# Dialects take the word
# The production of knowledge as an input for language policies.

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# INTRODUCTION

Towards the liberation of the differences

# Languages and Dialects

As we all know, the difference between "language" and "dialect" is due to sociological factors, not linguistic ones.

Noam Chomsky himself (1989: 29-30) says:

"A linguist who knows nothing about political boundaries or institutions would not distinguish 'language' from 'dialect' in the way that we do in ordinary discourse. Nor would he have clear alternative concepts to propose that would serve the same function."

# Our job

For the past twenty years, our research team at the National University of La Plata has been working on the recognition of linguistic heterogeneity in Argentina. We have placed emphasis on speakers in contact with indigenous languages with the purpose of studying Spanish varieties that exhibit differences from the Rioplatense standard.

# The Issue

As we know, linguistic varieties are socially evaluated based on arbitrary parameters linked to the concept of "correctness," which often stems from the rejection of what is different. This has direct repercussions on the self-esteem of those who belong to these cultures and significant implications in education (Otheguy, García, and Reid 2015), an issue that is not addressed in professional training spaces, except at the postgraduate level.

# The Conflict

We believe that a significant part of the problem lies in the representations of language in general, and in the case at hand, of the Spanish language in particular.

The established knowledge about language, in turn, has a strong impact on the adopted **language policies.**

Therefore, the task that falls upon us as linguists requires **confronting and revising the production of linguistic knowledge.**

# THE PRODUCTION OF LINGUISTIC KNOWLEDGE

Communication and linguistic structure

# The production of scientific knowledge

Specifically, we believe it is necessary for grammatical research not to lose sight of **human behavior in response to communicative needs**. Communication lies at the heart of linguistic structure (Diver: 2012 [1979]: 299).

We should not overlook, then, that "the connection between paradigmatic value in the system and syntagmatic use in speech is established by **the creative imagination of speakers** who articulate (and perceive) coherent combinations of forms as communicative expressions" (García, 1991).

# The Grammatical Research

From our perspective, there are many diverse grammatical issues that should be revisited as they are based on claims about linguistic structure that have not been subjected to falsification.

Some phenomena have already been questioned by Diver himself and his disciples from the Columbia Linguistic School. I especially consider those that correspond to the Spanish language.

- **El sistema pronominal  (García 1975)**

- **El orden en la FN (Klein-Andreu 1983)**

- **La reflexividad (García 1990)**

# Today: The categorization of verbs

On this occasion, we are going to question **the categorization (of verbs or constructions) as transitive and intransitive**, using an example that seeks to explain dialectal choices from ethnopragmatic studies.

The example I am going to consider is within the framework of the international project "El español de los Andes", and we focus on one of the Andean Spanish regions in Argentina: the Northern Andean region with Quechua influence.

**DESAFÍOS** EN LA **DIVERSIDAD**

Alexander von **HUMBOLDT** STIFTUNG

# The Northwest of Argentina: Jujuy, Salta, Santiago del Estero, Catamarca, La Rioja, and Tucumán

# The issue from one of the innovative approaches: ethnopragmatic analysis

In a peculiar way, in the oral narrative of the Northwest of Argentina (NOA), we observe the use of the verb "morir" in variation with the verb "matar" when the depicted scene is "X dio muerte a Y" (X caused the death of Y).

- (1) That it was a wickedness that could not be forgiven by God, and [the judge] ordered the lumberjack to hit him on the head with the eye of the axe, which the lumberjack did not hesitate to do, and he killed Don Tristán with a single blow (VII: 64).

- (2) At the same time, the fox jumped on the rooster and then on the hen, and killed them by slitting their throats (I: 206).

# One of the answers: ethnopragmatic analysis

Our interest is to investigate the strategy that underlies this selection because we do not believe it is a random or arbitrary use, but an exploitation of the meanings of the competing forms to meet the communicative needs of the community:

- Matar: **to take** someone's life
- Morir: **to lose** one's life

Strategy in the NOA: using the verb "morir" to construct a transitive scene (lo ha muerto) and alternating it with the verb "matar."

# The Qualitative Approach to All Variable Contexts

A careful analysis of the alternation allowed us to observe the relationship between the meaning of the selected form and the context it occurred in.

● What were those relationships that we considered cognitively rational?

# Matar: Completed action. Deserved punishment. The victim's guilt is explicit.

- (3) El zorro comenzó a disparar cuesta abajo y como por ahí venían los perros, lo pillaron y *lo **mataron** al zorro*. **Así pagó el zorro** lo que había hecho con la familia del gallo (I: 210).

- (4) Jue retrocediendo, y sin darse cuenta la sacó afuera, y áhi la vio el perro. El perro lu agarró de la cola al zorro, lo sacó y *lo **mató***. Y áhi se acabó el zorro comisario por **hacerse el vivo** (I: 196).

- (5) Que esa era un picardía que **no podía tener perdón de Dios**, y que [**el juez**] le ha ordenado al leñador que le diera con el ojo del hacha por la cabeza, lo que el leñador no se ha hecho esperar y *lo **ha matado** de un golpe a don Tristán* (VII: 64).

# Haber muerto (a alguien)
## 1) The action is recognized as linked to a necessity.

- (6) Y anduvo mucho el Señor y nadie lo atendía. Y ha llegado a la casa de un matrimonio, en la orilla del pueblo que eran muy pobres, los únicos pobres del pueblo, y ahí lu han hospedau. La mujer tenía una sola guagüita. **La única gallinita que tenía *la ha muerto* y li ha preparau una comida al viejito**. (VII: 212).

- (7) Diz que al día siguiente ha ido la gallina y el maestro la ha hecho pasar para que vea los hijitos y áhi no más *la ha muerto*, y **la familia** del zorro ha tenío **un buen almuerzo** (I: 217).

# Haber muerto (a alguien):
# 2) The action has not been completed or verified.

- (8) Cual no sería su asombro cuando ha visto que en lugar de lechones han salido dos perros, que han puesto en fuga a don Juan, y que **de no mediar la poca distancia a que quedaba la cueva, lo hubieran alcanzado y *lo hubieran muerto*** (III: 65).

- (9) Güeno... De ver que el lión no vuelve, **ya sospecharon que lu *había muerto* el hombre**. Y entonce dice el toro que lo a a ir a peliar... (III: 572).

# Quantitative analysis

Table I: Relative frequency of use of forms in relation to the nature of the action

| o.r. 22.79 | matar | morir |
|---|---|---|
| Acting as punishment | 59   94% | 4      6% |
| Not acting or acting out of necessity | 22   39% | 34     61% |

# Exploitation of the morphosyntactic strategy: evaluation of the action based on the contextual description of the victim

**TO KILL**

**TO DIE**

**+PUNISHMENT**

benevolent

Consummated act

necessary

**-PUNISHMENT**

not consummated

Unfulfilled act

not confirmed

# In contemporary journalism, the strategy is still in use in the NOA

NOA (Tucumán):

(1) "**Lo han muerto**": los videos que revelan el brutal ataque al hincha de San Martín

Las imágenes registran la confusión y el violento accionar de un grupo de personas que, tras dejar tendido junto al cordón a un hombre, se abalanzan sobre Héctor quien es golpeado en medio de la calle y luego logra escapar. **"Lo han muerto"**, grita un niño ante la escena. (El tucumano, 7/9/2023)

# CONCLUSIONS

Dialectal uses challenge us.

# Dialectal uses challenge us.

1) The transitive use of "morir" in alternation with "matar," observed in the NOA, is not arbitrary. It is motivated by communicative needs.

2) The communicative strategy of the speakers invites us to reconsider the categorization of verbs. Transitivity arises from the message and not from the meaning of linguistic forms: the speaker can convey a transitive scene through verbs considered intransitive. Argentinians are well aware of this: expressions like "lo fueron" (they were), "lo desaparecieron" (they disappeared him), "lo suicidaron" (they suicided him), "lo renunciaron" (they resigned him) are commonly used in light of events in my country.

3) The morphosyntactic solutions that speakers find for their communicative needs cannot be dissociated from the contents with which each community expresses **its place in the world.**

# To Liberate the Differences...

In his proposal to embrace differences, Gianni Vattimo expresses: "even dialects have grammar and syntax; in fact, only **when they acquire dignity and visibility do they discover their own grammar.**"

From our perspective, as linguists, we want to reverse this thinking because we believe that **if we discover (and explain) their own grammar, dialects gain dignity and visibility.**

The revision of grammars based on the understanding and explanation of dialectal heterogeneity, always motivated by the communicative needs of the speakers, can have an impact **on language policies that aim to overcome linguistic discrimination.**

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