



# Metalinguistic Concepts and Attitudes toward Mexican Spanish in Oaxaca de Juárez, Mexico

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## Abstract

This paper investigates metalinguistic concepts and language attitudes toward Mexican Spanish varieties and Spanish-Amerindian language contact in Oaxaca, Mexico. Theoretical-methodological approaches from Perceptual Dialectology and Metapragmatic Sociolinguistics are used to analyze non-linguists' views of linguistic variation and their prestige attributions in the multilingual communicative space of southern Mexico. On the data basis of semi-narrative interviews with speakers from the metropolitan region of Oaxaca, we discuss the results of a discourse analysis of these perceptions. The results show a tripartite division of the Oaxacan dialectal space with sporadic mention of salient linguistic features for each conceptualized variational space, an overt prestige for the urban Oaxacan variety and its close link to the Mexico City standard, and a negative attitude toward linguistic interferences coming from Spanish-indigenous language contacts.

**Keywords:** perceptual dialectology, metapragmatic sociolinguistics, language attitude, language ideology, Oaxacan Mexican Spanish, Mexican indigenous languages, multilingualism.

## Conceptos metalingüísticos y actitudes hacia el español mexicano en Oaxaca de Juárez, México

### Resumen

Este artículo estudia los conceptos metalingüísticos y las actitudes lingüísticas hacia las variedades del español mexicano y el contacto entre el español y las lenguas amerindias en Oaxaca, México. Se utilizan enfoques teórico-metodológicos de la dialectología perceptual y la sociolingüística metapragmática para analizar las visiones de no lingüistas sobre la variación lingüística y sus atribuciones de prestigio en el espacio comunicativo multilingüe del sur de México. A partir de datos de entrevistas seminarrativas con hablantes de la región metropolitana de Oaxaca discutimos los resultados de un análisis del discurso de estas percepciones. Los resultados muestran una división tripartita del espacio dialectal oaxaqueño con menciones esporádicas de características lingüísticas destacadas para cada espacio variacional conceptualizado, un prestigio manifiesto por la variedad urbana oaxaqueña y su estrecho vínculo con el estándar de la Ciudad de México, y una actitud negativa hacia las interferencias lingüísticas provenientes del espacio dialectal oaxaqueño de contactos español-lengua indígena.

**Palabras clave:** dialectología perceptual, sociolingüística metapragmática, actitud lingüística, ideología lingüística, español mexicano oaxaqueño, lenguas indígenas mexicanas, multilingüismo.

## Concepts métalinguistiques et attitudes à l'égard de l'espagnol mexicain à Oaxaca de Juárez, Mexique

### Résumé

Cet article étudie les concepts métalinguistiques et les attitudes linguistiques envers les variétés d'espagnol mexicain et le contact entre l'espagnol et les langues amérindiennes à Oaxaca, au Mexique. Les approches théoriques et méthodologiques de la dialectologie perceptive et de la sociolinguistique métapragmatique sont utilisées pour analyser les points de vue des non-linguistes concernant la variation linguistique et leurs attributions de prestige dans l'espace communicatif multilingue du sud du Mexique. En utilisant des données issues d'entretiens semi-narratifs avec des locuteurs de la région métropolitaine de Oaxaca, nous discutons des résultats d'une analyse discursive de ces perceptions. Les résultats montrent une division tripartite de l'espace dialectal oaxaquien avec des mentions sporadiques de caractéristiques linguistiques saillantes pour chaque espace variationnel conceptualisé, un prestige manifeste pour la variété urbaine oaxaquienne et son lien étroit avec la norme de Mexico, et une attitude négative envers l'interférence linguistique de l'espace dialectal oaxaquien des contacts entre les langues espagnoles et indigènes.

**Mots clés:** dialectologie perceptive, sociolinguistique métapragmatique, attitude linguistique, idéologie linguistique, espagnol mexicain d'Oaxaca, langues indigènes mexicaines, multilinguisme.

## Conceitos metalinguísticos e atitudes em relação ao espanhol mexicano em Oaxaca de Juárez, México

### Resumo

Este artigo estuda conceitos metalinguísticos e atitudes linguísticas em relação às variedades do espanhol mexicano e o contato entre as línguas espanhola e ameríndia em Oaxaca, México. Abordagens teórico-metodológicas da dialetologia perceptual e da sociolinguística metapragmática são utilizadas para analisar as visões de não-linguistas sobre a variação linguística e suas atribuições de prestígio no espaço comunicativo multilíngue do sul do México. Utilizando dados de entrevistas narrativas de seminário com palestrantes da região metropolitana de Oaxaca, discutimos os resultados de uma análise do discurso dessas percepções. Os resultados mostram uma divisão tripartida do espaço dialetal de Oaxaca com menções esporádicas de características linguísticas marcantes para cada espaço variacional conceituado, um prestígio manifesto para a variedade urbana de Oaxaca e sua estreita ligação com o padrão da Cidade do México, e uma atitude negativa em relação às interferências linguísticas. vindo do espaço dialetal de Oaxaca de contatos de língua espanhola-indígena.

**Palavras-chave:** dialetologia perceptiva, sociolinguística metapragmática, atitude linguística, ideologia linguística, espanhol mexicano de Oaxaca, línguas indígenas mexicanas, multilinguismo.

## Introduction

Since Labov's work (1972), sociolinguistics has assumed that speakers are able to assign in-group and out-group affiliations based on linguistic features (Chappell, 2019). From this assumption, perception-based branches of research have been established in recent years, making their way into Spanish sociolinguistics (Ortiz-López & Suárez-Büdenbender, 2022) from the initial work of perceptual dialectology (Preston, 1989). Perceptual variety linguistics (Krefeld & Pustka, 2010), which has found application in Spanish-dominated communicative spaces (Bäumler, 2023), has gained theoretical focus on a separation between language attitudes, concrete perceptions, and mental representations. It also calls for a greater diversification of approaches to the variational system of a language than would have been the case in perceptual dialectology.

This paper examines Oaxacan speakers' representations and language attitudes toward Spanish varieties, social multilingualism, and Spanish-American language contact in the communicative space of the Mexican state of Oaxaca. So far, existing sociolinguistic work on Oaxacan Spanish (Garza Cuarón, 1987) cannot yet provide sufficient evidence as to whether the urban speech community can be counted among a larger central-southern Mexican dialect complex influenced at all linguistic levels by the Mexico City standard (Lipski, 2009). It is thus imperative that we examine the metalinguistic utterances and language ideologies of Oaxacan speakers in order to find out which linguistic features are perceived as salient and/or prestigious within the context of their endogenous speech community. This will simultaneously elicit the social perceptions, power, hegemony, and ideology negotiations regarding social multilingualism and associated language contact phenomena between Spanish and Mexican indigenous languages in Oaxaca, e.g. Zapotec, Mixtec, among others. The paper thus pursues the following research question: What linguistic features of Mexican Spanish are seen by Oaxacan speakers as salient to local and regional varieties? In other words: What linguistic features lead speakers to localize themselves geographically in their own communicative space? Do Oaxacan speakers perceive differences between rural and urban regions within Oaxaca and, if so, which linguistic features are constructed as prestige-rich or -less? Which features lead to breaks in the communicative space and cause Oaxacans to de-localize certain speakers outside of their 'own' speech community?

Subsequently, the approach of perceptual variety linguistics is first explained in the context of metapragmatic sociolinguistics. Thereafter, the data collection is revealed, and perceptions and language attitudes are analyzed based on our own corpus. Finally, these findings are discussed with regard to ideology and prestige negotiations.

### Perceptual Dialectology

Previous meta-linguistic work on Mexican Spanish has narrowed the notion of language awareness to an emotional component, primarily investigating language attitudes in relation to Mexican Spanish (Brade, 2010). While research on speakers'

knowledge about linguistic varieties in the region has rarely been conducted in the context of perceptual dialectology, perceptual approaches to Mexican Spanish represented a desideratum until recently (Erdosová, 2011; Serrano, 2021).

Perceptual variety linguistics extends perceptual dialectology, which focuses on diatopic aspects, to the study of diastratic and diasituational elements of spoken language. Krefeld and Pustka (2010) define the term perceptual variety linguistics more consistently than other perceptual sociolinguistic tendencies, highlighting that metalinguistic knowledge and concrete speech influence each other in a circular process between linguistic production and perceptions. Speakers change their linguistic production throughout their lives based on concrete perceptions. Additionally, it is important to note that, following Krefeld and Pustka (2010), constant cognitive representations of speakers' (variety) linguistic knowledge are co-located in the mental concepts of metalinguistic knowledge. These variety-linguistic representations are again divided into abstract knowledge of linguistic variation, which a speaker can produce without stimulus and belongs to *langue*, and concrete knowledge of linguistic variation, which can be expressed on the basis of direct perceptions and belongs to the level of *parole*. Although both metalinguistic representations are interdependent and in mutually exchange with each other, it is essential to distinguish between these two aspects in perceptual variety linguistics (Harjus, 2018). In this paper, we will focus on the constant cognitive representations and also on their affective-emotional component, which is defined as a state of detachment from them (Krefeld & Pustka, 2010).

Both components of language awareness that we are examining here are relevant for the central concept of metapragmatic sociolinguistics: indexicality. The term indexicality points to the ability of signs, including linguistic features, to provide further clues about context and social actors. Furthermore, it is assumed by Silverstein (1979) that on a higher level, speakers can use or interpret these signs, here linguistic features, to help shape contexts and construct group affiliations – the in-groups and out-groups mentioned above (Spitzmüller, 2022). The third level, the so-called *third-order indexicality* (Silverstein, 1979), concerns itself with stereotypical conceptions of certain aspects of linguistic actions, which puts us in the midst of an expressed language ideology in which meaning is also ascribed to linguistic variation in the sense of the 'third wave' in sociolinguistics (Eckert, 2018). It is thus a central concern of metapragmatic sociolinguistics to examine metalinguistic references to linguistic features, e.g., of Mexican Spanish, in terms of their indexicality. This approach allows for an investigation of related phenomena, including stereotyping, negotiation of hegemony and prestige, or – in short – language ideologies as components of language reflection (Irvine & Gal, 2000; Amorós Negre et al., 2021).

## Perceptual and Attitudinal Studies about Mexican Spanish

Flores Farfán points out that sociolinguistics in general is a relatively young linguistic research discipline in Mexico (2010). Under sociolinguistic studies, we include metapragmatic work that has certainly been done on Mexican Spanish, but most of which

is aimed at the language attitudes of Mexico-City speakers (Moreno de Alba, 1999; Brade, 2010). These evaluative-affective data reflect, for example, with regard to the Oaxacan speech community, mainly a negative exogenous evaluation of any regional ways of speaking, without including Oaxacan speakers and without referring to concrete linguistic features in the evaluations, as Morett summarizes:

Recurrentemente, las hablas de Oaxaca y Chiapas fueron objeto de opiniones de abierto o velado rechazo entre los entrevistados. Los argumentos muchas veces no tienen una motivación lingüística (la interferencia entre lenguas), sino que se dan en función del origen étnico de sus pobladores, y lo que dejan ver es la presencia de racismo en la población mestiza (y mayoritaria) de la sociedad mexicana (2014, p. 863).

Studies dealing with purely cognitive aspects of metalinguistic utterances are rarer than studies on language attitudes. The journal papers of Serrano Morales (2002, 2009), Morúa Leyva and Serrano Morales (2004), and Erdösová (2011) take as their starting point exclusively Mexico-City speakers' metalinguistic perspectives. Recent perception-based sociophonetic work on Mexican Spanish focuses on Northern and Central Mexican varieties (Mazzaro & Gonzalo de Anda, 2019; Serrano, 2021) or Mexican varieties in the U.S. diaspora (Chappell, 2022). The Oaxacan speech community is not the focus of either research on linguistic attitudes or approaches to perceptual dialectology: in the relevant and most recent work by Serrano (2021), it does not even appear as a highlighted dialectal area and remains a blind spot on the Mexican dialect map. However, with regard to the dialectal areas of southern Mexican Spanish that continue to be discussed in research, it may be instructive to examine the metalinguistic utterances of Oaxacan speakers to find out which features are salient to them and constitutive of the speech community: "Qué parte del sur y centro de México ha de ser tratada junto con la Ciudad de México es un asunto sujeto a debate" (Lipski, 2009, p. 294). Metapragmatic references to the prestige of linguistic expressions are intriguing within the pluricultural and multilingual region studied here because, as multidimensional indexical interpretations, they reveal their language ideologies toward Spanish varieties, (indigenous contact) languages, and social actors in Mexico (Spitzmüller 2022).

### **The (Multilingual) Communicative Space of Oaxaca**

The Oaxacan communicative space – here understood as a political-administrative entity within Mexico with 3,800,000 inhabitants – is characterized by the coexistence of diverse ethnic groups as well as diverse languages, such as Zapotec, Mixtec or Spanish (Murphy et al., 1999, 5). Multilingual Oaxaca has been studied many times: the (socio-) linguistic studies on Spanish focus on questions concerning the diverse (mainly historical) language contact in the region (Schrader-Kniffki, 2022) or on aspects of linguistic politeness in language contact situations (Schrader-Kniffki, 2003). These relevant works, focusing on language contact or multilingualism in the communicative space of Oaxaca, contrast with a lack of research in the field of Spanish sociolinguistics on the barely multilingual urban Spanish variety of Oaxaca de Juárez. Dialectologically oriented works

deal only with phonetic aspects (Alvar, 1966; Garza Cuarón, 1987). Only recently, works from the COEM project (Martín Butragueño, 2019) and individual papers (Mayr & Harjus, 2024; Harjus, in press), that deal sociolinguistically with the urban Oaxacan Spanish spoken today, have been added. At the individual linguistic levels, these works highlight linguistic phenomena that can be seen as characteristic of Oaxacan Spanish in the mid to late 20th century: while hardly any linguistic features are pointed out at the syntactic and morphological levels, the lexical level of Oaxacan's speech community is seen as strongly influenced by that of Mexico City: "Básicamente coincide el léxico de esta zona con el de la ciudad de México, pero presenta muchas particularidades semánticas que lo caracterizan y lo diferencian" (Garza Cuarón, 1987, p. 135). The phonetic domain remains the one that seems most affected by linguistic variation. While relative uniformity is stated with regard to vowels, and vowel fading in unstressed syllables is spoken of in Oaxaca as well as in other southern and central Mexican areas (Moreno de Alba, 1994; Garza Cuarón, 1987), there are differences between sociolinguistic and dialectological work with regard to consonantal features. In particular, the observations of the linguistic realizations of the phoneme /x/ and the phoneme /s/ in syllable-final position are contradictory. While Moreno de Alba (1994, p. 97) points to a frequent weakening of syllable-final /s/, Garza Cuarón analyzes a retention of the phoneme in linguistic realizations in Oaxaca city: "(...) en la ciudad de Oaxaca la s en posición final de palabra ante pausa se conserva normal" (1987, p. 42). Furthermore, an aspiration of the phoneme /x/ in the urban speech community – still emphasized by Alvar (1965) – is not confirmed in Garza Cuarón (1987). Also, evidence for a realization of /j/ as postalveolar fricatives [ʒ] in the speech community is not found in later work. Research on Oaxacan linguistic features dates back many years – Garza Cuarón's linguistic data are from the early 1960s, despite being published in 1987 – and hardly reflects the current linguistic situation. Perceptual or attitudinal studies on variation and language contact phenomena in Oaxaca from an endogenous (urban) perspective have also been a desideratum, although Pfadenhauer (2012) examines metalinguistic aspects for rural areas for a language contact analysis in the Oaxacan *mixteca* region.

### Data and Methodologies

In street use surveys (Blommaert & Dong Jie, 2020) around the central marketplace in Oaxaca de Juárez, we created a corpus of 20 speakers, who were categorized according to the extralinguistic variables of age (18-25, 26-55, and 56-80 years), level of education (I = *Primaria* or illiterate, II = *Secundaria*, or III = *Académicos Universitarios*), and social gender. The semi-narrative interviews (Schütze 1977; Ochs & Capps 2001; De Fina & Geogakopoulos 2008) conducted as part of the street use survey were loosely structured and included perceptual tests, but left room for the communicative development of the speakers and included metalinguistic statements about the Oaxacan communicative space – made without external stimulus (e.g., audio samples). Only a blank map of the Oaxacan state and an unlabeled city map of the metropolitan region of Oaxaca de Juárez

were used as aids in the free conversations, giving the speakers the opportunity to point to concrete spaces and places.<sup>1</sup>

The 20 interviews, which lasted approximately half an hour, were first transcribed orthographically using the program *Exmaralda*,<sup>2</sup> processed as *Word* documents, and then qualitatively analyzed with the help of *Maxqda*. In the exploratory qualitative analysis (Mayring, 2015) for this paper, we focused on metalinguistic statements about the Oaxacan communicative space. The obtained, strictly *emic*, i.e. evoked without external stimulus, metalinguistic data material could be made interpretable by coding (Kuckartz, 2016) and later linguistic categorization in the program *Maxqda* (Harjus, 2018). The main categories were formed according to phonetics, morphosyntax and lexicon. After that, purely cognitive and emotional-affective attitudes were categorized separately. We also separated meta-linguistic information about Spanish in the region and indigenous languages in terms of categorization.

## Results

### Concepts: Amerindian Languages and Spanish Dialectal Zones in Oaxaca

On the one hand, in their metalinguistic discourses, the speakers emphasize geographic zones that, for them, represent separate dialect zones within Oaxaca and contrast with the linguistic variety of their ‘own’ (imagined) speech community. On the other hand, in the conversations about the Oaxacan communicative space, they also mention Mexican indigenous languages that, to their knowledge, are used in parts of Oaxaca.

**Table 2.** Spanish dialectal areas in Oaxaca mapped and named by urban Oaxacan speakers (n=20)

	Valles Centrales	Sierra Norte	Sierra Sur	Costa Pacífica	Istmo de Tehuantepec
% of all mentions	32.14%	16.07%	8.93%	26.78%	16.07%
% of all speakers	90.00%	45.00%	25.00%	75.00%	45.00%
Total of speakers	18	9	5	15	9

1 We would like to thank our former project partner Prof. Dr. Martina Schrader-Kniffki from the University of Mainz/Germersheim for her help with the corpus creation, her valuable advice on the speech community and networking with the Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca.

2 We would like to thank our student and research assistants from the University of Innsbruck, especially Angela Campisano, for preparing the transcriptions.



The highlighted geographic zones, which for the speakers represent distinct dialect zones of Spanish in Oaxaca, are limited to a minimum of three and a maximum of eight conceptualized dialect areas (Table 2), with geographic characteristics such as mountain, valley, and coastal location as guiding factors, although a few speakers (1) highlight the political-administrative zones of Oaxaca as dialect zones.

- (1). **Se nota cuando alguien viene de alguna comunidad o de alguna otra zona del estado.** Está dividida en ahora son eran siete regiones, ahora **son ocho regiones. Cada una tiene sus, este, características, pero se nota bastante en la manera de hablar** (3M1b).

On average, a speaker in the corpus names 2.80 distinguishable zones in the communicative space of Oaxaca. A separate imagined dialect zone encompasses the geographic area of the *Valles Centrales* and includes the capital city of Oaxaca de Juárez. This central area is mentioned by 90.00% of all speakers in the corpus and is separated from the speakers by at least two to a maximum of seven other dialect zones: most frequently singled out after the *Valles Centrales* is the *Costa Pacífica* region (75.00%), drawn around Puerto Escondido on the southern Pacific coast of the state. Some speakers separate the *Istmo de Tehuantepec* region, which extends westward toward the state of Chiapas, from the *Costa Pacífica* macrozone (45.00%), although the Isthmus is, of course, also on the Pacific Ocean. From these dialect zones, at least one macrozone *Sierra* is still demarcated, which mostly separates speakers into a non-contiguous northern and southern dialect area, namely the *Sierra Norte* (45.00%) and the *Sierra Sur* (25.00%). Table 2 shows how the percentage distribution of mentions compares to the total number of all mentions.

Furthermore, the speakers identify Mexican indigenous languages that they locate in the Oaxacan communicative space (see Table 3). On average, 2.20 Amerindian languages are highlighted per speaker for the Oaxaca area. Mainly the Zapotec language group is mentioned by speakers (95.00%), although some distinguish between different dialects of Zapotec, including *Zapoteco del Valle* and *Zapoteco de la Sierra*, or more rarely *Zapoteco del Istmo*. Less numerous are the Amerindian languages *Mixe* (25.00%), *Mixteco* (30.00%) and *Chinanteco* (15.00%) mentioned by the speakers, which according to their linguistic knowledge are spoken in the communicative space. Other indigenous languages that are assumed to be spoken by speakers were hardly named more than twice in the corpus and are grouped under the 'Others' column in Table 3. This category includes Mexican Amerindian languages with low speaker numbers, such as *Amuzgo*, *Chontal*, *Chatino*, *Trique-Maya*, and *Nabuatl* (O'Connor, 2014, pp. 96). Overall, 25.00% of all speakers indicate one of these indigenous languages.

**Table 3.** Amerindian Mexican languages in Oaxaca named by urban Oaxacan speakers (n=20)

	Zapotec	Mixtec	Mixe	Chinantec	Others
% of all mentions	43.18%	13.63%	11.36%	6.80%	25.00%
% of all speakers	95.00%	30.00%	25.00%	15.00%	55.00%
Total of speakers	19	6	5	3	11

Subsequently, we present the speakers' concepts of the linguistic features of Oaxacan Spanish and their language attitudes toward the different varieties of Oaxacan Spanish they highlight. We discuss the linguistic features they mention and/or language contact phenomena related to Amerindian languages they highlight in the corpus, which we see as salient phenomena. A salient linguistic feature is a phonetic, morphosyntactic or lexical feature, that is highly striking for listeners, mainly due to its possible deviation from a individual linguistic standard of any kind or a descriptive regional standard of a certain language (Harjus, 2018). We separate the metalinguistic discourses according to the relevant linguistic levels of morpho-syntax, lexis and pragmatics, and phonetics, starting with the latter.

### Salient Phonetical Features

#### Concepts and Attitudes regarding Oaxacan Spanish Phonetics

In the phonetic domain, there is little evidence of metalinguistic concepts used to name concrete features of Oaxacan Spanish or to make internal differentiation between the highlighted dialect zones. Most of the features mentioned in the phonetic domain are used by the speakers to distinguish between their 'own' variety – Spanish from the *Valles Centrales* area – and the southern coastal area of the Pacific Ocean or the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

- (2). Ahora en la costa se cambian los sonidos, por ejemplo, si tú dices *quesillo*, dicen '**quesio**', ya no lo pronuncian por completo, digamos, en esta zona hay algunas variaciones, por lo regular, es con las palabras que llevan **dobles** *ele* (1MIIB).
- (3). Acortan mucho las palabras. Quizá **la ese**, la pronuncian **como jota** '*cohta*', así, ¿no? Entonces es como que hay, te vas a dar cuenta de que esa persona no es de la ciudad de Oaxaca, por ejemplo (2FIIa).
- (4). El canto es diferente en el Istmo. Tienen un acento muy **cantadito**, ¿no? (1MIIB).

- (5). Pues la mayoría de mis compañeros vienen de otros pueblos. Entonces yo, por ejemplo, había una, tengo una amiga que es del Istmo y hablaba como que muy **cantadito**, como que ‘nana hola’ (2F1a).

On the one hand, the phonetic features mentioned here aim at a salient prosody of the speakers from the isthmus (*cantadito*), without the interviewees being able to use a specific technical terminology (4, 5). On the other hand, segmental phenomena in the coastal region are named (2, 3). Both metalinguistic statements on the aspiration of syllable-final /s/ and the intervocalic dropout of /k/ (or /j/ in realizations with *yeísmo*), respectively, point to a possible tendency toward consonant weakening in implosive and intervocalic positions in the spoken Spanish of southern Oaxacan speech communities, conceptualized as demarcating features from the urban variety of Oaxaca de Juárez. On the phonetic level, however, it remains with vague descriptions of prosodic features, also in order to distinguish differences between individual speaker groups within the speech community of Oaxaca de Juárez, whether by age structure or district-specific origin.

- (6). San Martín Mexicapan, ¿no? Y, entonces, su manera de hablar era, era más como, como **más lenta**, como **más alargada**, ¿no? O sea, como, como las palabras más como así, como **más lentas**, o sea, como más, **más lento** y como con **un acento distinto** [...] y somos amigos y convivimos por ejemplo aquí en el centro urbano, pero tiene una manera distinta de hablar (2FIIIa).
- (7). Ya **cambió un ritmo** (3MIa).
- (8). Tal vez también puede ser en el, **en la velocidad y el tono**, ¿no? Los más grandes, las personas más grandes tal vez por la edad misma, tienen como **un hablar más pausado**. (2MIIa).

While the speaker’s metalinguistic statement (6) refers to prosodic differences between speakers from the center and periphery (San Martín Mexicapan) of the Oaxaca metropolitan area, quotes 7 and 8 refer to diagenational differences as extralinguistic variables regarding suprasegmental features in spoken Spanish in the Oaxaca de Juárez speech community (*personas más grandes [...] tienen un hablar más pausado*).

While the metalinguistic statements we have listed here follow a relatively clear cognitive orientation in the representation of intra-Oaxacan variation, the majority of statements on phonetic aspects are affective-emotional. Thus, the bulk of the metalinguistic discourse reflects language attitudes rather than cognitive dialect perceptions.

- (9). Yo siento que somos un poquito más, **más secos** tal vez, como **más enfocados**. Y los costeños son un poquito, igual **alargan más las palabras**, ¿no?, igual las cantan (3FIIa).
- (10). O sea, en toda la costa es como fuerte, y, claro, como con, con el acento de la costa y ‘ahí:::’. Yo tengo el acento, el costeño siempre como, como, como **un cotorreo**, pero siempre **muy fuerte**, ¿no? O sea, como que en general la gente que conozco que es de la costa **habla fuerte-fuerte** (2FIIIa).

- (11). Los en la sierra hablan **muy fuerte**. Los del Istmo igual: gritan, esos, este, **gritan mucho**. Los costeños igual. La gente en la sierra sur es la que habla como **más suavecito** más **calmado**. Igual los de la Sierra Norte, los de Tuxtepec son muy, este, son **muy escandalosos**, ajá, los de la Mixteca igual (1MIIIa).

Affective-emotional statements about phonetic aspects of Oaxacan Spanish separate peripheral speech communities, such as those of coastal (*muy fuerte*, *gritan mucho*, *un cotorreo*) or mountainous (*más suavecito*, *más calmado*) regions, from their 'own'. These differences are also explicitly marked by alteration suffixes (-ito) and the intensifying repetition of the adjective *fuerte* in (10). Language attitudes toward varieties within Oaxaca manifest themselves more clearly when contact language phenomena are discussed in the context of phonetic aspects.

### Oaxacan Spanish Phonetics: Concepts and Attitudes regarding Language Contact and Multilingualism

Purely cognition-based metalinguistic evidence for language contact between Oaxacan Spanish and Amerindian languages in the phonetic domain is scarce in our corpus. The few statements are aimed at prosodic aspects and omit segmental phenomena.

- (12). Porque, por ejemplo, **le dan otro tono** (1FIb).

Rather, the segmental features expressed by Oaxacan speakers are immediately part of an affective-emotional conceptualization, i.e., a cognitive-based statement about language contact-indexed, phonetic features is immediately associated with language attitudes, and thus purely cognitive localizations of multilingual speakers in Oaxaca are scarcely available.

- (13). Este, pues, sí, **la pronunciación**, ¿no? Hay veces que ellos **no pronuncian muy bien**, digamos, sí, el español (2FIb).
- (14). Es **el tono** y depende también mucho de la palabra porque hay muchos que **no pronuncian ciertas palabras bien**, o sea, como que **les cuesta un poquito**, ¿no? Me imagino que por lo que, igual **hablan sus lenguas**, ¿no? (2FIa).
- (15). En vez de usted **dicen 'uhté'**, 'uhté'. Uno **no completa la lengua**. (3MIa).
- (16). Sí, porque hablan como, hay palabras que como, nosotros decimos como que **las arrastran**, ¿no? Así como que hay **ciertas letras** que no las, **no son claras**, como que **las jalan** (2FIb).

The metalinguistic statements, which are mostly made without concrete phonetic features (13, 16) and only sporadically in the context of salient linguistic features (15), indicate negative language attitudes towards language contact phenomena, which allow us to point to language normative discourses in the urban speech community (*no*

*pronuncian bien, les cuesta, las jalan*), which are partly mitigated by linguistic tricks, such as diminutive formations (*un poquito*) or indefinite adjectives as hedges (*ciertas*). *Igual* (14) as a modal adverbial, on the other hand, could suggest a negative view of indigenous languages, while the adverb *muy* (13) further reinforces a negative attitude towards language.

### **Oaxacan Spanish Morpho-Syntactical Features: Concepts and Attitudes regarding Language Contact and Multilingualism**

Perceptually based evidence for morpho-syntactic phenomena within Oaxacan Spanish is scarce. If at all, there are only metalinguistic remarks on grammatical incongruities, which are limited to a lack of genus congruence, e.g. in the area of determiners and nouns (17).

- (17). Por ejemplo, este, a veces **cambian el, algunas palabras**, o sea, por ejemplo, a veces, dicen ‘hace **mucho la calor**’ y aquí, bueno, decimos ‘hace mucho calor’ o ‘está fuerte el calor’. Y ellos no: ‘**la calor**’. Sí, cambia, varía (2FIa).

Otherwise, morpho-syntactic variations do not play a role in speakers’ cognition and/or language attitudes – in contrast to lexical-pragmatic phenomena, whose metalinguistic conceptualization is presented below.

### **Salient Lexical-Pragmatical Features**

#### **Concepts and Attitudes regarding Oaxacan Spanish Lexicology and Pragmatics**

Harjus (*in press*) has already highlighted that with regard to the use of pronominal forms of address – which we could, of course, also have assigned to syntactic categories, but which should be considered here in the overall field of (lexical-pragmatic) onomasiology – there are conceptual attributions within the Oaxacan speech community to the rural (*usted*) or urban (*tú*) communicative space in the state or in the urban space of the metropolitan region, respectively. This conceptual separation of urban and rural manifests itself in metalinguistic accounts:

- (18). Ajá, porque de las **zonas, este, rurales**, sí, son más, así como que ‘**usted**’, ‘**usted**’. Y ya de la zona **urbana** ya son más, así como que, pues, como **de ‘tú**’, pues como que más hablan así diferente (2FIa).
- (18). **En los pueblos es más de usted** porque se tiene como un respeto, pero más que respeto es como imposición. Así no es como tanto dar respeto, sino es más como imponer quien es el mayor. [...] Y aquí **en la ciudad** de alguna manera, sí, se, sí, **se ha ido** como, hay más accesibilidad, o más voz (2FIb).

In addition to a construction of urban-rural dualisms, the use of pronominal forms of address in Mexican Spanish, that is, the undifferentiated use of *usted*, is seen by speakers as diagenational variation. Metalinguistic evidence (20) shows that the

extensive use of *tú* is associated with youth, whereas the use of *usted* use is conceptualized as obsolete (and rural) (Orozco, 2010; Harjus, *in press*).

- (20). Pues, sí, **la gente más mayor** sí habla mucho de ‘usted’, ¿no? era como, hablamos de ‘usted’. El uso formal del español, ahorita cada vez más **jóvenes estamos dejando el ‘usted’** un poco más de al lado. (1MIIIb)
- (21). Por ejemplo, **los jóvenes** ahora **te saludan con ‘hola’**, ¿no? Y **los grandes** no ocupan esta palabra, la de ‘hola’. **Nada más te dicen ‘buenos días’**, ‘buenas tardes’, pero **no ocupan el ‘hola’** los señores ya grandes (3FIIa)

On a pragmatic level, different greetings also serve to metalinguistically reflect diagenational differences within the Oaxacan speech community.

- (22). Pues, a veces porque, por ejemplo, las **personas más grandes** usan **otras palabras**. Otras palabras diferentes, ¿no? Y **ahorita los jóvenes**, ahorita, pues, igual hablan con **palabras diferentes**. [...] Hay unas palabras que dicen las personas mayores y te quedas, así como, ¿qué es?, ¿no? (2FIIc)

Finally, general indications of Anglicism usage in the younger generation are also clarified, although even here only a few concrete examples (*likes*; *inbox*) are metalinguistically explicated, and in example (23), reference is made to the technical language domain of social media users:

- (23). Y sí, hay como que mayor **influencia ahorita del inglés**, por ejemplo, los usuarios de Facebook, de WhatsApp usan palabras como, este, no sé, ‘**likes**’, ‘**share**’, ‘**inbox**’, etcétera (1MIIIc)

At the lexical-pragmatic level, primarily diagenational variation is manifested, which is cognitively conceptualized by speakers. However, apart from pronominal forms of address and a few anglicisms, no concrete lexical units are mentioned that indicate variation within Oaxacan Spanish. The inclusion of Spanish-Amerindian language contact does little to change this situation.

### **Oaxacan Spanish Lexicology and Pragmatics: Concepts and Attitudes regarding Language Contact and Multilingualism**

Speakers do make metalinguistic comments about the lexical influence of indigenous languages on Oaxacan Spanish. However, concrete references to lexical items are absent from their remarks, generally pointing to challenges in communication between multilingual speakers and monolingual Spanish speakers based on possible lexical differences in meaning between Spanish and Mexican Amerindian languages. In this context, in-group and out-group dichotomies are also discursively established (24) by differentiating between a ‘we’ (*nosotros*) and ‘they’ (*ellos*) through the use of pronouns, which also resonates with language ideologies (see below) (*no entienden el español*).

- (24). Sí porque a veces, este, bueno, hay veces que unos que no entienden el español y **las palabras para ellos significan una cosa, para nosotros otra** y como que veo, sí, veo diferencias, ¿no? (3MIa).

Also of interest are indications of lexical interference and code-switching in multilingual speakers of Spanish and Mexican indigenous languages. In addition to statements about frequent use of words from Amerindian languages (*muxe*), evidence is given about code-switching (*hablan español y de repente hablan una frase en mixe*), which multilingual speakers experience both in communication in majority Spanish (*hablan español, pero ocupan mucho el vocabulario que está en zapoteco; hablan español, pero de repente hay palabras que no conoces y las mezclan*) and in majority Amerindian languages (*están hablando como mixe, mixe, mixe, de repente una palabra española*). The use of code-switching or lexical interference between Amerindian languages and Mexican Spanish is basically not located by the speakers in the urban area of Oaxaca, but is limited to peripheral regions, e.g., the Istmo de Tehuantepec.

- (25). **El Istmo es como, hablan español, pero ocupan mucho el vocabulario que está en zapoteco.** El, el 'muxe', este, todos estos y **lo combinan pues en vez de usar la palabra digamos que sería en español, usan esa palabra** (1MIIC).
- (25). **El Istmo de Tehuantepec, ¿no?,** por acá, ahí también es una, es una forma más como, en general, como más abierta, ¿no? Más, con **muchas más groserías, ¿no?** Como que todo, todo es 'venga, no sé qué'. Yo tenía muchos amigos de, del Istmo y eran un desastre, o sea, todo el tiempo **estarse alboreando y cotorreo** y muchos, como **muchas palabras del zapoteco, mixe, que se decían, aunque ellos no hablaban zapoteco todo el tiempo, pero sí se decían entre ellos,** este (2FIIIa).
- (25). Este, me imagino que lo mismo pasa con las regiones del **mixteco o mixe que usan palabras o vocabulario de, de repente del mixteco,** por ejemplo, yo, a las comunidades que he ido de la sierra norte, o sea, sí, **hablan español, pero de repente hay palabras que no conoces** y las **mezclan** ¿no? Los hablan en zapoteco, en mixteco, mixe o, al revés, están hablando, este, mixe entre ellos y de repente viene una palabra que no existe en mixe, pues 'automóvil', no sé, algo así similar, y la dicen en español. Entonces, de repente es como que **están hablando como mixe, mixe, mixe, de repente una palabra española** o al revés hablan español y de repente hablan una frase en mixe y es, está mezclada (1MIIIa).

The speakers mainly emphasize the lexical influence of Spanish on the indigenous languages, but hardly the opposite at the lexical level (*hay más influencia del español en lo que ellos hablan; mezclan palabras en español con su lengua, no al contrario*), thus revealing divergent degrees of development of the languages involved (27).

- (28). **Hay más influencia del español en lo que ellos hablan porque mezclan palabras en español y también en su lengua. No sé si se debe** porque

no hay una traducción exacta para algunas palabras. Pero cuando estamos hablando, yo he visto a personas y estaban conversando con algunos que **hablan lengua y, y mezclan palabras en español con su lengua, no al contrario** (3M1b).

In the metalinguistic comments about lexical interference from or code-switching between indigenous languages and Oaxacan Spanish, language attitudes are also revealed. Utterances such as *mezclan palabras en español y también en su lengua. No sé si se debe* (28) indicate normative discourses that question the use of lexical items of Amerindian languages in Mexican Spanish per normative verb and impersonal SE-diathesis (*se debe*). This negative affective-emotional conceptualization is evident both in exemplary anecdotes (29) from the speakers interviewed (*el vocabulario le iba costando trabajo; le costaba dificultad comunicar*) and in basic critical statements about the use of indigenous lexis in Oaxacan Spanish that point to communicative challenges (*en vez de usar la palabra que sería en español; muchas groserías*).

- (29). A lo mejor son las palabras porque veía yo que a él **le costaba dificultad comunicar** [...] Como que **el vocabulario le iba costando trabajo**, o sea, como que tenía la idea y entonces **iba buscando** las palabras para decírmelo, era eso (3F11a).

After this presentation of the results of our analysis, we now move on to discuss the results and place them in an overall sociolinguistic context of Oaxacan Spanish.

## Discussion and Conclusions

In this paper, we traced language ideologies at the intersection of cognitive representations and language attitudes, i.e., following the theoretical-methodological approaches of perceptual dialectology and metapragmatic sociolinguistics in the communicative space of Oaxaca. The aim was to shed light for the first time on language attitudes and perceptions of speakers from an endogenous perspective, in order to be able to analyze language ideologies regarding Spanish-Amerindian language contact and other Spanish varieties of monolingual speakers, and to investigate their linguistic knowledge about linguistic variation and multilingualism in southern Mexico. We had defined language ideologies following recent definitions (Kroskrity, 2007) as collected attitudes within a speech community or speakers' perspectives on language use, specific linguistic varieties, and social actors.

The results show, on average, a conceptualized tripartition of the communicative space of Oaxaca into coastal, valley and mountain regions, i.e., into a central dialect area – the *Valles Centrales*, mostly equated with Oaxaca de Juárez's own urban speech community – and peripheral regions in the south (*costa pacífica*) and north (*sierras*). Regarding multilingualism in the Oaxacan communicative space, the speakers mention an average of 2.20 Mexican indigenous languages – mainly Zapotec – that coexist with Spanish in the communicative space.



These highlighted varieties and languages are ranked within the Oaxacan speech community: they are considered to have different values, i.e., they are seen as appropriate for certain communicative situations. When such ranking of particular languages or linguistic varieties occurs explicitly or implicitly, modern sociolinguistics speaks of 'orders of indexicality' or 'language regimes' (Eckert, 2018). Thus, perceptions and attitudes become important components within a speech community to negotiate power, hegemony, and social inequality. In the case of the Oaxacan communicative space studied here, it has become clear that speakers' perceptions of Oaxaca de Juárez's own urban variety approximate a Mexican Spanish standard (*más o menos estándar; lo más estándar*) of whatever kind. The speakers explain that the assumed standard is, on the one hand, geographically located in the speech community of Mexico City (*chilango*) and, on the other hand, close to a diaphasic-distant pronunciation (*un español de las películas; un español que verías en los presentadores*).

(30). **En los Valles** diría que es como, que como, que **lo más estándar** (1MIIIa).

(30). No lo sé cómo explicar, pero diferente al, digamos, **estándar que ubico más como en centros como urbanos** más crecidos [...] o sea, pienso, que la, que tendemos más como en las **zonas más privilegiadas del cen... de la ciudad**, ¿no?, **como colonias del centro, colonia Reforma, en San Felipe**, pero digamos que los nuevos, ¿no?, de San Felipe. Creo que tendemos más como a... como a **una forma de hablar que se acerca un poco más como un 'chilango'**, ¿no?, no sé cómo explicarlo, pero como una... más un **español estándar**, como tanto de, como **un español que verías en las películas**, como un español que verías **en los presentadores** de las, como de las noticias. **Un español más o menos estándar** (2FIIIb).

Thus, speakers follow the perception of other Mexicans that the speech community of Mexico City holds the overt prestige and model character within Mexican Spanish for urban speakers (Erdősová, 2011). However, no specific linguistic features are mentioned for the imagined standard, which is unsurprising given that closeness to the standard is associated with a lack of salient features (Harjus, 2018) and (urban) Oaxacan Spanish thus tends to be closer to a south-central dialect zone from the speaker's perspective (Lipski, 2009).

Urban Oaxacan speakers find the identification of other speakers in the Oaxacan communicative space by linguistic features rather challenging (32), which provides evidence for less existing metalinguistic discourses on variation or even relative variational homogeneity in the Oaxacan communicative space:

(32). Ajá, sí, esto **es demasiado complicado** (2FIb).

The salience of a linguistic feature is used in the corpus, if at all, for dialect zones that differ from one's own. Here, as in other studies on the perception of Mexican Spanish by Mexican speakers (Erdősová, 2011), phonetic and lexical-pragmatic aspects predominate. These are not always explicated in technical terms, but rather named

with makeshift adjectives such as *cantadito* or *lento*, which, on the one hand, indicate suprasegmental features. On the other hand, the cognitive perception is left and dialect areas of Oaxaca, especially the coastal and mountain zones, are implicitly evaluated:

- (33). En **la costa**, para mí, son **demasiado expresivos** y los, siento yo que **los del valle somos** como el **neutro**, pero, por ejemplo, en **la sierra son más, cierran más y no se expresan, incluso no llegan a saludar** y así como que apenas, sí, contestan, ¿no? (2FIIb).

Thus, the cognitive representation of features in the corpus is limited to a few phonetic and lexical aspects that can hardly contribute to a conceptual separation between diatopic varieties within the Oaxacan communicative space.

Rather, what is exciting for a sociolinguistic analysis of Oaxacan Spanish is that linguistic evaluations or orders of indexicality with respect to a single, vague feature emerge only in the context of Spanish-Amerindian language contact. Baird (2022) has shown for Guatemalan Spanish that a concretely perceived apocope of /s/ functions as an indexical marker of indigeneity. In our corpus, speaker evaluations of language contact in Oaxaca, while not related to concrete features, were related to linguistic levels: thus, phonetic (e.g., the loss of implosive consonants), morpho-syntactic (e.g., genus incongruence), and lexical-pragmatical features of language contact were evaluated negatively, thereby placing such variant bundles at a disadvantage in relation to the varieties of monolingual Spanish speakers, especially from Oaxaca City. This indexicalization of varieties derived from language contact, while not feature-based, nevertheless patterns the hegemony and power position of Spanish over indigenous languages in Mexico (*nada más del normal español*), as well as a lack of acceptance of linguistic interference, as already demonstrated by Pfadenhauer (2012) for Mixtec-Spanish language contact in the Oaxacan *Sierra Norte*, even in the pluricultural and multilingual Oaxacan speech community.

### Authors' contributions

Jannis Harjus: conceptualization, formal analysis, research, resources, supervision, writing (original draft), writing (draft review and revision/correction). Paul Mayr: conceptualization, formal analysis, research, resources, supervision, writing (original draft), writing (review of the draft and revision/correction).

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The authors declare no conflict of interest that could affect the impartiality, objectivity or information presented in this research article.

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