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PROBLEMATISING ACCENTS IN PLURICENTRIC LANGUAGES: THE CASE OF TEACHERS OF SPANISH AS A WORLD LANGUAGE IN AUSTRALIA

Abstract: Spanish is a pluricentric language with nearly 500 million native speakers spread across twenty-one countries. Paradoxically, and despite the cultural and linguistic diversity that such a vast geographical distribution entails, approaches to teaching Spanish as a world language (SWL) remain largely monocentric, upholding Castilian Spanish as the “standard” norm and reproducing and perpetuating asymmetrical power relations among speakers of other Spanish varieties differing from it. Such linguistic hierarchies, which originated in colonial times, have given rise to accentism, a form of discrimination that, at first, might be understood as merely based on accent, but which entails a more complex set of interwoven factors. This paper aims to problematize the absence of accents in the teaching of SWL and to critically examine the roots of such linguistic discrimination as well as the long-lasting effects of the colonial legacy on teachers. To this end, the paper draws on empirical data from a study investigating the perceptions of university-level teachers of Spanish in Australia (n=38) towards normative geographical varieties of Spanish.

Keywords: Linguistic diversity ♦ language ideologies ♦ accentism ♦ teachers of Spanish as a world language ♦ linguistic discrimination

Introduction

Spanish has long been identified as an international language that enjoys increasing importance among the world's languages. It has official status in twenty-one countries and in many international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU). Nearly 500 million people are native speakers¹ of Spanish, and more than twenty-four million people study it as an additional language (Cervantes Instituto, 2022). Such linguistic demographics provide evidence of its pluricentric nature. However, the cultural and linguistic diversity inherent in its extensive geographic spread has not yet been reflected in the teaching Spanish as a world language (SWL)².

The market-oriented model that dominates language teaching and learning has promoted a utilitarian understanding of language that decontextualises, depoliticises and homogenises knowledge to be traded everywhere for profit-making (Bruzos, 2022). On the other hand, pluralist paradigms, particularly in English teaching, have striven to promote linguistic diversity and dismantle such reductionist conceptualizations of language since the 1980s, as we will see below. And yet, while these paradigms have significantly enhanced our understanding of these matters on a theoretical level, they do not appear to have permeated teaching practices.

Consequently, teaching SWL remains largely monocentric. Furthermore, the “sanitised” vision of language that promotes such model is not neutral (Norton, 2010). Castilian Spanish has been naturalised as the “standard” norm and, thus, promoted and privileged in SWL while other Spanish language varieties and accents are ignored or invisibilised. I contend that the persistence of such a monocentric model and Eurocentric teaching practices in SWL are inextricably linked to teachers' language ideologies: a system of beliefs inherited from colonial times which plays a crucial role in reproducing and perpetuating existing power relations and “inequalities, prejudices, and social and linguistic hierarchies” (Martín-Rojo et al., 2017, p. 171).

These hierarchies, which are often interpreted on the basis of a linguistic element alone, actually involve a more complex set of interwoven factors related to language users' identity/ies that we

1 Throughout this article, I will be using the terms "native" and "non-native" speakers, as they are conventionally used in relevant scholarly sources. However, I acknowledge that these binary categories reflect an ideological stance rooted in a Modern/European imperial model of language that arose from colonialism (Train, 2012) and that their use is not unproblematic (Dewaele, 2018).

2 For a thorough analysis of the similarities and differences between this concept and the well-developed and widely theorized concept of English as a world/global/international language refer to Perez et al. (2021).

must unpack and problematise to dismantle linguistic inequalities. In this study, I focus on *accentism*—a form of discrimination based on speakers’ accents—and its intersection with social status. The study has two main objectives, which are articulated in the following research questions:

1. Do SWL teachers perceive the different accents of the normative varieties of Spanish equally?
2. What are the ideologies underpinning teachers’ (un)equal perception of Spanish accents?

The study focuses on teachers of SWL in the Australian university context, where recent research has found cases of accentism towards non-native English speakers (Dovchin & Dryden, 2022a, 2022b; Dryden & Dovchin, 2021). Before discussing the methodology used, I will briefly explain how linguistic diversity has been tackled in language education, paying particular attention to English language teaching, a pioneering field in this area of study. I will also situate linguistic diversity within SWL teaching—where some theoretical attempts have been made to incorporate the pluricentric nature of Spanish into praxis—and discuss the origins and evolution of pervading Eurocentric teaching practices. This foundational engagement with extant scholarly literature will assist in understanding the complex links and interwoven connections between linguistic discrimination and language ideologies—a set of beliefs rooted in the processes of colonization but maintained and hidden by coloniality—which are responsible for sustaining and reproducing inequalities both within the classroom and in society as a whole.

Linguistic diversity in language education

Despite diversity being an inherent characteristic of all natural languages and, consequently, of their speakers, such diversity has not always been acknowledged in linguistics, language policy nor language education. The structuralist view of a language as a discrete formal system of fixed boundaries and a neutral medium of communication operating independently of its language users (Curdt-Christiansen & Weninger, 2015; Demuro & Gurney, 2018) only began to be challenged with the emergence of sociolinguistics in the 1960s. The advent of this field brought to the fore the impossibility of drawing clear boundaries across languages and the inextricable link between language and its cultural, political, and social context (Arnoux & Del Valle, 2010).

Scholarly discussions in the field of English language education have pioneered the problematisation of such an essentialist conceptualisation of language since the 1980s through the development of different complementary paradigms aimed at promoting the vast linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of English and its speakers. Among these paradigms, the most prominent are World Englishes (WE) (Kachru, 1985), English as a lingua franca (ELF) (Jenkins, 2018), English as an international language (TEIL) (Matsuda, 2017) or the postmodern construct of translanguaging (García & Li, 2014). Such pluralist approaches have not only visibilised and promoted linguistic diversity and diversity discourse but have also advocated for a new conceptualisation of languages as “diverse, fluid, and multifaceted” (Kubota, 2015, p. 21).

The WE paradigm resonates greatly with this study, as it questions the traditional norms of Standard English (particularly British English) as the only valid and legitimate way of speaking, as well as the perceived superiority of its native (privileged, white) speakers, a colonial legacy very much entrenched in the Spanish language too, as shown below. Such an approach to language teaching, inspired by decolonial thinking and the process of globalisation (Kubota et al., 2022), openly rejects ethnocentric and purist/normative visions of languages, advocating for the use of local varieties as educational models. In postcolonial settings, those varieties coexist with the socially highly esteemed (“prestigious”) “standard” norm leading to social stratification and marginalisation of speakers of the local varieties. To counteract the unavoidable, unequal categorisations of one model as “better” or “superior” than others resulting from such social stratification, WE scholars advocate for a pluricentric model which legitimises different norm centres emanating from other geographical areas around the world where a colonial language has been nativised (Tupas & Rubdy, 2015).

Nevertheless, despite its good intentions, this paradigm has been criticised for reproducing monolingual and centrist models (Canagarajah, 1999), homogenising language (English) varieties based on the educated/elitist model (Tupas, 2006) and neglecting linguistic diversity transcending nation-states by mapping language varieties along national borders (Pennycook, 2010). However, the criticism that has attracted wider support is the lack of critical attention to the unequal power relations among language varieties (inter and intra), language users (based on racial, ethnic or socioeconomic background, to name a few), and other languages. For Tupas (2015), such an absence of critical reflection obscures the reality that language (English) varieties are inextricably entangled with severe forms of inequality, particularly in postcolonial societies. Thus, scholars such as Rubdy (2015) and Saraceni and Jacob (2021) advocate for a deeper and more complex engagement of the field with decolonisation and decolonial thinking.

Although all the above-mentioned pluralist paradigms have greatly advanced our theoretical understanding of linguistic diversity, the prevalence of the traditional structuralist/monocentric approach that privileges standard varieties of English and native English-speaking teachers in language policies, language educators, teaching materials, and classroom instruction (Kubota, 2021; Motha, 2014) indicates that, at the pragmatic level, such paradigms have failed to permeate everyday practices (Kubota, 2015; Rubdy, 2015). For critics such as Otsuji and Pennycook (2010) and Kubota et al. (2022), this failure can be attributed to the fact that they have “romanticized, apolitical images of diverse global communication” (Kubota, 2015, p. 22). In other words, they merely celebrate linguistic and cultural diversity but fail to complexify languages and the issues of power associated with them that produce and perpetuate inequalities and injustices.

This idea is closely related to the widespread and dangerous “double-edge sword” concept of linguistic equality (Tupas & Rudby, 2015, p. 2), whereby, for the sake of linguistic democracy, varieties of English, and other colonial languages, tend to be considered equal, ignoring the massive inequities existing in the post-colonial societies where those varieties exist. To avoid falling into this trap, Tupas and Rudby (2015) plead for a view of linguistic equality “as a thoroughly political and ideological question” (p. 3), which must unpack power configurations in today’s societies. These arguments are also consistent with criticism of the liberal and neoliberal views of multiculturalism (Kubota, 2015) since they appreciate and respect cultural diversity by further equalling all cultures, which, in turn, hides unequal power dynamics among language varieties, groups of speakers, and different languages. Thus, by simply appreciating diversity without unpacking and criticising its coexisting relations with domination/privilege and oppression/subordination, social injustices such as prejudice, discrimination, and inequalities would remain unchallenged and reproduced.

Overall, criticism of the pluralist approaches seems to underscore the necessity to link linguistic diversity to broader ideological forces shaped during colonial times, but still pervading because of a lack of criticality (e.g., the Standard English, the nation-state, the native speaker, ethnocentric attitudes, etc.). Kubota et al. (2022) emphasise the urgency of making a such connection by stating that, to achieve true linguistic diversity, we must problematise structural obstacles and recognise that ideologies are ingrained in unequal relations of power intersecting with many-faceted language users’ identity (race, gender, class, and sexuality, etc.) which influence how speakers communicate. Thus, diversity paradigms must critically unpack the political and ideological underpinnings behind communication. Before focusing on language ideologies, I describe briefly how linguistic diversity has been approached in Spanish language teaching.

Linguistic diversity in Spanish as a world language (SWL) teaching

In contrast to English, where we have seen that linguistic diversity has long been acknowledged and promoted in language instruction, other pluricentric languages like Spanish have only recently started to do so. Despite the extensive cultural and linguistic diversity of a language spoken by nearly 500 million native speakers across twenty-one countries (Cervantes Instituto, 2022) and the development of language models to guide teachers to implement and sustain linguistic diversity in their teaching practice (e.g., Andi6n Herrero, 2009; Moreno Fern6ndez, 2007; Zimmerman, 2006), the teaching of SWL is still pervaded by a monocentric approach that privileges Castilian Spanish (the variety of Spanish spoken in the central-northern part of Spain) over other Spanish varieties (Padilla & Vana, 2019).

As a result of colonialism and imperialism, a range of extralinguistic factors has favoured this variety above all others, causing it to be traditionally associated with power, prestige and social mobility. A pivotal/watershed moment for such a perception of Castilian Spanish to emerge was the publication of Nebrija's grammar (1492), which not only acted as catalyst in the political unification of the Spanish empire but, very importantly, also played a crucial role in the epistemological enterprise of transforming this variety into a language of knowledge and civility (Veronelli, 2015). Consequently, Castilian Spanish has been incorrectly assumed to be "the Standard Spanish". Thus, it has been widely used and promoted in education, while other Spanish varieties have been mostly ignored until not too long ago³.

In 2004, the Real Academia Espa1ola (Spanish Language Academy, hereafter: RAE) implemented The Panhispanic Language Policy. This policy aimed at standardising the linguistic norms across Spanish-speaking areas to guarantee the unity of the Spanish language while recognising the existence of other varieties that belong to and contribute to global Spanish (Paffey, 2007). This shift in the institution's vision marked, in theory, the end of a long-standing hegemonic position of the Castilian variety, which had been reinforced and maintained by the RAE's authority and leadership for centuries. In 2009, in the prologue of the *Nueva gram6tica de la lengua espa1ola* (2009)—a groundbreaking Panhispanic grammar co-authored by the RAE and the other twenty-one Spanish Language Academies—, the RAE officially recognised for the first time the pluricentric nature of the Spanish linguistic norm.

Despite the RAE's paradigm shift and the acknowledgement that the current use of Spanish cannot be conceptualised as one single variety, recent research has shown that both inside and

3 For the history and genealogy tracing the rise of Castilian Spanish above other Spanish varieties, consult comprehensive works by Moreno Fern6ndez (2020a; 2020b).

outside Spain, Spanish is still very much taught according to a monocentric approach (Borrego, Recio & Tomé, 2019; Moreno Fernández & Dumitrescu, 2019; Ortiz- Jiménez, 2019). Thus, like in the case of English, there seems to be a gap between scholarly work and teaching practices (Kubota, 2021), which is aggravated by the absence of pluralist perspectives in SWL instruction.

Some scholars and practitioners contend that this situation results from teachers' insufficient sociolinguistic knowledge of the diversity of the Spanish language (Arteaga & Llorente, 2009; Balmaseda, 2009; Franco González, 2013; Hidalgo Froilán, 2014). However, studies have documented that teachers' increased understanding of the linguistic diversity of English (Suzuki, 2011) or Spanish (Ortiz-Jiménez, 2018) did not reflect a readiness to incorporate language varieties in their teaching. Thus, in agreement with critics of the pluralistic paradigms, I argue that in SWL teaching, a monocentric approach is still prevalent because the unequal power relations that exist amongst Spanish language varieties and that intersect with its speakers' multi-layered identity/ies have not been unpacked and problematized. Underpinning those unequal power relations are oppressive language ideologies from the colonial era, which remained unaltered, as discussed below. The intersectionality between language and race is one of the topics that has attracted the most attention in emerging research agendas. However, other identity categories (gender, ethnicity, education, etc.) also interact with language, influencing language users' judgments and participation in social and interpersonal power dynamics. This study focuses on the relationship between standard language and accents representing other varieties as well as the symbolic status attributed to the speakers of such varieties. The next section explores these intersections in more detail.

Colonialism, language ideologies and accentism

From a linguistic point of view, an accent is a way of pronouncing words (including rhythm and intonation) that functions as an individual's strong identity marker since it reveals where we are from (country of origin, region), our racial and cultural backgrounds or our social status (social class), among other possible multifaceted identities (Freynet & Clément, 2019; Lippi-Green, 2012; Orelus, 2017)⁴. Accents are part of languages' interlinguistic variation, which has long remained a factor of discrimination and social inequity, given the social stratification

⁴ Although this paper draws on a linguistic definition of accentism, it must be recognized that "accents" can extend beyond verbal communication. Indeed, there are emerging, more expansive and encompassing definitions of accent(ism) and how it can manifest in nonverbal ways, such as in sign language (Rowley & Cormier, 2021), all of which falls outside the scope of this study.

resulting from such variation (Rubdy, 2015). Although language variation is a natural phenomenon, the emerging sociolinguistic categorisations are not based on linguistic criteria but rather on the characteristics associated with people's identities who speak it (race, class, ethnicity, gender, etc.). In other words, through the process of social categorisation, people associate salient linguistic features with specific social groups, establishing a link between language and social identity (Kristiansen, 2001). Thus, as Milroy and Milroy (2012) noted, it is not a linguistic issue but rather an ideological one.

Even though the significance of the social aspect for the study of languages has been acknowledged since the 1960s, language ideologies have not been part of the research agenda until the early 1990s (Del Valle, 2014). The first to define this concept, according to Kroskrity (2015), was Michael Silverstein, describing it as “sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalisation or justification of perceived language structure and use” (1979, p. 193). The connection between the ways of talking and the sociocultural structures is clearly underlined by Woolard and Schieffelin (1994, p. 56), who state that “[language ideologies] are not only about language. Rather, such ideologies envision and enact links of language to a group and personal identity, to aesthetics, to morality, and to epistemology”, links that coloniality and neoliberalism have masked, as Gurney and Diaz (2020) contend.

This study is particularly interested in the so-called standard language ideology, defined as “a bias toward an abstracted, idealised, homogenous spoken language which is imposed and maintained by dominant bloc institutions” (Lippi-Green, 2004, p. 289). Such an ideology underpins the creation of linguistic hierarchies that ascribe different status and prestige to standard and non-standard forms and their speakers, indexing the latter attributes such as “inferior”, “wrong”, or “broken” (Freynet & Clément, 2019). The supremacy of the standard language and other ideologies, such as the native speaker authority (native-speakerism; Cook, 1999), as well as the resulting power imbalances they cause, are inextricably linked to the historical, economic, political, and ideological processes connected with colonialism and imperialism (Rubdy, 2015).

Veronelli (2015) argues that colonial logics applied through a linguistic lens played a pivotal role in determining, and even stripping, people of their humanity. During the colonial expansion of the 16th century, colonisers' languages and ways of being were deemed superior and civilised, while colonised groups' languages, ways of communicating and ways of being were deemed inferior and even sub-human. Such a reductive Eurocentric conceptualization of language linked language to humanity, civility, grammar and knowledge and, importantly, naturalised the way the notion of “language” has been used and weaponised.

The focus on a homogeneous and common national language as a foundation for the creation of a shared national identity during the European nation-building justified the codification of a standard language which, far from being common and real, is an ideal that has served since its inception as a symbol of (white) middle-class' social identity (Milroy & Milroy, 2012; Rubdy, 2015). Such codification is not based on linguistic grounds, but on the subjective judgement of an exclusive group of language gatekeepers (white men's elite), as part of a political enterprise. Thus, nation formation created the conditions for social bias, power inequalities and people's categorisation based on how they speak (Hegarty, 2020)⁵. The lack of critical reflection and problematisation of such power imbalances and the failure to unpack their connection to other intersecting identities (race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, etc.), as denounced by critics of the pluralist approaches, has resulted in the pervasiveness of the entrenched standard language ideology and other colonial ideologies that reinforce unequal power relations and ensures the continued reliance on colonial canons and norms.

Consequently, when people's pronunciation differs from the so-called "standard", they are said to speak "with an accent", which frequently leads to discrimination. Such accent-based-discrimination, termed accentism (Orelus, 2017), has been gaining traction in the global arena as a category of discrimination on its own since 2020 when a bill was passed in France equating it as an offence comparable to racism or sexism (Nguyen & Hajek, 2022). Yet, as explained above, accentism is not solely based on linguistic factors, it also intersects with other identity markers (social class, nationality, ethnicity, race, etc.). Due to the overlapping of language-based discrimination with other social biases, there is a wide range of different terms to refer to this bias (cf. Nguyen & Hajek, 2022).

One of the most extensively studied factors intertwining with linguistic discrimination is race. From such a scholarship, terms such as linguistic racism (Dovchin, 2020) and raciolinguistics or raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015) are now also gaining traction. According to Nguyen and Hajek (2022), those concepts are particularly useful in investigating linguistic discrimination against racialised speakers by combining racial and linguistic ideology factors, with race being a prominent factor. However, they warn that these race-based terms may not always be relevant to describe linguistic discrimination in other contexts, especially if race is not a major concern (cf. glottophobia, Blanchet, 2019). Following their advice and considering that the present study aims to unveil whether Spanish accents differing from the so-called "standard" are discriminated against, rather than those terms, we have chosen to use accentism,

⁵ For a comprehensive historical account and analysis of intersections among the Euro-modernist colonial project, language ideologies and the question of language discrimination refer to Heller and McElhinny (2017).

which Orelus (2018, p. 175) defines as “[...] a systemic form of linguistic discrimination against people speaking in accents deviating from the so-called standard accent”.

In this study, the social marker intersecting with linguistic discrimination is social class rather than race since the revered “standard accent” is the one used by privileged groups (Milroy & Milroy, 2012; Rubdy, 2015). Much research from social psychology has documented that evaluations of speakers are not random, and that the language varieties and accents spoken by those who dominate society are highly regarded in terms of status and are encouraged in education. On the contrary, the varieties and accents of non-dominant speakers are devalued in status and discouraged from education (Edwards, 2011; Ryan & Giles, 1982; Williams et al., 1996). Thus, depending on the prestige conferred to speakers, their language variety and accent will be perceived as “better” or “worse”.

Accentism is a far-reaching and urgent matter, given its many implications at different levels, from individual ethnolinguistic identity (Freynet & Clément, 2019) to job recruitment or education (Román, Pastor & Basaraba, 2019). A great deal of studies has proven that people with non-standard accents systematically face discrimination and are denied employment in Australia (Dovchin, 2019; Dovchin & Dryden, 2022a, 2022b; Dryden & Dovchin, 2021), Canada (Ramjattan, 2019; Ramjattan, 2022) or Britain (Barratta, 2018). Such discrimination can even lead to serious consequences such as depression and other mental health issues (Dovchin, 2020). Even though most of these studies use the term accentism, the linguistic discrimination reported is connected to other identity attributes, such as race, ethnicity or gender.

The interest of this study, in turn, is in Spanish intralinguistic discrimination among university-level teachers of SWL, given their crucial role in normalising and reproducing the unequal linguistic power between language users and other structural inequalities found in society. I argue that educational institutions require special attention since, due to teachers’ adherence to Western pedagogical frameworks underpinned by elitist monolingual ideologies, students continue to be taught and evaluated against a monocentric and monolingual benchmark (De Costa, 2020). This finding was corroborated by Román, Pastor and Basaraba (2019) in their study about bilingual teachers’ language attitudes towards US varieties of Spanish spoken by heritage students.

Thus, in an attempt to shed some light on the critical understanding of language ideologies in education and their relationship with other sociocultural constructs (race, prestige, class, etc.), this study aims to investigate teachers’ perceptions of eight normative Spanish geographical varieties to unveil whether accent discrimination is prevalent. Accentism is also explored

intersectionally, through its links with social class since the “standard accent” has been traditionally associated with social status and the elite. Finally, the fact that several recent studies dealing with World Englishes have confirmed that accentism is found in Australian society (see above) makes this a particularly suitable context to conduct such a study, which will, in turn, contribute to the advancement of scholarly knowledge in this area.

Methodology

This study is part of a larger project guided by using a mixed-methods approach and a combination of indirect and direct methods as well as qualitative, semi-structured interviews (Ortiz-Jiménez, 2018). The overall research design underpinning the project follows a social-psychology orientation since beliefs, perceptions, and ideologies are not immediately visible, but must be inferred from a variety of observable behaviours. In this study, I concentrate on some of the findings emerging from one instrument, the verbal guise questionnaire (VG). This data collection technique, which is an indirect method from social psychology, consists of a questionnaire with a bipolar semantic-differential scale and has been widely adopted to measure language attitudes and perceptions (Garrett, 2010; McKenzie, 2010).

Social perceptions of speech have been grouped into two broad categories: status and solidarity. For the purposes of this study, I focus on status, which refers to speakers’ socioeconomic power and competence (Garrett et al., 2003; Ryan & Giles, 1982). Table 1 presents the six adjectives used in the scale of the VG related to personality traits associated with status and validated in previous studies (Hiraga, 2005; Zhang, 2009).

Table 1. Bipolar adjectives related to status

Ignorant	Educated
Poor	Rich
Rural	Urban
Insecure	Secure
Lazy	Hard worker
Informal	Formal

In order to eliminate any potential left-right bias, the scale’s positive and negative adjectives were mixed up. As a six-point scale was used (1 meaning “negative” and 6 “positive”), values below 3.5 are taken to represent a negative attitude, whereas values above 3.5 represent a positive one. All questionnaires were in Spanish, and the results were analysed with the SPSS statistical package.

For data collection, participating teachers (see below) were asked to listen to a series of digital recordings of speakers born and raised in each of the eight normative Spanish dialectal areas established by dialectological research (Moreno Fernández, 2009): Andalusian Spanish, Canarian Spanish, Castilian Spanish, Caribbean Spanish, Mexican-central Spanish, Andean Spanish, Chilean Spanish and River Plate Spanish. While the participants were listening to the recordings, they evaluated each speaker in relation to the six personality traits in Table 1.

Each teacher evaluated a total of sixteen speakers' recordings (2 per each Spanish dialectal area) of one-minute duration each. As recommended by Preston (1999), the questionnaire also included an item requesting information about the provenance of the speaker to facilitate the interpretation of the data. The sixteen speakers were carefully selected using an accent test validated from earlier research (see Ortiz-Jiménez, 2018) to ensure that they were representative of the geographical area concerned. Their speech was natural and spontaneous, and the topic was the only controlled aspect.

A second question was added to the questionnaire to confirm that accent was the most salient feature for participants when identifying and rating speakers. Teachers were requested to indicate the features they paid more attention to when deciding speakers' geographical origin. Finally, to establish the socioeconomic profile that teachers assigned to each speaker, they were asked to indicate the level of education attributed to the different speakers. Even though the determining factors of a person's status have been traditionally wealth, power and prestige, Congosto Martín and Quesada Pacheco (2012) contend that the perceived level of education by the way of speaking also influences the status granted to someone. Given that the speakers were all university graduates, this question sought to investigate whether speakers' accents triggered a different perception of the level of education attributed by teachers, which will indicate an unequal social categorization of speakers in terms of status.

The 38⁶ SWL teachers who completed the questionnaire were working in seven Australian universities located in two states and one territory: New South Wales, South Australia, and the Australian Capital Territory. The group was formed by 27 speakers of Spanish as L1 (12 from Spain and 15 from Latin America) and 11 speakers of Spanish as L2. Table 2 provides an overview of teachers' sociodemographic profiles.

6 Although 38 participants might seem a small sample size, it represents a significant portion of the Australian population. Additionally, the sociodemographic distribution of the sample closely resembles that of the entire population, indicating a representative and reliable data collection process.

Table 2. Sociodemographic characteristics of participating teachers

			N=38	
Gender	Women		30	
	Men		8	
Language spoken	Spanish as L1		27	
		Spain	12	
		Argentina	5	
		Mexico	3	
		Peru	3	
		Colombia	2	
		Venezuela	1	
		Puerto Rico	1	
		Spanish as L2		11
		English	7	
		German	2	
	French	1		
	Portuguese	1		
Age	<40		16	
	40-50		13	
	>50		9	
Qualification	BA		4	
	MA		16	
	PhD		18	
Teaching experience	<5		7	
	5-10		13	
	>10		18	

Regarding L2 speakers' linguistic affiliation, three self-identified as speaking Spanish from Spain, while eight others said they spoke Spanish from Latin America. Additionally, they had all had contact with speakers of several Spanish varieties, whether through travel, friends, or living and studying in various Spanish-speaking countries.

Findings

Accents perception

Results from the VG test show that the participating teachers perceive the studied Spanish varieties and their accents in a hierarchical way in terms of status. Such a finding means that teachers perceive some Spanish varieties' accents (particularly Castilian Spanish) to be more

prestigious than others. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were run to check whether the calculated mean scores of the eight normative Spanish varieties and their accents were significantly different. ANOVA tests yielded statistically significant differences among the mean scores of the different Spanish varieties' accents in the status dimension [(F(7,296) = 24,92, p < 0,001)]. As a result, ANOVA tests were followed by a pair-wise comparison using the Tukey tests (Table 3) to ascertain which mean scores were significantly different.

Table 3. Tukey comparisons among the Spanish varieties' accents

<i>Status</i>		
Accents	Mean	
Castilian Spanish	4.38	a
Mexican Spanish	4.26	a
Colombian Spanish	4.18	ab
Canarian Spanish	3.92	bc
Argentinian Spanish	3.88	bc
Chilean Spanish	3.85	c
Andalusian Spanish	3.38	d
Caribbean Spanish	3.31	d

Mean scores not sharing a letter are significantly different.

As shown in Table 3, Castilian Spanish and its accent rank first in the status dimension, obtaining the highest mean scores in four of the six bipolar adjectives (Table 4, in bold). Mexican and Colombian Spanish are in second and third place, respectively, with no significant differences between them. Canarian, Argentinian and Chilean Spanish come next, with scores below 4. Andalusian and Caribbean Spanish varieties and accents are the least valued in terms of status, with both scoring less than 3.5, indicating a negative attitude. Caribbean Spanish is particularly devalued, scoring negatively in four of the six bipolar adjectives (Table 4, in bold italics). As the Tukey comparisons in Table 3 revealed, the mean scores of Andalusian and Caribbean Spanish are significantly inferior to those of the other Spanish varieties' accents, particularly Castilian and Mexican Spanish.

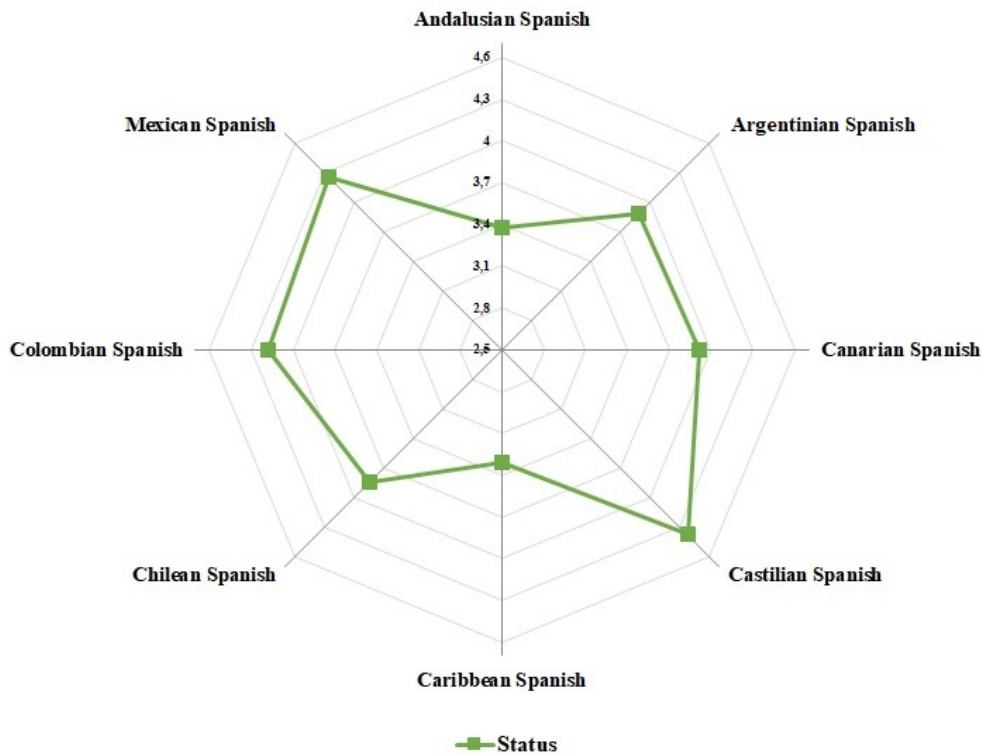
Table 4. Mean scores and standard deviations of adjectives in each Spanish varieties' accent

	Andalusian Spanish	Argentinian Spanish	Canarian Spanish	Castilian Spanish	Caribbean Spanish	Chilean Spanish	Colombian Spanish	Mexican Spanish
<i>Status</i>	3.38 ± 0.46	3.88 ± 0.49	3.92 ± 0.5	4.38 ± 0.49	3.31 ± 0.49	3.85 ± 0.43	4.18 ± 0.51	4.26 ± 0.47
Rich	3.29 ± 0.79	3.99 ± 0.65	3.75 ± 0.75	4.32 ± 0.67	2.89 ± 0.78	3.62 ± 0.78	4.13 ± 0.76	4.07 ± 0.73
Educated	3.17 ± 0.78	4.01 ± 0.84	4.22 ± 0.82	4.39 ± 0.97	3.22 ± 0.7	3.75 ± 0.83	4.07 ± 0.84	4.32 ± 0.83
Urban	3.55 ± 0.94	4.25 ± 0.9	4.12 ± 0.67	4.42 ± 0.91	2.59 ± 1.06	3.84 ± 0.88	4.43 ± 0.84	4.49 ± 0.83
Confident	3.96 ± 0.92	3.55 ± 0.91	4.01 ± 0.95	4.62 ± 0.94	3.96 ± 0.87	4.39 ± 0.75	4.46 ± 0.87	4.45 ± 0.93
Hard worker	3.97 ± 0.83	3.96 ± 0.68	4.03 ± 0.74	4.55 ± 0.7	4.2 ± 0.67	4.42 ± 0.68	4.33 ± 0.8	4.64 ± 0.64
Formal	2.34 ± 0.8	3.53 ± 0.75	3.37 ± 1.03	3.99 ± 0.84	2.97 ± 0.8	3.05 ± 0.8	3.67 ± 0.8	3.59 ± 0.79

Mean scores in bold are the highest. Mean scores in bold and italics are the lowest.

Castilian, Andalusian, and Caribbean Spanish are the varieties exhibiting the most pronounced changes, as shown by the line in Figure 1 indicating the status attributed to each accent.

Figure 1. Perception of Spanish varieties' accents in status



Accents recognition and salient features

In terms of accent identification, even though teachers were able to recognise some accents better than others, overall, the accuracy rate can be regarded as being quite high, given that the percentage of right recognition exceeds 50% in most cases, and there is only one variety (Canarian Spanish) where the error rate is higher than the success rate, as Table 5 indicates.

Table 5. Recognition rate of Spanish varieties' accents

	Recognition, <i>n</i> (%)		
	Wrong	Right	
Andalusian	34,2	65,8	ad
Argentinian	30,3	69,7	ad
Canarian	75	25	b
Castilian	9,2	90,8	c
Caribbean	18,4	81,6	ac
Chilean	44,7	55,3	d
Colombian	30,3	69,7	ad
Mexican	25	75	acd

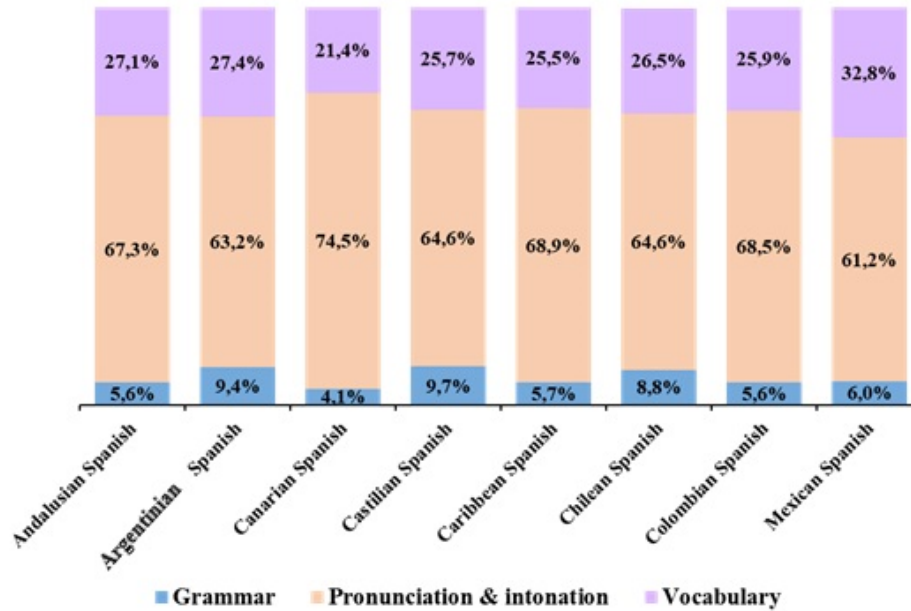
Scores not sharing a letter are significantly different.

In order to determine whether the accuracy rate of accent recognition is associated with the varieties, a Chi-square test was performed. Such a test revealed that the percentage of error/success rate is indeed associated with the variety ($\chi^2(7) = 94,297$, $p < 0,001$). In other words, teachers are aware of the origin of speakers when rating their accents.

Castilian Spanish is undoubtedly the most recognised accent, obtaining a very high success rate (90,8%) that is statistically higher than the others. Caribbean Spanish is the second most accurately identified with 80%, closely followed by Mexican Spanish with 75%. Colombian, Argentinian and Andalusian Spanish are next with around 70% accuracy rate. Nearly half of the teachers correctly identified Chilean Spanish, whereas Canarian Spanish is the least recognised of all accents obtaining an error rate of 75%. Such a percentage is significantly lower than those obtained by all varieties.

Regarding the most salient linguistic traits for the participating teachers to determine the origin of the speakers, Table 6 shows how accent (pronunciation and intonation) clearly stands out for all the Spanish varieties. Vocabulary is significantly lower than accent, while grammar is mostly residual.

Table 6. Most salient linguistic traits in accent recognition



The performed Chi-square test $\chi^2(14) = 9,674$, $p = 0,786$ showed no statistically significant differences between the varieties. In other words, no variety stands out in pronunciation and intonation, vocabulary or grammar compared to others when being recognized. Thus, this question demonstrated that the accent was the linguistic trait that all teachers focused on to determine the origin of the speakers in all the varieties.

Level of education attributed to speakers based on their accents

Finally, the third question of the questionnaire sought to determine whether teachers assigned different levels of education to speakers based on their accents. In order to do that, a Kruskal-Wallis test was performed. Such a test showed significant differences between varieties Kruskal-Wallis: $\chi^2(7) = 125,44$, $p < 0,001$, indicating that there is an association between the Spanish accents and the level of studies attributed to their speakers. Table 7 indicates the range and median (interquartile range) of the level of studies according to each Spanish accent as well as the percentage.

Table 7. Level of education attributed to the different accents

Variety	Level of education			Level of education, <i>n</i> (%)			
	Range	Median (IQR)		1	2	3	4
Andalusian	1 - 4	3 (2 - 3)	a	1 (25)	11 (28,9)	22 (16,1)	4 (3,2)
Argentinian	1 - 4	3 (3 - 4)	b	1 (25)	3 (7,9)	23 (16,8)	11 (8,8)
Canarian	3 - 4	3 (3 - 4)	c,b			23 (16,8)	15 (12)
Castilian	3 - 4	4 (4 - 4)	d			4 (2,9)	34 (27,2)
Caribbean	1 - 4	2 (2 - 3)	e	2 (50)	19 (50)	16 (11,7)	1 (0,8)
Chilean	2 - 4	3 (3 - 4)	b,c		5 (13,2)	23 (16,8)	10 (8)
Colombian	3 - 4	4 (3 - 4)	c,f			16 (11,7)	22 (17,6)
Mexican	3 - 4	4 (3 - 4)	f,d			10 (7,3)	28 (22,4)

Castilian, Mexican and Colombian Spanish speakers are perceived as the most educated. However, by looking at the interquartile range (IQR) Castilian speakers stand out from the rest. 34 teachers assigned them the highest level of education (4, university), which shows an unquestionable agreement when attributing university studies to Castilian speakers. Mexican and Colombian speakers were perceived as holders of university education by 28 and 22 teachers, respectively. Moreover, while Castilian speakers are perceived as having secondary education (3) only by 4 teachers, Mexican and Colombian speakers are being attributed to such a level of education by 10 and 16 teachers, reinforcing the perception of Castilian speakers as the most educated.

Argentinian, Chilean and Canarian Spanish speakers are mostly perceived as holders of secondary education (3) by more than half of the teachers in each case. Nevertheless, their range also varies, which indicates differences. Canarian speakers are considered to have university education by 15 teachers, whereas Argentinian and Chilean by 11 and 10, respectively. Moreover, while none of the informants judges Canarian speakers as not having a formal education (1) or as having only primary education (2), Chilean speakers were perceived as holders of primary education by 5 teachers, whereas Argentinian speakers by 3 teachers and even as non-educated by 1.

Finally, Caribbean and Andalusian Spanish speakers are in sharp contrast, especially the former, who are perceived as the least educated, with a mean of 2. Thus, Caribbean speakers

are mostly perceived as having primary education (2). 19 teachers judged those speakers that way, while 16 recognised them as holders of secondary education. Nevertheless, 2 teachers also perceived them as non-educated. Andalusian speakers are also attributed primary education by 11 teachers and no formal education by 1. However, 22 teachers associated them with secondary education, which indicates teachers perceive Andalusian speakers as having more studies than Caribbean speakers but less than the rest of the other speakers, as its IQR reveals.

Overall, the results of this question are consistent with those obtained in the VG since the Spanish accents located in the first positions of the status hierarchy are the same ones whose speakers are perceived with the highest level of education. Conversely, speakers of Spanish accents located in the lower positions of the hierarchy are associated with low levels of education, particularly Caribbean Spanish speakers.

Discussion

Unequal Spanish accents

In response to the first research question (see above), the findings indicate that despite the RAE's Panhispanic Language Policy and abundant sociolinguistic scholarship defending that all language varieties are equal, the different Spanish varieties and accents investigated here are unequally perceived and valued in terms of status, as the ANOVA tests revealed.

Castilian Spanish is undoubtedly the most prestigious accent for our participating teachers, obtaining the highest value in status and followed closely by Mexican Spanish, the two accents attracting more values above 4. Moreover, Castilian speakers receive the largest number of positive assessments since they are perceived as the most educated, confident, formal, and richest (Table 4) of all speakers presented to the teachers. On the contrary, Caribbean and Andalusian Spanish accents are devalued in status and, importantly, stigmatised since not only did they obtain the lowest values in the VG, but those accents were also the only ones scoring below 3.5, which represents a negative attitude towards them. Thus, Caribbean and Andalusian speakers are regarded as poor, non-educated, rural, and informal (Table 4).

Previous studies about the English language conducted among English speakers and English teachers (Bayard et al., 2001; Garrett, 2010) and about the Spanish language in non-educational contexts (Cestero Mancera & Paredes García, 2015) have found a similar social categorization of language varieties based on the perceived status of their speakers whereby the socially constructed "standard" languages or varieties are perceived as having more status than "non-

standard”. This research demonstrates, thus, that this finding also applies to university-level teachers of Spanish in Australia.

Moreover, the devaluation and stigmatisation of Caribbean and Andalusian accents suggest a case of accentism or linguistic discrimination toward these two accents among participating teachers and, consequently, in their classroom instruction. Caribbean Spanish speakers might also be subjected to raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015) since they are often racialized as black and brown (Urciuoli, 2022). This finding has important pedagogical implications for SWL teaching since prestige is the determining factor for the inclusion of a variety in the language models used in the classroom. The fact that these two accents are devalued in status and stigmatised makes them “inadequate” for teaching so they will not be used as models for teaching or even presented to students since educational institutions must socialise students to follow the so-called standard (Leeman, 2012). Unsurprisingly, Castilian and Mexican Spanish monopolise most textbooks currently used in SWL teaching worldwide (Llorca Serrano, 2014). Thus, the above-mentioned status hierarchy found in the study echoes current teaching practices.

It is important to point out that accentism is not necessarily overt and conscious; it could also be covert and unconscious (Dovchin & Dryden, 2022a), given the underlying forces of language ideologies, as I will discuss next. Thus, merely stating that we all appreciate and value linguistic diversity, as many teachers did, does not exempt us from exerting or being complicit with accentism. By invisibilising from teaching practices Caribbean and Andalusian accents or any other accents subjectively perceived as non-prestigious, language teachers are discriminating unconsciously against them.

Pervasiveness of the standard language ideology

Regarding the second research question, the fact that teachers verbally acknowledge the equality of all Spanish varieties and accents, as the current scholarship defends, but subconsciously uphold Castilian Spanish as the most prestigious one appears to confirm the powerful and enduring nature of the standard language ideology. This is a well-established ideology in the education system which defends the existence of an abstract linguistic ideal associated with the “correct” usage of a language (Lippi-Green, 2012; Paffey, 2008). In the case of the Spanish language, Castilian Spanish not only has been the language model favoured in education for centuries but has also been associated with such socially constructed “Standard Spanish”, being the accent that has dominated language teaching since colonial times.

The pervasiveness of the standard language ideology explains that while Castilian Spanish is assigned more status and prestige, other varieties, especially Caribbean and Andalusian Spanish, are perceived to be inferior versions of such an idealised language. Thus, Castilian Spanish continues as a reference point of exemplarity for the Hispanic linguistic model both within and outside Spain (Moreno Fernández, 2015), as results from the VG have corroborated. Because of Castilian Spanish's prototypical nature to the Spanish language, those varieties sharing linguistic features with it are also perceived as prestigious (Prototype theory, López García, 2010), which offers a possible explanation for the second position of Mexican Spanish, a variety sharing many linguistic features with Castilian Spanish.

It is interesting to note that, although participating SWL teachers' linguistic affiliation is diverse and includes not only speakers of Castilian Spanish but also speakers of Andalusian and Caribbean varieties as well as speakers of Spanish as L2, they all appear to be influenced by the standard language ideology. This finding reinforces the idea that normative ideologies function as hegemony (Gramsci, 1971 as cited in Ives, 2015), forcing people to accept current power structures and making them subjugate themselves to domination, even those coming from marginalized positionalities (Kramsch, 2020). In other words, teachers speaking Andalusian or Caribbean Spanish also devalued their own accents, and thus also marginalised themselves. Similarly, L2 SLW teachers also conform to the same ideologies and Western-centric pedagogical frameworks.

However, standardised Castilian Spanish (or the language of power) is not inherently linguistically superior to others; instead, it is its association with an upper/upper-middle-class social identity and the symbolic power attached to their speakers and their linguistic forms and practices that make such Spanish accent to be perceived as more prestigious. Thus, there is a connection between linguistic discrimination and social status. In order to probe this intersection, teachers were asked to indicate the level of education attributed to each speaker. Unsurprisingly, despite all speakers holding a university degree, Castilian Spanish speakers were associated with the highest level of education in most cases teachers hear this accent. On the contrary, Caribbean and Andalusian Spanish speakers were mostly assigned the lowest level of education, especially the former.

The highly accurate recognition rate of Spanish accents (Table 5) demonstrates that teachers did not evaluate them randomly, but rather they could identify the different accents and, thus, when conferring a higher level of education to one speaker than another, they were aware of their provenance. Therefore, it is clear that language and social class intersect to produce a

power hierarchy of language speakers who place Castilian Spanish speakers in dominant positions and Caribbean and Andalusian Spanish speakers in subordinate positions.

Concluding remarks and future possibilities

The study reported here explored how the different accents of a pluricentric language like Spanish are perceived among teachers of SWL in Australia. Findings have corroborated that despite existing pluralistic approaches and language policies promoting linguistic pluralism and linguistic democracy, Spanish accents are unequally perceived in terms of status. Such results support Kubota et al.'s (2022) idea that linguistic justice cannot be attained until people develop critical awareness of both language and human differences. As Orelus (2017) also underscores, the problem is not “speaking with an accent” but people’s prejudiced and discriminatory attitudes towards certain linguistic forms and language use based on ideologies linked to ‘[...] broader social, economic, and institutional systems of power which unequally position diverse language users due to their intersecting identities’ (Kubota et al., 2022, p. 301).

In this study, the standard language ideology seems to underlie the language power hierarchy found in the VG, which situates the Castilian Spanish accent at the top, and the Caribbean and Andalusian Spanish accents at the bottom. This ideology, closely related to colonialism and imperialism, links an abstract linguistic ideal with an upper/upper-middle-class social identity attributing greater symbolic power to its speakers. Teachers’ attributions of the highest level of education to the former and the lowest to the latter, despite all speakers holding a university degree, confirm that social class intersects with language. Thus, to dismantle or at least disrupt this hierarchy, as Kubota et al. (2022) advise, we must focus on language users and how their intersecting identities are embedded in broader social dynamics.

Linguistic (and cultural) diversity has not yet been fully or genuinely integrated into language teaching; instead, it often functions as a token to make language education appear more inclusive. Such a superficial and tokenistic use of diversity has been encouraged by the current market-based educational environment, which has commodified languages as merely economic resources, resulting in a reductionist, monocentric, ahistorical, depoliticized, and acritical approach to language teaching and learning. This situation is particularly problematic for colonial languages where historically unequal power relations resulting from colonialism continue to oppress people both in postcolonial settings and symbolically beyond such geographical locations through the shaping of social practices (Kubota, 2022).

Consequently, to truly incorporate linguistic diversity into language education and move beyond a tokenistic perspective, it is urgent to problematise and unpack its complexity. From

the different options proposed, I join those voices who advocate for the incorporation of insights from critical pedagogy and decolonial and Southern perspectives into language education (Kubota, 2022; Rubdy, 2015; Saraceni & Jacob, 2021). Such a lens allows us to question Eurocentric norms and language ideologies that have been naturalised as common-sense arguments by coloniality (e.g., the superiority, purity or correctness of the standard languages and white native speakers), critically reflect on the intersectional nature of structural inequality as well as identify the sources of systematic oppression and dominance and, ultimately, to delink ourselves from Western knowledge as the only possible way of thinking and being.

Within this perspective, many practical pedagogical strategies can be implemented in language classrooms. In my opinion, it is imperative to dismantle the essentialist approach to language teaching largely centred on touristic or utilitarian reasons, as the neoliberal trend currently shaping higher education worldwide dictates (del Cerro Santamaría, 2020). As discussed earlier, this approach has numerous negative implications (e.g., the conceptualisation of languages as fixed and bounded systems, absence of linguistic diversity or its inclusion as a token, dominance of White Eurocentric knowledge and normative ideologies, etc.). One possible way to move away from this approach and effectively dismantle it, is to include teaching materials that encourage students to think critically about the intersections of language, power and identity in academic settings and beyond. This can be achieved by using multimodal texts about controversial social issues from both the global North and the global South's angle and allowing students to understand the relationship between them. Those topics should be approached from a critical perspective, raising students' critical awareness about the impact of coloniality on the language users and the languages they are studying and, more broadly, on global structural inequalities.

Similarly, such materials should incorporate a variety of voices/identities demonstrating how they are impacted by a particular issue and, very importantly, these voices must be authentic. That is, they must come directly from those individuals who experience such problems first-hand. In this way, we give visibility to marginalised voices and contrast them with dominant ones while exposing students to real stories, different cosmovisions, and different accents and language uses in real-life contexts.

Nevertheless, to implement such an approach, teachers must take an active role and be committed to embarking on this journey. They must be willing to pay attention to their implicit biases and weaknesses and engage in an iterative process of self-reflection from their different positionalities. In this sense, teacher preparation programs also play a key role in helping teachers to deconstruct oppressive language ideologies underpinning unequal power relations

and to enact their position through their practices. However, for those programs to be effective in encouraging teachers' criticality, they must shift the focus from an overreliance on theoretical knowledge or acritical practice to teachers' subjectivities or "stance" (Seltzer, 2022, p. 2).

Finally, it is important to point out that while teachers' active role is essential, it is not enough. A collaborative effort is required to increase the chances of success in incorporating a much-needed critical and decolonial perspective into world language teaching to disrupt enduring hegemonic language ideologies that reinforce and reproduce linguistic hierarchies that are also linked to other intersecting identities. Thus, teachers must be supported by the active participation of all stakeholders involved in language education, including administrators, policymakers, instructional designers, publishers and students.

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