

Conservative and Radical Dialects in American Spanish: New Venezuelan Data and Theoretical Implications

Godsuno Chela-Flores

*Maestría en Lingüística y Enseñanza del Lenguaje
División de Estudios para Graduados
Facultad de Humanidades y Educación, Universidad del Zulia
Apartado 526. Maracaibo, Venezuela*

Abstract

This paper focuses on and questions the widely accepted bipartition of American Spanish into conservative and radical dialects, mainly based on the coda-weakening tendencies of the latter and closely related to geographical location. The shortcomings of such a dichotomy are demonstrated on the basis of recent dialect work on Venezuelan Spanish varieties which has produced relevant data on prenuclear and postnuclear phonemes. Furthermore, the use of those dialectal categories is questioned in the light of an updated Natural Polysystemic Model (Chela-Flores 1995, 1999) and insights provided by Optimality Theory. The conclusions are that it is necessary to increase the number of dialectal types to accommodate the new data and that universal tendencies of natural languages in the intrasyllabic systems and constraint rankings should be taken into account to attain a satisfactory understanding of dialectal diversity.

Key words: American Spanish, dialectology, conservative and radical.

Dialectos conservadores y radicales del español de América: nuevos datos de las variedades venezolanas y sus implicaciones teóricas

Resumen

Este trabajo cuestiona la bipartición usual del español de América en dialectos conservadores y dialectos radicales, basada principalmente en las tendencias de debilitamiento de los segmentos en la coda silábica y relacionada con la dicotomía geográfica de tierras altas y tierras bajas. La insuficiencia de esta bipartición como acercamiento al problema dialectal hispanoamericano se demuestra sobre la base de datos extraídos de recientes trabajos dialectológicos sobre el español de Venezuela. Además, el cuestionamiento se profundiza a la luz del Modelo Polisistémico Natural con algunas nuevas modificaciones (Chela-Flores 1996, 1998b), y orientaciones provistas por la Teoría de la Optimidad. Se concluye que es necesario revisar la tipología dialectal para explicar la nueva información y que las tendencias universales y jerarquizaciones de restricciones deben tomarse en cuenta para lograr una comprensión satisfactoria de la diversidad dialectal.

Palabras clave: Español americano, dialectología, conservador y radical.

The traditional approach to the dialects of Venezuelan Spanish should be revised in the light of recent studies (Obediente 1998a and b, Villamizar 1998, Chela-Flores 1998a y b), since their results alter the bipartite dialectal division suggested by many hispanists (vide for instance, Rosenblat 1984:227; Montes 1982:124 and 1996:135; Fernández-Sevilla 1980:457). This bipartition is closely linked to geography because the American Spanish speaking highlands have conservative phonological characteristics, while the lowlands tend towards weak codas. It is relevant to point out however, that the basis of this dichotomic approach is the orthography-phonology correspondence –or lack of it–

and only the postvocalic graphemes and phonemes are taken into account. Thus, the terms “conservativa” and “radical” (see Zamora and Guitart 1998 for the use of the latter term) should be used with care as they do not do justice to a very complex situation. “Conservativa” has been applied to Spanish varieties with a pronunciation that remains relatively close to the spelling and which, thanks to what Rosenblat (1963:31) quite aptly termed “fetishism of the letter”, have greater prestige among native and non native speakers¹. Zamora and Guitart did warn their readers that by using the term “radical” they were referring “only to the post-nuclear consonantal behaviour” (op.cit.: 107; our translation)². On the other hand, if both prevocalic and postvocalic phenomena are considered within a polysystemic approach, one will find that the so-called “conservativa” dialects **add** articulatory complexity to the first ones, distancing them from the articulatory identity with postvocalic phones expressed or represented by the orthography. For instance, in the rural speech of Marida a representative highland province³, the prevocalic vibrants undergo a process of assibilation, which is a consonantal strengthening since they become more complex. This process was first reported for Valencia, a lowland dialect (Navarro 1995:127), but its frequency is not very high (13%) and although it was found in all social classes, most examples came from the lowest one. In the Andean Merida dialect, the assibilated vibrants are reported for the capital city and the rural area, although the most detailed study is for the latter. Villamizar indicates that they studied their occurrence in the onset both singly and as the second member of a cluster ([rráma] ‘rama’, ‘branch’ and [trápo] ‘trapo’, ‘cloth’), but also in the coda ([árma] ‘arma’, ‘weapon’); [estár] ‘estar’, ‘to be’). The results point to a clear preference for assibilation to occur in the prevocalic position or onset: 42.31% singly (cf. in the coda: 5.84% and 10.71% for pre-consonantal and word-final positions respectively) and 25.32% and 0.97% in [trV] and [drV] respectively (op.cit.: 65)⁴. As can be seen, the very distinctive sibilance added to the vibrants by this process not only adds complexity to the prevocalic phones, but also distances them from the phonemic values suggested by the orthography in a move that resembles the postnuclear events that have given the “radical” status to the lowlands.

Another similar process has been detected in the Marida dialect: prevocalic /s/, whose most frequent allophone in Venezuelan Spanish is a predorso-alveolar [s], is realized as a slightly retroflex [s], i.e. an

apico-post alveolar, which again is articulatorily more complex and perceptually quite different. In the rural areas it reaches 70.84% among male speakers between 15 and 45 years of age and 73.51% for those over 45 (Villamizar, *op.cit.*: 45 and Obediente 1998a: 333-335).

The most striking example of a change in the onset is the labiodentalization of /b/, which affects both highland and lowland dialects. This Venezuelan Spanish process was reported for the first time by ChelaFlores (1987:74) and has been confirmed by Romero 1998, Obediente *op.cit.*: and Chela-Flores 1998a:

[la éya muhér] → [la véya muhér] ‘la bella mujer’, the beautiful woman’

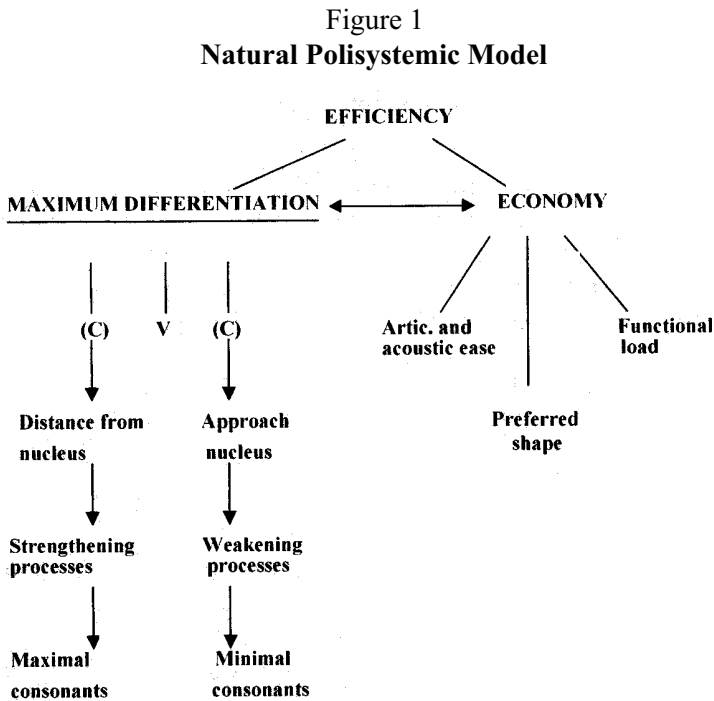
(Chela-Flores *op.cit.*:50)

The process above strengthens the bilabial approximant making it a labiodental fricative, sacrificing thus a **place-neutral** articulation –the most natural– for a **displaced** one (Laver 1994:137)⁵. This labiodentalization –frequent in speakers below the age of 45, women reaching a 60% (Romero 1998:48)–runs counter to the unsuccessful attempt by primary school teachers in Spanish-speaking countries to impose such articulation on children grappling with spelling exercises, since Spanish has a <v> grapheme alongside , both with a bilabial articulation. This spontaneous labiodentalization of /b/ is clearly what Labov calls a change from below (1994:78), since it represents –as we have shown– the operation of internal linguistic factors.

The three prevocalic processes analyzed above make clear that the present use of the “conservativa” and “radical” labels in American Spanish dialectology has to be modified, since it is based on an allegedly exclusive tendency of lowland dialects to veer away from the original values assigned to postvocalic consonant graphemes. We have shown that this growing divergence between grapheme and phoneme is not exclusive of lowland varieties and that it should not be thought aprioristically that only coda consonants change⁶.

Another approach to the dichotomic dialectal division of American Spanish is found in the Natural Polysystemic Model (Chela-Flores 1983, 1987, 1998a and b, etc), which rejects unisystemic analyses and instead considers phonological events in terms of three intrasyllabic systems –prenuclear, nuclear and posnuclear– each with its preferred conditions, states, processes and phones. A more convenient way to approach dia-

lectal consonant characteristics as dimensions of naturalness, is to see them occurring in “preferred contexts”, which are determined by opposite reactions to the syllabic nucleus, or nuclear system in our terms. In fact, they are expressions of the **Principle of Maximum Differentiation**, which applies to the intrasyllabic systems (Chela-Flores 1983:491). Maximum Differentiation itself is one of two expressions of the very basic meta-principle of **Efficiency** in the use of linguistic resources, the other one being the principle of **Economy** as shown in Chela-Flores (1995:454) reproduced here, with some slight modifications, in the following diagram:



This model provides what Longmire (1976:179) –among other phonologists– asked of a theoretical approach to dialectology: “What is needed is a dynamic model of the language system which clearly defines those parts of the adult system vulnerable to change and those parts that are invulnerable, a model which is able to predict weaknesses or tendencies in the system” (the underlining is ours).

With this framework in mind, the dialectal diversity we are dealing with, may be seen differently: when a “conservative” dialect increases the consonantal nature of its onset system –by a larger number of articulatory gestures or replaces a gesture by a more complex one–, it is not doing anything either conservative or radical, it is merely following the expected prenuclear tendencies of natural languages. In the same way, no “radical” dialect—any of those included in what Catalan 1960 called “Atlantic” Spanish—embarks upon unforeseen or revolutionary operations when it weakens postnuclear /s/ into [h]:

/raspar/ — [rahpár] ‘raspar’, ‘scratch’

/sjudades/ - [sjuðáðdeh] ‘ciudades’, ‘cíties’

or velarizes /n/ in the same position /renta/ → [réŋta] ‘renta’, ‘income’;

/kantan/ - [káŋtan] ‘cantan’, ‘they sing’.

In both cases, the labels “conservative” and “radical” are inadequate. The dialectologist faces varieties which go against one tendency or another or in which a tendency or a universal constriction outranks another: in the “conservative” ones, the postnuclear weakening tendencies or the NO CODA constriction of Optimality Theory (O.T. from now on)⁹, are not complied with, but Onset Maximization or the ONSET constriction is favoured¹⁰. A different situation obtains in the so-called “radical” dialects: although the coda undergoes evident erosion or weakening, there is no clear dominance of Onset Maximization in the Venezuelan Spanish ones at least, since the only sign of strengthening is the labiodentalization of prenuclear /b/ described and explained above.

There is another dimension in which Spanish dialectal categorization requires modification: the Merida data we have mentioned above reveals a vigorous reduction of postnuclear /s/ to a voiceless glottal fricative [h], instead of the predorsal allophone [s], usual in the highlands of Venezuela (Obediente 1997). This dialectal study indicates a 54% of [h], 25.4% of [s] and 20.6% of elision in urban speech, while in the rural areas the percentages are 52%, 39.7% and 8.3% respectively. Longmire (op.cit.: 95) had already detected the process in the coda more than two decades ago, with a 19% of [h] and a 63% of elision, the latter being a somewhat suspect result, given the big difference with the 1997 study¹¹. On the other hand, postnuclear /n/ does not practically undergo velarization, as it does in the lowland varieties; the results of the Merida field

work in the city being 9.4% of [ŋ], 67.4% of [n] and 23.3% of a placeless variant with a strong nasal resonance, while in rural speech the results are 3.1 of [ŋ] and an impressive 96.9% of [n]. How can one explain the difference between the weakening of /s/ in the coda and the firm coronal realization of /n/ in the same intrasyllabic system of this dialect?

Our polysystemic approach provides an answer to the apparently anomalous behaviour of these highland speakers. The weakening processes of the coda reduce its consonantality bringing it nearer to the vocalic nature of the nucleus-nucleus and coda form the **rhyme**, which indicates a close relationship between the two, while prenuclear strengthening processes distance the **onset** from the rest of the syllable. The closer the coda is to the nature of the nucleus—as in the case of sonorants—the less vulnerable it will be to the erosive postnuclear processes, since the objective of drawing it nearer to the vowel is largely within grasp. However, highly consonantal phones, such as obstruents, will undergo first and more intensely the weakening effects of the post-nuclear processes. As /s/ is an obstruent, it clearly weakens in a postnuclear position, while /n/, a sonorant and thus closer to vowels, does not undergo velarization—a typical postnuclear backing—in a dialect in which coda weakening is not the dominant tendency anyway.

The above considerations provide a strong argument against the two super-dialect approach to Venezuelan Spanish, since we have a highland variety displaying one of the two most important markers of lowland speech—postnuclear /s/ as [h]—and clearly not the other one—postnuclear /n/ as [ŋ]. It appears then that **intermediate** varieties should be added to the inventory of Spanish dialect types (**archaistic** and **special** should also be considered; see Chela-Flores 1998a:4-5). Our use of ‘intermediate’ differs from Mosonyi (1971:53) and Longmire (1976:73 and 75), since they apply it to a degree of intensity of the postnuclear /s/ tendency with different degrees of development: a very advanced one in American lowlands... and diverse intermediate observable stages, for instance, in the Venezuelan Andes...” (Mosonyi, op.cit.) Furthermore, our intention differs from Trudgill’s, when he writes of **interdialects** with phonetically intermediate forms, since he refers “to situations where contact between two dialects leads to the development of forms that actually originally occurred in neither dialect” (1986:62). We posit a type of American Spanish dialect in which firm characteristics of the “conser-

vative” and of the “radical” varieties coexist, and have not evolved by contact with other dialects.

We have tried to bring greater precision to the dialectal typology American Spanish dialectologists have devised. Recent Venezuelan data and two theoretical approaches have been brought together in this paper and although a good deal of work –practical and theoretical– remains to be done, the task is worthwhile; after all we aim at explaining no less than the linguistic behaviour of human beings: *homo sapiens* is *homo loquens* before anything else.

Notes

1. Of course, this attitude is not confined to Spanish speakers: a clear example of this graphemic “fetishism” is the English adverb often with its two current pronunciations, [ofn] and [oftn]. The first one represents the natural evolution of the word, whereas the second shows the insertion of /t/ inspired by the spelling. Jespersen points out that “H[art] 1569 and G[ill] 1621 still pronounce /t/ in *often*, but it seems to have been always mute in the 18th and 19th c., **until quite recently pedants have tried to re-introduce it on account of the spelling**” (1965:225; the emphasis is ours). However, English speakers seem to shy away from the artificiality of these apparent triumphs of the orthography: in his Longman Pronunciation Dictionary, J.C. Wells reports that in answer to a postal opinion poll carried out among 275 native speakers of British English, 72% preferred the pronunciation without /t/ in *often* (1990:493).
2. They were referring to the distance between the phonemic and the phonetic levels and we are reporting on the correspondence between orthography and pronunciation, but we are all referring to dimensions of the same problem. The orthography of a language aims initially at reflecting its pronunciation in the ideal grapheme-phoneme relationship, although one knows that even in the best of cases writing can never be considered an exact equivalent of speech. Perhaps because the distance between orthography and phonology has not become as great as in English or French, Spanish speakers are more prone to thinking that a spelling pronunciation is to be aimed at as a sign of education and social standing.

3. Mérida is one of three Venezuelan states located in the Andes, with a capital city well known because of by its many writers and artists in addition to being the seat of one of the oldest universities in the country.
4. The assimilated vibrant only occurs in clusters with dental stops /t/ and /d/, although the very low percentage for the voiced one, leaves /tr/ as virtually the only context for this process. This preference for /t/ in the onset, is not unknown in other varieties of Spanish, such as Chilean and Costa Rican (Lipski 1994:200 and 222 respectively).
5. Laver introduces these useful categories: “Segments made by an active articulator interacting with its anatomically neutral passive articulator will be said to produce **place-neutral articulations**. A smaller number of segment types are made with what is called **displaced articulation** where the active articulator is displaced from its anatomically neutral position. . . one familiar example is a labio-dental articulation” (op.cit.: 137). The relevance of Laver’s comments in this context is that the Venezuelan Spanish varieties not only distance themselves drastically from the orthography in this case, but in the process also opt for a more costly articulation in neuromuscular terms.
6. This whole dichotomic approach to Spanish dialectology on the basis of the divergence between orthography and pronunciation is inadequate, since the former will always be subjected to what Sampson (1997:204) called “inertial deepening”. He was referring to the virtual impossibility of orthography to adapt to phonological change, which in turn leads to a distinction between ‘superficial’ and ‘deep’ writing systems. On this connection, Carol Chomsky wrote an interesting paper about thirty years ago (Chomsky 1973), defending the classical generative view that English spelling was an adequate “lexical” or “deep” representation (op.cit.:320). Be that as it may, the question has little relevance to dialectal classification.
7. Archangeli y Langendoen 1997 y Roca 1999 (capítulo XIX) son buenas introducciones al modelo.
8. The processes that take place in the prenuclear system tend to be of a strengthening kind, so the result is that prenuclear phones move away from the nucleus, whereas the opposite occurs in the postnuclear system. Articulatory and acoustic ease serve the system needs

and the speaker's sense of economy. The functional load a phone-me or of an opposition is a key factor in their permanence: speakers tend to marginalize phonological elements of low yield as a manifestation of economy. Preferred shape is a modified version of Leben's 1973 Obligatory Contour Principle and appears in our proposal as a *tendency* to avoid adjacent identical phones.

9. Optimality Theory is a constraint-based approach, in which the constraints are given a ranking. The most interesting feature of the approach is that it "... is not so much that it is based on constraint satisfaction but that it allows violations of those constraints" (Sherrard 1997:43). When two constraints collide, preference is given to the higher-ranked one, doing justice to the fact that in language things are not as linguists - ever bent on elegant generalizations, would like them to be. O.T. does away with rules and derivations, which is a radical change theorizing. Good introductions to the model are found in Archangeli and Langendoen from the previous decades of linguistic (1997) and Roca and Johnson (1999).
10. ONSET: Syllables begin with a consonant.
 NO CODA: Syllables end with a vowel
 (Hammond 1997:36).
11. Longmire's work was her Georgetown PhD dissertation, but her results were inexplicably ignored by Hispanic dialectologists after its approval in August 1976. In spite of our observation on the percentage of elision, it must be said that her detection of the glottal realization of postnuclear /s/ in a highland dialect makes it a key reference. It must be emphasized that most Venezuelan dialectologists expected a firm alveolar allophone in the coda (for example, Rosenblat 1960:18).

References

- ALVAR, M. (editor) 1996. **Manual de Dialectología Hispánica: El Español de América**. Editorial Ariel, Barcelona.
- BAILEY, C.J. 1971. **Variation and Linguistic Theory**. Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington D.C.
- CATALÁN, D. 1960. "El español canario entre Europa y América". **Boletim de Filologia** XIX, Lisboa.

- CHELA-FLORES, G. 1983. Is there a preferred state in phonology? **Neuphilologische Mitteilungen** 4/LXXXIV. Helsinki.
- CHELA-FLORES, G. 1987. "El español antillano de Venezuela: problemas de fuerza segmental y norma formal". **Neuphilologische Mitteilungen** 1/LXXXVIII. Helsinki.
- CHELA-FLORES, G. 1995. "Minimality Naturalness and other constraints on phonological change". **Neuphilologische Mitteilungen** 4/XCVI.
- CHELA-FLORES, G. 1998a. **Orígenes y estado actual del español de Venezuela**. Ediciones Comisión Regional "Macuro 500 Años". Cumaná.
- CHELA-FLORES, G. 1998b. "Interpretación y Explicación Fonológicas". **Español Actual**, No. 69. Madrid
- CHELA-FLORES, G. 1999. "Profundización inercial del sistema escriturario: Ortografía y fonología del español de Venezuela". Proceedings of the II International Symposium on Reading and Writing (November Maracay; in print).
- CHOMSKY, C. 1973. "Reading, Writing and Phonology". En Lesten, M. (editor). **Readings in Applied Transformational Grammar**. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York.
- CLEMENTS, G.N. and KEYSER, S.J. 1983. **C.V. Phonology: A Generative Theory of the Syllable**. M.I.T. Press, Cambridge.
- FERNÁNDEZ SEVILLA, J. 1980. "Los fonemas implosivos en español". **Boletín del Instituto Caro y Cuervo**, XXXV. Bogotá.
- HAMMOND, M. 1997. "Optimality Theory and Prosody". In Archangeli and Langendoen (editors).
- JESPERSEN, O. 1965. **A Modern English Grammar on historical principles. Part I: Sounds and spellings**. George Allen & Unwin Ltd., Londres.
- LABOV, W. 1994. **Principles of Linguistic Change: Internal Factors**. Blackwell Publishers. Oxford.
- LAVER, J. 1994. **Principles of Phonetics**. Cambridge University Press.
- LEBEN, W. 1973. "Suprasegmental Phonology". Doctoral dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Cambridge, Mass.
- LESTEN, M. 1973. **Readings in Applied Transformational Grammar**. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York.
- LIPSKI, J. 1994. **Latin American Spanish**. Longman, London.
- LONGMIRE, B.J. 1976. "Relationship of variables in Venezuelan Spanish to historical sound changes in Latin and the Romance Languages". Doctoral dissertation. University of Georgetown, Washington.
- MONTES GIRALDO, J.J. 1982. **Dialectología General e Hispanoamericana**. Publicaciones del Instituto Caro y Cuervo LXIII. Bogotá.

- MONTES, GIRALDO, J.J. 1996. "Colombia". In Alvar, M. (editor).
- MOSONYI, E.E. 1971. **El habla de Caracas: Estudio lingüístico sobre el español hablado en la capital venezolana.** Ediciones de la Biblioteca. Universidad Central de Venezuela, Caracas.
- NAVARRO, M. 1995. **El español hablado en Puerto Cabello.** Ediciones de la Universidad de Carabobo. Valencia.
- Obediente, E. 1996. "Datos sobre la /r/ asibilada en Venezuela". **Lengua y Habla.** Vol. 1.2. Mérida.
- OBEDIENTE, E. 1997. "Revision de los parámetros fonéticos en la división dialectal de Venezuela". Paper read in the XLVII Annual Convention of the Venezuelan Association for the Advancement of Science, Valencia.
- OBEDIENTE, E. 1998a. **Fonética y Fonología.** 3ª edición, Ediciones de la Universidad de los Andes, Mérida.
- OBEDIENTE, E. 1998b (comp.). **El habla rural de la Cordillera de Mérida.** Ediciones de la Universidad de los Andes, Mérida.
- ROCA, I. (ed.) 1997. **Derivations and Constraints in Phonology.** Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- ROCA, I. 1999. **A Course in Phonology.** Blackwell Publishers, Oxford.
- ROMERO, L. 1998. "Fricativas y aproximantes: labiodentalización y refuerzo". M.A. thesis. Zulia University, Maracaibo.
- ROSENBLAT, A. 1960. **Buenas y Malas Palabras,** Vol. I. Editorial Edime, Madrid.
- ROSENBLAT, A. 1963. **El Fetichismo de la Letra.** Ediciones de la Universidad Central de Venezuela, Caracas.
- ROSENBLAT, A. 1984. **Estudios sobre el español de América.** Monte Ávila Editores. Caracas.
- SAMPSON, G. 1997. **Sistemas de Escritura.** Editorial Gedisa, Barcelona (Spanish version of "Writing Systems" 1985. Century Hutchinson Ltd.).
- SHERRARD, G. 1997. "Questions of priorities: An Introductory Overview of Optimality Theory". In Roca (editor).
- TRUDGILL, P. 1986. **Dialects in contact.** Basil Blackwell Ltd., Oxford.
- VILLAMIZAR, T. 1998. "Fonetismo" in Obediente E. (editor).
- WELLS, J.C. 1990: **Longman Pronunciation Dictionary.** Longman, London.
- ZAMORA, J.C. and GUITART. J.M. 1998. **Dialectología Hispanoamericana.** 2a edición, Ediciones Almar, Salamanca.

Tendencias de investigación por parte de profesores de inglés de Venezuela en la década de los noventa*

Carlos Eduardo Blanco

*Departamento de Lengua y Comunicación
Escuela de Educación, Facultad de Humanidades y Educación
Universidad Central de Venezuela
E-mail: ucv-udi@yahoo.com*

Resumen

Se busca caracterizar a la sub-rama de la Lingüística Aplicada conocida como Enseñanza del Inglés como Lengua Extranjera (EFL/TEFL) en Venezuela, desde el punto de vista de sus tendencias u orientaciones de investigación actuales sobre la base de aquellas existentes en el país según resúmenes de investigación presentados en los dos más importantes eventos lingüísticos del país. Se utiliza la caracterización corrientemente aceptada internacionalmente (*investigación descriptiva, investigación interpretativa e investigación ideológica o crítica*), y se clasifica una muestra intencional de 85 “abstracts” o resúmenes de investigaciones locales en el lapso 1990-1999 de las jornadas de la Asociación de Lingüística y Filología de América Latina en las convenciones de la Asociación Venezolana para el Avance de la Ciencia (ALFAL-Aso-VAC) y de los Encuentros Nacionales de Docentes e Investigadores de la Lingüística (ENDIL). Además del análisis descriptivo de dichos resúmenes en cuanto a tendencia o modo de investigación, se clasifican éstos

* Versión resumida del trabajo ganador del premio APIU-UCV:PDVSA-CIED a la mejor investigación por profesores, año 99, área de educación. Ponencia presentada en el 19º Encuentro Nacional de Docentes e Investigadores de la Lingüística (ENDIL XIX) Universidad de Oriente. Cumaná, del 19 al 23 de junio de 2000. Investigación apoyada por el CDCH-UCV.

de acuerdo con los criterios de área temática y procedencia o afiliación institucional. Se obtiene que predomina la investigación llamada descriptiva, de base positivista. Se discuten algunas posibles implicaciones epistemológicas, éticas y para el currículum oculto en enseñanza de la investigación del hallazgo en cuestión para el contexto venezolano.

Palabras clave: Lingüística aplicada, inglés como lengua extranjera.

Research Trends by Venezuelan EFL Teachers in the Nineties

Abstract

This paper presents the results of a study aimed at producing a profile of the sub-field of applied linguistics known as Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL/TEFL) in Venezuela from the point of view of its research trends or orientations, and based on the information presented in research abstracts in the more important national linguistic events. The internationally accepted characterization format was used (descriptive, interpretive, ideological and critical research) This was done by means of an intentional non-random sample of 85 research abstracts submitted to two major local linguistic events (ALFAL-ASOVAC and ENDIL) during the decade of the nineties. Using the descriptive, interpretive and ideological research trilogy, such abstracts were classified and interpreted. Institutional affiliation, thematic area and source were also taken into account. Results show a bias towards the descriptive (positivistic) research orientation. Possible implications from the point of view of epistemology, ethics and hidden curriculum in the teaching of research are discussed.

Key words: Applied Linguistics, English as a Foreign Language.

Lo que limita el desarrollo de la ciencia son los marcos conceptuales, que a la vez limitan la metodología.

Manuel Elkin Patarroyo

INTRODUCCIÓN

Este trabajo continúa una línea de investigación (Blanco, 1998; 1999) la cual persigue suministrar datos para una caracterización del campo del Inglés como Lengua Extranjera (EFL/TEFL) de Venezuela desde el punto de vista de sus orientaciones o modos de investigación. Los objetivos específicos son: producir una clasificación analítica de un conjunto de *abstracts* de dos eventos científicos (ALFAL en AsoVAC y ENDIL) de este campo según sus tendencias de investigación (Cumming, 1994), una clasificación de dichos *abstracts* por área temática y una clasificación según la procedencia o afiliación institucional de los autores de dichos *abstracts*.

Se consideran aquí profesores de inglés a quienes comunican sus esfuerzos en jornadas de investigación organizadas para tal fin o en artículos de revistas arbitradas. Esto sobre las premisas siguientes: la investigación no comunicada es, para los propósitos sociales de la ciencia, inexistente; no todos los profesores de Inglés son necesariamente investigadores; investigación significa, en general, la indagación sistemática respecto de un tema con el objetivo de descubrir, establecer o revisar hechos o teorías, lo que implica la búsqueda de lo desconocido y la resolución de un problema de conocimiento mediante procesos y procedimientos científicos -conjunto de convenciones de crítica racional y evaluación- con producción de nuevos conocimientos (Hatch y Farhady, 1982; Arias, 1997), además del aporte original y útil que se deriva de estas mismas cuestiones (Denscombe, 1998; Blaxter *et al.*, 1996; Barrons, 1976; citado por Felce, 1997), habida cuenta de que se busca descubrir “hechos no triviales” (Bell, 1993: 2). Esto implica la vigilancia y el cuidado del concepto mismo de investigación, tarea llevada a cabo por los expertos revisores o árbitros de las ponencias y manuscritos en su función académica contralora (cancerberismo o *gatekeeping*) (véanse en este sentido Gregg *et al.*, 1997; Berkenkotter y Huckin, 1995).

A pesar de que no puede decirse que existe una única definición de investigación aceptada por todos, los autores consultados (arriba) coinciden en cuanto al carácter sistemático, controlado, planificado, crítico y

público de ésta, por una parte, y en cuanto a la necesidad de evitar la trivialidad, por la otra. Sin embargo, se ha podido notar que parece haber varias definiciones implícitas de investigación, desde las más estrechas (el experimento cuantitativo de cinco páginas) hasta las más amplias, en las cuales casi todo parece considerarse investigación (discursos, opiniones, clases magistrales, propuestas, denuncias, etc.). En consecuencia, la definición de investigación asumida no será una amplia. Se considerará aquí investigación lo que se acepta para ser presentado en los eventos de la comunicación científica señalados, es decir, las ponencias de ALFAL-AsoVAC y ENDIL por ser éstos los dos más importantes del país para este campo (Serrón, 1994; Di Prisco, 1992)¹.

Las preguntas de investigación son ¿qué estamos indagando? (Block, 1996) y ¿con qué enfoques y perspectivas? (Cumming, 1994), mediante lo cual se podría contribuir a elaborar un perfil de las tendencias indagativas del campo de conocimientos en discusión. Adicionalmente, la escasez de trabajos teóricos, epistemológicos o filosóficos del campo del TEFL venezolano que aborden explícitamente la cuestión del tipo de investigación y temáticas que se privilegian y la concepción de ciencia que se asume, hace necesario atacar estas preguntas de investigación por vía de los productos que se generan, clasificándolos con el fin de intentar responder tales cuestiones. Se abordan las orientaciones, en el sentido de tendencias o modos de investigación (Cumming, 1994; Auerbach, 1994; Cohen, 1994; Connor, 1994; Hornberger, 1994; Pennycook, 1994; Spada, 1994; Tarone, 1994), de las fuentes más apropiadas para el objetivo planteado, en este caso, los *abstracts* o resúmenes de investigación presentados en jornadas del área en cuestión. También se presenta un análisis por áreas temáticas abordadas por los investigadores, así como de sus instituciones de afiliación o procedencia.

1. METODOLOGÍA

1.1. Tipo y nivel de la investigación

Es de tipo documental y nivel descriptivo, pues persigue referir e interpretar lo que es sobre la base del análisis de materiales publicados. Se halla relacionada con condiciones o conexiones existentes, con prácticas, puntos de vista o actitudes que se mantienen, efectos que se sienten o tendencias que se desarrollan (Morles, 1997: 33; Best, 1961: 91). Se combina con la comparación o el contraste, existiendo medición, clasifi-

cación, análisis e interpretación, siendo entonces investigación descriptiva por observación (ibid.). Aunque presenta información del campo del TEFL en secuencia cronológica (sucesos que han tenido lugar), no es histórica en sentido estricto pues más bien presenta un carácter descriptivo acerca de los años de los eventos científicos examinados, presentando un corte seccional de los datos. Los únicos elementos que manipula el investigador son sus métodos de observación y descripción, y el modo en el cual analiza las relaciones (Best, 1961).

Denscombe (1998), al ocuparse del análisis documental de fuentes escritas, aunque no trata este tipo de investigación con *abstracts* como fuentes primarias, utiliza, por una parte, la categorización de “registros” (p. 161) y, por otra, de “publicaciones gubernamentales y estadísticas oficiales” (p. 163), compartiendo las fuentes de los resúmenes rasgos de ambas categorizaciones en cuanto a que presentan una visión más o menos sistemática de los acontecimientos; están disponibles para el público y poseen autoridad y objetividad (p. 163-164).

1.2. De la validez: muestra intencional y *abstracts*

Las unidades de análisis (elementos de la muestra), de las cuales se obtienen los datos para la clasificación realizada, son los resúmenes o *abstracts* de investigación del campo del EFL/TEFL presentados en los eventos de ASOVAC y ENDIL para el lapso especificado. La estructura de la muestra, referida a la lista o conjunto perteneciente al universo del cual se toma la muestra, ha sido circunscrita a dos eventos considerados de la mayor representatividad. El cálculo estadístico empleado para representar los datos cuantitativos es el aritmético simple con porcentajes.

El procedimiento muestral utilizado ha sido el intencional (no aleatorio ni probabilístico) razonado (Ander-Egg, 1982: 185-186) debido a que los elementos de la muestra deben reunir ciertos rasgos o atributos preestablecidos. Este procedimiento es adecuado en tanto que el investigador no tiene la intención de generalizar los resultados a otras poblaciones (Sanders y Pinhey, 1983: 119). No está basado en teoría estadística o matemática sino en el juicio o criterio del investigador quien ha considerado que, por ejemplo, el ser profesor de inglés investigador no es una cuestión de probabilidad o aleatoriedad, sino que más bien es una condición previamente determinable. Para este tipo de indagación el investigador afirma el carácter no probabilístico de este aspecto del conocimiento. En este caso, “la aleatoriedad y el azar no son inteligentes como

para lograr una muestra óptima lo cual sí se logra con una muestra intencional” (Martínez, 1996:34). Aquí, la pregunta que se ha planteado el investigador para seleccionar la muestra ha sido la siguiente: dado lo que ya conozco del tema de investigación y del rango de personas o eventos estudiados, ¿quiénes o qué me puede suministrar la mejor información? (Denscombe, 1998: 15). Este procedimiento muestral supone conocimiento del universo a estudiar; su técnica consiste en que el investigador escoge algunas categorías que considera típicas o representativas del fenómeno a estudiar: la elección intencionada no es absolutamente representativa sino bajo ciertos puntos de vista que se consideran importantes o típicos (Ander-Egg, 1982: 186).

1.3. Controles y confiabilidad: juicios de expertos

Para procurar la validez y la confiabilidad de la observación, se recurrió al juicio adicional de dos expertos del campo de EFUTEFL con el fin de tener otras evaluaciones acerca de la inclusión de uno u otro *abstract* dentro de cada una de las categorías de Cumming (1994). Se le pidió a dos colegas responder a un breve cuestionario elaborado sobre la base de la tipología Lickert (Millán, 1998) (ver anexo), quienes evaluaron la trilogía de Cumming (1994) atendiendo a cinco parámetros de concordancia: absolutamente de acuerdo, de acuerdo, ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo, en desacuerdo, absolutamente en desacuerdo.

Los expertos manifestaron, el primero, su acuerdo, y el segundo, su no desacuerdo con la clasificación suministrada, de lo cual se interpreta que visualizan a ésta como una manera de realizar la investigación aquí presentada. Se les proporcionó una muestra de los eventos incluidos en el estudio (seleccionada al azar), una para cada evento. Clasificaron los *abstracts* según los mismos criterios por los cuales lo había hecho el investigador, mostrando un nivel de coincidencia del 81.8% para con éste, pues coincidieron con él en nueve de los once casos asignados.

1.4. Descripción de lo realizado

La observación realizada respecto de la trilogía señalada (Cumming, 1994: 673-703) se constituyó extrayendo las premisas o criterios expresadas en dicha fuente. En primer lugar, se partió de la base de que para efectuar una aproximación epistemológica, si acaso indirecta, a los trabajos del campo del EFL venezolano actual, era necesario utilizar una base de datos de cierta jerarquía científica. Los trabajos a ser analiza-