

Discourses on languages

Perceptions of and attitudes towards languages

Master's course “Discourses in Europe”

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Warm-up

Before we start ...

- 1 Which is your favourite language besides your mother tongue?
- 2 Why? Is it the sound, the people, the culture, the country, a person ...?
- 3 Three adjectives that come to mind for that language — and for your own.
- 4 Is there a language you simply do not like? Where does that feeling come from?



Discourses on languages

Outline

- 1 Introduction: the study of language perceptions
- 2 Attitudes to languages
- 3 Perceptions and attitudes to language learning
- 4 How to study language perceptions: research paradigms

Part 1 · Introduction

The study of language perceptions

Language perception and country image

Perception as a psychological construct

Attitudes are learned

How to measure attitudes

Language vs. language learning

01

1 · The study of language perceptions

Language perception and country image

DEFINITION

Country image

All aspects related to a given nation and its culture, economy and inhabitants.

DEFINITION

Language perception

The vision and attitudes of speakers of one language community towards the language of another language community.

Both deal with similar questions. Linguistics has long studied attitudes of speakers towards their own language and dialect and towards other languages —

but the perception of foreign languages is scarcely studied in brand linguistics or marketing-based studies.

1 · The study of language perceptions

Perception: an invisible object

- Origins in **psychology**: Allport (1935); for a review of the literature see Ianos (2014: 94ff.).
- Shared with studies on the “Other”: the **concept of perception** and its **evaluation**.
- Attitudes are imaginary abstractions that cannot be directly observed (Oppenheim 1982: 39) — only inferred through their manifestations.
- Attitude vs. perception (Baker 1992: 13)? Not a fruitful distinction: both refer to the image one has of an object, not to active behaviour. English *attitude* ≈ Spanish *percepción*.
- Their overt manifestations are observable — and are generally revealed in **discourse**.

“the structure of an attitude can be represented as an object-evaluation association and the knowledge structures linked to it”

Albarracín et al. (2005: 80)

1 · The study of language perceptions

“Attitudes are learned”

- Linguistic attitudes (especially the image of foreign languages) are open manifestations of an **implicit ideology** (Sallabank 2013: 64).
- They are framed within the **social conventions** of a given national culture: society is decisive in shaping attitudes towards a foreign language.
- “**Attitudes are learned**” (Garrett 2010: 22).

EXAMPLE

Migrant languages in Europe

Traditionally perceived negatively in the host countries. The language of migrants is associated with:

- poverty
- a low socio-economic and socio-cultural stratum
- social attitudes not accepted in the host country

These perceptions reflect the implicit views the host society has of each migrant group.

1 · The study of language perceptions

How can attitudes be measured?

As with country brands, attitudes towards foreign languages can be assessed with three kinds of schemes:

Dichotomous

positive | negative

Only allows an evaluation in positive or negative terms.

Polar

**positive | neutral |
negative**

Makes it possible to include a neutral term.

Scalar

1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5

Scales such as the Likert scale allow a more detailed perceptual study.

This is related to sentiment analysis — and, more and more, perceptions can be analysed through massive, automated analysis of the data collected.

1 · The study of language perceptions

Two different objects of evaluation

ATTITUDES TOWARDS AN OBJECT

The language itself

The perceived image of a given language — e.g. the perception of Spanish in German and Dutch society in general, including those who already know or are learning it.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS A TARGET

Learning the language

Language learning perception — e.g. the attitudes of German and Dutch pupils towards learning Spanish, towards the methods applied in class, etc.

Eagly/Chaiken (1993): “attitudes towards object” vs. “attitudes towards target”.

Your turn

Object or target?

- 1 Think of the foreign language you know best. How would you rate the language itself on a scale from 1 (very negative) to 5 (very positive)?
- 2 And how would you rate your experience of learning it — the classes, the teachers, the methods?
- 3 Are the two ratings the same? If not, why not?



Part 2 · Language as the object of assessment

Attitudes to languages

Language, culture and nation

Types of language perceptions

Own language, dialects, national variants

Co-languages and migrant languages

Accents, neighbours, school languages

02

2 · Attitudes to languages

Language, culture and nation

Attitudes towards a language are closely linked to the culture and the nation(s) related to that language.

MONOCENTRIC · MONONATIONAL

**Polish, Icelandic,
Finish, Italian**

One language, one nation: the link is especially clear.

NON-GLOBAL PLURICENTRIC

**German, French,
Spanish, Portuguese**

Several nations and national cultures — a global study of their image must include all of them:

- German: Germany, Austria, Switzerland
- Spanish: Spain and all Latin American countries

GLOBAL

English

The only global lingua franca today, a “hypercentral language” (Pérez-Llantada 2018: 31).

Yet American (and to a lesser extent British) culture has spread together with EFL (Gosse 1997: 157–158).

2 · Attitudes to languages

An umbrella concept

Language perception encompasses many variables, which must be broken down and contextualised. Building on Baker (1992: 29), at least these types of perceptions of languages can be distinguished:

1

One's own language (and its dialects)

2

National variants of the same language

3

Co-languages

4

Migrant languages

5

Foreign accents in another language

6

The language of the neighbours

7

Languages in the school curriculum

→ Part 3: perceptions of language learning

2 · Attitudes to languages

1 · One's own language

- Attitudes towards one's own language are generally **positive** in all official speech communities.
- The reason: the identification between language and nation that emerged in the 19th century — still predominant in 21st-century Europe.
- Hard to imagine the Dutch result in:
 - countries with a colonial past (Spain, Portugal, France)
 - economic and/or military powers (Germany, Italy, UK, Russia)
 - new states or states liberated from a foreign power (Poland, Estonia, Slovenia, Greece)

THE EXCEPTION: THE NETHERLANDS

≈ 1/4

of the indigenous Dutch population consider English to have a higher status than Dutch

Edwards (2016: 83)

2 · Attitudes to languages

Migrants and their own language

Sometimes one's own language is perceived even better than the language of the host country — typically when it is a school foreign language or enjoys international prestige.

EXAMPLE

Latin American migrants in Catalonia and the Basque Country

have a better perception of Spanish than of Catalan or Basque (Janés 2006a; Rojo et al. 2010).

- In these semi-independent territories, Spanish is not a vehicular language — especially in Catalonia.
- Migrants' attitudes towards the languages around them are often hard to discover and interpret, due to their complicated linguistic biographies.

2 · Attitudes to languages

Bulgarian Roma in Germany

In some German Länder they may represent 50–80% of the Bulgarian migrant population (Sánchez Prieto 2020).

MOTHER TONGUE
Romani dialect

unwritten; generally poorly regarded among its own speakers

FIRST SECOND LANGUAGE
Rumelic / Thracian Turkish

a non-standard written variant; better regarded — former language of the ruling class in Ottoman Bulgaria

SECOND LANGUAGE
Bulgarian

the language of their first schooling — hence more prestigious

HOST-COUNTRY LANGUAGE
German

probably the most valued language for this group

2 · Attitudes to languages

Dialects and accents

Perceptions about other dialects and accents of one's own language also belong to this group. Some studies:

GERMAN

Plewnia/Rothe (2011)

Perception of German varieties.

SPANISH

**Moreno Fernández
(2002)**

Perception of the linguistic varieties of Spain by capital-city speakers.

GALICIAN

Suárez Quintas (2017)

Perception of Galician dialects.

**Which accent of your own language do you find most pleasant — and which one least?
Why?**

2 · Attitudes to languages

2 · National variants of the same language

- Key for the study of **pluricentrism**: Hiraga (2005) for English, Kretzenbacher (2011) for German, Lybaert/Delarue (2017) for Dutch.
- Also in the foreign language classroom: Beaven (2000) on EFL teachers' attitudes towards national variants.
- General finding: speakers perceive **their own national variant** better — whether dominant or not.
- Australians favour Australian over British or American English (Bayard et al. 2001); Peninsular Spaniards esteem Spanish from Spain over Latin American Spanish (Paredes García/Cestero Mancera 2018).

THE CURIOUS EXCEPTION

Latin America

Speakers of American national variants of Spanish still perceive Spanish from Spain as a more “cultured” variant than their own.

Bugel/Scutti-Santos (2010)

Your turn

Which variant?

- 1 Which national variant of your favourite foreign language did you learn at school? Was that a choice?
- 2 Which variant do you prefer today — and why?
- 3 Do you feel that your own national variant is “better” than the others?



2 · Attitudes to languages

3 · Co-languages

Perceptions among co-language communities tend to be dominated by politics: linguistic differentiation (Ausbau) vs. maintenance of a unified language model.

	Their own language (by Ausbau)	The “other” language
Valencians	Valencian — positive, identity-building	Catalan — an imperialistic foreign language
Croats	Croatian — positive, identity-building	Serbo-Croatian — an imperialistic foreign language
Macedonians	Macedonian — positive, identity-building	Bulgarian — an imperialistic foreign language

For Catalans, Serbs (mostly) and Bulgarians, the other’s language is nothing more than a politicised variant that should not have the status of a language.

2 · Attitudes to languages

Migrants, accents, neighbours

TYPE 4

Migrant languages

Often perceived much more negatively than school-curriculum languages.

Japan: Spanish has been associated with Latin American migrant workers in recent years — and has lost prestige (Sakuragi 2008: 83–87).

Research (as on co-languages) is still in its infancy.

TYPE 5

Foreign accents

Viewed negatively according to the vast majority of available studies (Lindemann 2003).

An exception? The French accent when speaking Spanish, German or Italian ...

TYPE 6

The neighbours' language

How do we see the language of the country next door?

The case of Spain: Portuguese, French ... and Catalan, Basque, Galician?

2 · Attitudes to languages

7 · Languages in the school curriculum

- Usually languages of economic or cultural importance — so their image is generally positive or relatively positive, compulsory or optional.
- Most studies focus on **English** (and its national variants); fewer on French, and even fewer on Spanish.
- One of the most comprehensive (though outdated): Dörnyei/Csizér (2002) on English, German, French, Italian and Russian among Hungarian learners.

Language	Studies
English	Ladegaard 2000 (Denmark) · Rindal 2010 (Norway) · Bernaus/Gardner 2008 (Spain) · Csizér/Lukács 2010 (Hungary)
French	Gardner et al. 2004
Spanish	MacIntyre/Noels 1996, Heining-Boynton/Haitema 2007 (North America) · Dewaele 2005 (Belgium)
Several	Dörnyei/Csizér 2002 (Hungary)

Your turn

Accents, neighbours, school

- 1 Which foreign accent do you find charming when someone speaks your language? Which one irritates you?
- 2 Do people in your country learn the language of their neighbours? Should they?
- 3 Which languages did you learn at school? Did you choose them — and would you choose them again?



Part 3

Attitudes to language learning

From object to target

Four variables of learners' attitudes

Difficulty

Economic valence

Communicative valence

03

3 · Attitudes to language learning

Learning a language: attitudes towards a target

ATTITUDE HERE MEANS

“the set of values which a pupil or a student brings to the Foreign Language Class experience”

LEARNERS' ATTITUDES INCLUDE (CHAMBERS 1999: 27)

1

The experience of learning the target language

2

The perception of the target language community

3

The experience of travel

4

The influence of parents and friends

3 · Attitudes to language learning

Perceptions of language learning

PERCEPTION OF

Difficulty

Two levels (Bartram 2010: 90): the learner's personal difficulties with the four skills — and the imported, general view a society has of a language.

UK & Germany: Spanish easier than French (Phillips/Filmer-Sankey 1993). Spain: German the most difficult school language.

USEFULNESS · ECONOMIC

Economic valence

Languages of economically stronger nations are seen as more useful — and more worth learning.

Employability and economic importance: two of the most important criteria when choosing a foreign language (Grosse et al. 1998: 462).

USEFULNESS · COMMUNICATIVE

Communicative valence

The perceived usefulness of a language for its learners (cf. Prifti 2014: 10ff.): its presence in media, music, culture ...

... and, for Spanish in Germany and the Netherlands, holidays and leisure.

Your turn

Difficult, useful, fun?

- 1 What is the most difficult language you have ever learned? Is German really that hard?
- 2 Would you learn a language only because it helps you get a job? Which one?
- 3 In which languages do you listen to music, watch series, read? Does that change how you see them?
- 4 Do minority languages (Welsh, Basque, Frisian ...) have communicative valence? For whom?



Part 4 · How to study language perceptions

Research paradigms

Language evaluation

Speaker evaluation & the matched-guise test

Language learning

A historical study

A research gap

04

4 · Research paradigms

Three research paradigms

PARADIGM 1

Language evaluation

Sharp et al. (1973). Attitudes towards **minority languages**, via questionnaires or interviews in bilingual territories:

Wales (Baker 1992), Malta (Caruana 2007), Catalonia (Madariaga et al. 2013)

Few on foreign languages, e.g. Sakuragi (2006).

PARADIGM 2

Speaker evaluation

Lambert et al. (1960). Attitudes towards the **speakers** of a language, not the language itself — mostly via matched-guise tests (Agheysi/Fishman 1970).

Dailey (2005), Bugel/Scutti-Santos (2010), Garrett (2010)

PARADIGM 3

Language learning

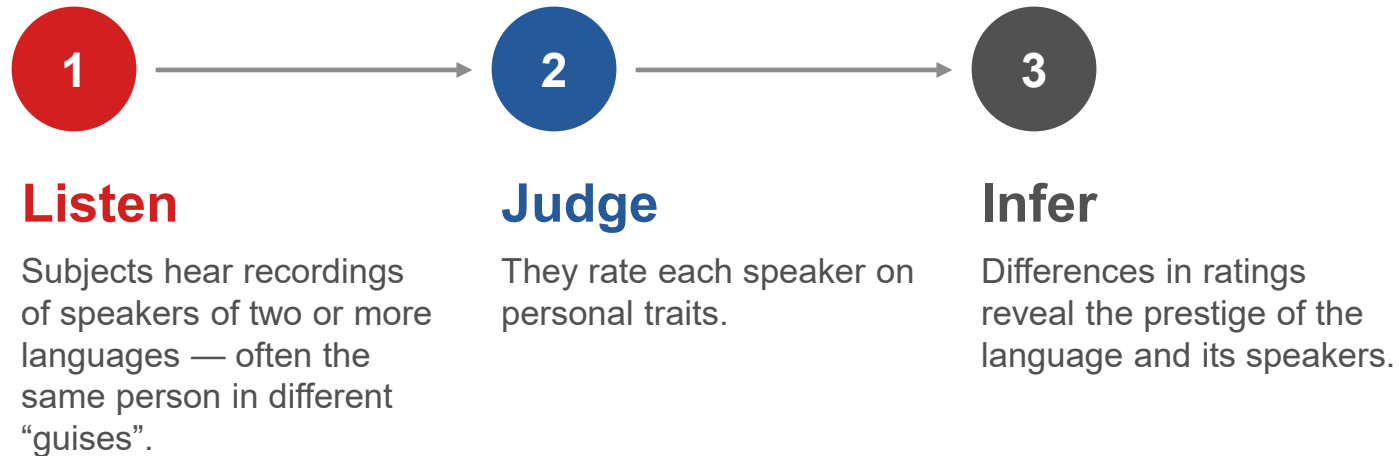
Walker (1973), Gardner (1985). Attitudes towards **language learning** and foreign language classes.

Chambers (2000), Dörnyei/Csizér (2002), Bernaus et al. (2009)

4 · Research paradigms

The matched-guise test

A sociolinguistic experiment to uncover the true feelings of an individual or community towards a language, dialect or accent (Stefanowitsch 2005).



TRAITS RATED

body height · good looks ·
leadership · sense of humour ·
intelligence · religiousness · self-
confidence · dependability ·
kindness · ambition · sociability ·
character · likability

4 · Research paradigms

History — and a research gap

A HISTORICAL STUDY

Jones (1999)

Attitudes towards German from 1500 to 1800.

Particularly noteworthy for its historical character and the multitude of documents analysed.

THE GAP

Lots of studies — but most are theoretical and not based on textual corpora.

An opportunity for your paper ...

Your turn

Your research idea

- 1 Which language perception would you like to study — and in which discourse community?
- 2 Which texts could form your corpus: social media, newspapers, forums, textbooks, historical documents?
- 3 Which method would you combine: sentiment analysis, text actions, questionnaires, matched-guise?





Thank you

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