Implicit vs. Explicit Linguistic Awareness and Attitudes in Buenos Aires
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Recently in sociolinguistics, the Implicit Association Task (IAT) has been used to test implicit linguistic awareness and attitudes. With the advent of this methodology, studies have been acutely concerned with the relationship between implicit measures such as the IAT and other more explicit measures. While prior studies have found a relationship between implicit and explicit awareness of variants (Campbell-Kibler 2011), this has not been the case for attitudes. Lack of correspondence between implicit and explicit attitudes has been attested to by both Pantos (2010) and Campbell-Kibler (forthcoming), with respect to foreign accented speech and regional variation in American English, respectively. The present study adds to this implicit vs. explicit discussion by examining the awareness and attitudes of sibilant devoicing in Buenos Aires Spanish (BAS).

The IAT (Greenwald et al. 1998) was designed to measure the strength of an association between two categories. Adapting the methodology of Campbell-Kibler (forthcoming), who has shown the IAT to be an effective way to test associations between linguistic variables and social categories, my study investigates awareness of and attitudes about the variation between the voiced and voiceless palatal fricatives in BAS. Production studies from the past half-century have shown a general trend towards devoicing in BAS and that [ʃ]-[ʒ] variation is correlated with age, social class and gender (see Rohena-Madrazo, forthcoming, for a summary).

For perception, King (2009) concluded that the voiced variant is associated with older and upper class speakers. In the present study, perception of the variable is tested implicitly with the IAT and through subsequent explicit questioning. Twenty-six natives of Buenos Aires participated in three tasks: the first examined awareness of the variable, the second looked at its association with neighborhoods within Buenos Aires and the third considered the association between the variable and friendliness. The D measures, for each IAT, calculated in accordance with Greenwald et al. (2003), were the dependent variable in separate linear regression models for each task. These models were fit using the independent variables of gender, age, origin, self-identification and explicit awareness/attitude of the participant, as well as version and order of the task.

The results from the first task show that while all participants comment explicitly on the difference between the voiced and voiceless variants, this same behavior is only exhibited for a particular version and order of the first IAT. In the best model for the second task, explicit attitude was selected as the only significant predictor of the implicit measure. That is, participants who exhibited an association between the variable and neighborhood in the IAT also commented on that same association explicitly after the IAT. In the third task, the participants overall demonstrated neither an implicit nor an explicit association between the variable and friendliness. The results from task two run counter to what previous research using the IAT has found. The results of this research show that the attitudes surrounding distinct variables behave differently and that implicit and explicit linguistic attitudes may indeed show strong similarities.