language variation carries social meaning (Garrett 2010) and evokes different reactions to language use. In the same way, individuals categorize and judge other speakers to organize their communicative situations. Even though language attitudes dominate our daily lives, "they are not always publicly articulated and, indeed, we are not always conscious of them" (Garrett 2010: 1).