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PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE
From the field, to the Web, and back again: incorporating Internet methods into language ideology research

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Researchers from a variety of academic disciplines have begun to incorporate Web-based methodologies in their research agendas. Nonetheless, many of those interested in language ideologies — i.e. speakers’ beliefs about language, as well as their rationalisation of those beliefs — vehemently stand by site-specific ethnographic approaches. Rather than arguing for a replacement of one method by another, the present methodological analysis explores how Internet methods can be intertwined with more traditional, face-to-face techniques for data collection. Exemplifying this process by way of a three-phase project investigating Spanish-speaker opinions about various dialects of Spanish that exist in the world, we illustrate how online and offline methods can mutually inform one another, together allowing both specificity and generalisability of findings, as well as an overall more profound understanding of a given phenomenon of interest.

Keywords: methodology; ethnography; surveys; interviews; language ideologies/attitudes; dialectology; Spanish

Introduction

Approaches to the study of language can at times seem as varied as the languages they seek to investigate. Although a fundamental benefit of such diversity is indeed a more robust and comprehensive array of findings, an unfortunate and all-too-common side effect is methodological isolation. Different sorts of language researchers — from linguists, to anthropologists, to sociologists, and more — frequently ally themselves with a particular method(s) of collecting and analysing data and are quick to point out the presumed inadequacies of other techniques.

Those interested in the ideologies surrounding language usage — ‘shared bodies of commonsense notions about the nature of language in the world’ (Rumsey, 1990, p. 346) — overwhelmingly stand by on-the-ground, ethnographic field methods. Of course, much mixing of qualitative methods can be prevalent on-site, including audio-/video-recording, participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and so on. But all of these research designs emphasise extensive fieldwork within a specific community, thereby often rendering large-scale, cross-dialectal, and cross-communal investigations difficult or impossible to pursue in an efficient manner.

The present study explores how Internet methods can be interwoven with these more traditional ethnographic approaches to overcome some of the logistical difficulties involved in large-scale language ideology research. I use as a case-in-point a project designed to investigate Spanish-speaker opinions about various varieties of Spanish...
spoken in the world. Given that Spanish is the language with the second largest number of
native speakers globally (Lewis, 2009), this is no small task. Specifically, I aim to illus-
trate concretely the ways in which site-specific observations can motivate questions that
Web-based methods are well equipped to address; and responses from Internet surveys
can then, in turn, inspire new questions to be explored in subsequent site-specific
research. This iterative melding of offline and online methods can provide researchers not
only with a more comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon of interest, but also a
more solid grounding on which to engage in broad-spectrum theorising.

(Standard) language ideologies

Before we begin our discussion of methods, some brief preliminaries are due in order to
substantively situate the present inquiry.

Language ideologies, as a concept, have been broadly defined as ‘sets of beliefs about
language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language
structure and use’ (Silverstein, 1979, p. 173). Language ideology researchers have been
particularly active in communities of language contact in which a ‘larger’ (often colonis-
ing) language comes into contact with a ‘smaller’ (often indigenous) language and cul-
ture. Examples include so-called ‘global’ languages such as Spanish, English, and French
in contact with Mexicano/Nahuat in Mexico (Hill, 1985, 1998; Messing, 2007), Tewa in
the US South-west (Kroskrity, 1998), Wolof in Senegal (Swigart, 2000), or Corsican in
Corsica (Jaffe, 2003, 2007). In such contexts, scholars have traditionally performed in-
depth, on-the-ground research in single regions or communities to understand the multi-
ple ways in which the smaller languages can and do adapt to prolonged situations of con-
tact with global languages.

Adaptation to and within contexts of multilingualism and multidialectalism causes
questions to emerge on each side of the linguistic divide as members work to define ‘what
a language community should normatively be like’ (Silverstein, 2010, p. 339), as well as
what institutional policies should be put into practice in order to reach that ideological
objective. A recurrent theme that often surfaces in such debates has been labelled the
‘standard’ language ideology. Lippi-Green (1997, p. 64) describes this phenomenon as ‘a
bias toward an abstracted, idealized, homogenous spoken language which is imposed and
maintained by dominant bloc institutions and which names as its model the written lan-
guage, but which is drawn primarily from the speech of the upper, middle class’. Crucial to
note are the consequences of such an ideology: if there exists a ‘standard’ or ‘correct’ way
of speaking, then other ways of speaking must therefore be, by extension, ‘incorrect’ or
‘non-standard’. This distinction can thus form the basis for numerous forms of institu-
tionalised discrimination through language (cf., e.g. Shohamy, 2006; Spolsky, 2004; Spolsky &
Shohamy, 1999; Zentella, 2001). Milani (2008), for instance, analyses the proposal to intro-
duce language testing as a requirement for citizenship in Sweden. Contrary to the argu-
ments made by the proposal’s supporters, Milani argues that ‘as a rite of institution, a
language test actually contributes to rather than challenges the reproduction of social differ-
entiation, thereby legitimizing the exclusion of certain groups from both the civic and sym-
bolic domains of Sweden as a nationstate’ (p. 53, emphasis in original).

Further demonstrating the complexity of this area of inquiry, Wodak, Krzyżanowski, and
Forchtner (2012) examine code-switching practices in European Union institutions and illus-
trate how language ideologies move beyond the simple ‘monolingualism vs. multilingualism
dichotomy’ within which researchers often operate, arguing instead in favour of ‘a contin-
um of context-dependent multilingual practices...which are characterized by different
patterns of language choice and which serve a range of both manifest and latent functions’ (p. 157). Such research, from a discourse-historical approach, focuses on the implications that institutional policies, such as those of the European Union, can have on public opinion as to ‘how multilingualism should be approached, managed, and practiced’ (Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2011, p. 132; cf. also Krzyżanowski, 2010; Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2011).

With this larger theoretical foundation in mind, let us now turn to the three methodological phases of the present study examining the role of dialectal variation in the language ideologies of Spanish speakers.

**Phase one: field observations**

My initial interest in (standard) language ideologies was sparked through fieldwork conducted with Salvadorans in southern California (Raymond, 2012a, 2012b). I was specifically interested in the use of the second-person singular (‘you’) pronouns vos and tú in this specific contact variety of Spanish — vos being the pronominal norm of El Salvador while tú being the form used by the surrounding Mexican majority of the US South-west. Despite the continued use of vos within the home amongst those who had immigrated from El Salvador, the children of these individuals (born and raised in southern California) massively conformed to the Los Angeles vernacular Spanish form tú (cf. Parodi, 2004, 2009, 2011). Furthermore, these non-Salvadoran-born individuals actively displayed sheer disgust when asked if they themselves ever used vos, using a range of pejorative adjectives to describe the pronoun, from ‘weird’ to ‘gross’ to ‘stupid’ (Raymond, 2012a).

My field observations included not only interactions amongst Salvadoran family members, but also between Salvadorans and their non-Salvadoran Spanish-speaking friends. In the following Excerpt (1), for example, Salvadoran-born Lisa has been chastising her cousin (Juan) for backing out of a recent trip they had planned to go on to El Salvador. She ends this near-berating by referring to him as vos, and their mutual Mexican-American friend (Mario), co-present in the interaction, immediately questions this form.

(1) Salvadoran—Mexican interaction

01  MAR:  Por qué >allá< dicen ‘vos’.  
*Why do you guys say ‘vos’ there.*

02  LISA:   .hhh ‘Vos’ para nosotros Okei.  
*hhh ‘Vos’ for us Okay.*

03  MAR:   [Porque ‘vos’ es la voz.  
*Because ‘vos’ is the voice.*

04  MAR:   Es: Es como [(hablo)  
*It’s: It’s how (I talk)*

05  LISA:  [N:o no no n[o.  
*N:o no no no.*

06  JUAN:  [.tsk

07  LISA:  Ah:[::

08  MAR:   [Es voz.  
*It’s voice.*

09  LISA:  No. [Porque: . . .  
*No. Because . . .*
In this excerpt, Mario displays confusion as to the surfacing of *vos* in the interaction. His understanding of the word is its homophone *voz*, the Spanish word for ‘voice’, rather than as a pronominal form (lines 3–4, 8). The two Salvadoran cousins then do their best to clear up the confusion and move on with the discussion at hand.

What I want to underscore with the above example is that this lack of understanding of *vos* immediately comes to the surface in the interaction and is explicitly oriented to by the co-participants in the ongoing talk. Dialect—contact interactions of this sort in the southern California context reveal a massive unawareness — and oftentimes disparagement — of Spanish dialect variation. And while the above case is relatively amicable, this is not always so. On the contrary, such ‘moments’ of dialect contact have the potential to cause conflict amongst speakers, much like in situations of language contact (cf. studies cited above).

Nevertheless, these site-specific observations quickly spark more global questions: Are the beliefs about language invoked in this context due solely to the pressures of unbalanced contact — 70% of Spanish speakers in the Los Angeles metropolitan area being of Mexican descent (i.e. users of *tú*), while the next most numerically present group is Salvadorans (users of *vos*) at only 12.6%? Is this the consequence of the US ‘monoglot standard’ of English (Silverstein, 1996) combined with a dearth of formal instruction in Spanish? Or do such beliefs extend into the monolingual Spanish-speaking world as well?

**Phase two: Internet survey**

These more ‘global’ or ‘panoramic’ questions about Spanish language usage required a far more ‘global’ or ‘panoramic’ methodology. Specifically, I sought to investigate what happens when dialects of the same language, each considered a ‘standard’ in its own country of origin, are compared across country borders. Which variety(-ies) ‘win’, and what rationalisations are offered to justify that victory?

To begin to approach these broad-spectrum questions, I constructed an online, internationally circulated, three-part survey which elicited various opinions about the varieties of Spanish that exist in the world. This was done using the survey design site SurveyGizmo.

**Internet methods for ‘sensitive’ topics**

Often the first thought that comes to mind with the proposal of a Web-based research method is that the Internet institutes an additional gatekeeper into the research design, namely that only those who have access to the Internet can participate, and this preselects samples (Fricker & Schonlau, 2002; Seymour, 2001; cf. also Barton & Lee, 2013 on the use of computer-mediated communication in linguistic research more generally). This is undeniably true. However, such an argument against online methods fails to take into account that traditional ethnographic and other offline research designs can be similarly limited in that only groups, individuals, and contexts to which researchers are actually able to gain access can be studied ethnographically. Thus the more general challenge of gaining access to participants applies to a range of scientific inquiries, online and offline alike.

The obvious *practical* advantages of using online research methodologies (e.g. low cost, ease of acquiring a large number of participants, wide geographical reach, etc.) are by now widely known. But these are not the only benefits of such approaches.
Non-face-to-face methods have proven to be effective in various disciplines seeking to investigate 'sensitive topics': 'From behind their screen identities, respondents are more apt to talk freely about issues that could create inhibitions in a traditional face-to-face group, particularly when discussing sensitive topics' (Soloman, 1996, p. 11; cf. also Bargh, McKenna, & Fitzsimons, 2002). In fact, Griffiths (2010, p. 9) argues that the Internet ‘has a disinhibiting effect on users and reduces social desirability... [which] may lead to increased levels of honesty and therefore higher validity in the case of self-report’. He goes on to state that ‘online communication can lead to more emotional discourse and higher levels of personal disclosure than face-to-face settings’ (p. 9; cf. also Joinson, 2001, 2005; Matheson & Zanna, 1988). Miller and Slater (2000, p. 183) similarly assert that data collected online can actually demonstrate more ‘intimacy’, particularly with regard to qualitative responses. This is indeed shown to be the case, for example, in Langer and Beckman’s (2005) study of individuals interested in undergoing cosmetic surgery, very much a ‘sensitive topic’, both macro-socially as well as personally.

Opinions about language can, without a doubt, be regarded as ‘sensitive’, particularly if some level of introspection is being elicited from respondents. There are also interpersonal, interactional, social (e.g. gender-based, age-based, class-based, etc.), and in-group vs. out-group concerns that may come into play in a ‘live’ participant-observation or other face-to-face study design (cf. Seymour, 2001). If the interviewer is Argentine, can she realistically expect her Mexican interviewee to explain how much better he thinks Mexican speech is compared to that of Argentines? Or might he be more likely to downplay those feelings in the presence of his Argentine interlocutor? These points of worry are minimised if the researcher’s face/body/persona are removed from the data collection process; and that is precisely the opportunity Internet-based methodologies offer.

Survey design and options for analysis

The first part of the present survey included only identification/demographic questions (e.g. the respondent’s age, sex, place of birth, etc.). Respondents were required to submit this information before moving on.

The second part of the survey asked various open-ended questions designed to uncover respondents’ opinions about the existence of ‘good’ vs. ‘not-as-good’ Spanish(es) (Did they exist? Were there differences? If so, Which? Where?), as well as if the individual particularly liked/disliked any dialect(s), and if so, which and why. Respondents also expressed opinions about their own Spanish. All questions allowed respondents to write as much or as little as they wished in response to each question.

Finally, in the third part of the survey, seven different Spanish dialects were randomly ordered and presented via 30-second audio samples of naturalistic, female speech: Argentine, Colombian, Mexican, Mexican-American, Peninsular, Peruvian, and Salvadoran. With the particular website used for the present study, audio files can be directly embedded into the survey, thereby allowing respondents to play each audio track as they are ready. The objective of this part of the study was to simulate a spontaneous ‘moment of contact’ between the respondent and the sample speaker/dialect, without potentially confounding variables such as necessarily being in a situation of prolonged, day-to-day contact with the dialect, having a relationship with the speaker, seeing the speaker’s face/dress/skin colour/etc., and so on. In other words, the only input respondents were given on which to base their opinions was language itself.
After listening to each sample audio, respondents commented on both the dialect and the anonymous speaker in both quantitative rankings on an array of variables, as well as qualitatively via open-ended response questions. Although all that respondents had to go on was audio, they were free to (and indeed did) identify speakers based on what they presumed to be their country of origin, education level, race, and so on, in the free-response portions. Submissions for each audio track were final, meaning that respondents could not go back and change responses for the first speaker upon hearing the second, for example.

Using a snowball sampling method — respondents being encouraged to pass the survey on to other friends — well over a thousand responses from throughout Latin America, Spain, and the United States were compiled in only a few short weeks. It should be noted, though, that more restricted sampling methods are also readily available (e.g. requiring a code to take the survey) according to the needs of the researcher. The objective of the present inquiry was not a perfectly random sample taken from all 400+ million speakers of Spanish, but rather to acquire as much information as possible from those individuals to whom the researcher could gain access, as is often the case in ethnographic work as well. The content of these responses could then be analysed for common threads and trends which pervaded across geography-, class-, gender-, race-, etc.-based lines.

As responses to online surveys come in, they are automatically stored securely by the website; they can then be downloaded in a variety of ways. A researcher might elect to view the entire survey for each respondent (particularly useful in the beginning stages of analysis, to get a sense of the sample), or all of the informants’ responses to Question 7, for instance (perhaps in searching for a clear and illustrative response to include in the analysis write-up). Furthermore, combinations of responses are also possible: as opposed to sorting through hundreds of responses by hand, one could ask the system to provide only the responses to Questions 7 and 13 from US males between the ages of 22 and 34, for example. Finally, for quantitative (i.e. non-free-response) questions, statistical analyses are readily computed via the website, for instance: What percentage of US females outside of the United States believed that Speaker 3 had less than an elementary school education? SurveyGizmo in particular also allows for data to be exported to statistical packages such as SPSS for further (and more elaborate, e.g. regression) quantitative analysis as well.

A sample response

Given the open-ended structure of the survey, let us return now to our original interest – opinions as to the use of tú vs. vos in interaction – to see if/how this morphological distinction is spontaneously evoked by respondents. In the following brief example, taken from a Peruvian respondent’s part two of the survey, observe how the same lack of understanding of dialectal variation from Excerpt (1) is again portrayed.

(2) Peruvian on tū vs. vos

Bueno nosotros hablamos Castellano, en realidad...cuando la conquista de los españoles a nuestros países sudamericanos. En el Peru hablamos un castellano correcto. Hay otros países que distorsionan el idioma, como los argentinos que acentuan la ultima silaba todo el tiempo. Ejemplo: vení para acá, en vez de decir: ven para aca...Desafortunadamente...mexicanos, salvadoreños, etc. hablan un español pésimo. Asesinan el idioma castellano.
Well we speak Castilian really...when the conquest by the Spanish of our South American countries. In Peru we speak correct Castilian. There are other countries that distort the language, like the Argentines who accent the last syllable all the time. Example: veni para acá, instead of saying: ven para acá...Unfortunately...Mexicans, Salvadorans, etc. speak an awful Spanish. They murder the Castilian language.

With regard to tú vs. vos, here we have reference to Argentines ‘accenting the last syllable all the time’ with the example of ‘vení’ instead of ‘ven’. Indeed, ‘vení’ is the vos imperative conjugation of the verb venir ‘to come’, while ‘ven’ is the tú variant. But note that this respondent’s explanation of dialectal differences does not mention these as morphological distinctions, instead referring only to differences in pronunciation. This suggests a similar lack of understanding of a certain dialectal feature as that displayed by Mario in Excerpt (1). Furthermore, we see an explicit disparagement of this way of speaking, in addition to a rationalisation of that opinion.

These morphological distinctions are implicated as this respondent draws numerous other ideological lines in the sand in justifying her point of view. First, there is a distinction made between ‘español’, used in the question, and ‘castellano’, used in the response (cf. Mar-Molinero, 2000, pp. 33–36 for discussion of these naming practices). This effectively begins an invocation of Spain as the purveyor of ‘correct Castilian’. The legitimacy of the claim that Peruvian Spanish is the true prestige variety is then explained with regard to the connection between Peru and Spain: the Conquest. And this respondent believes that the Peruvian standard least ‘distorts’ that particular variety from the fifteenth century which is offered up as the gold standard. Throughout this explanation there is an us-vs.-them dynamic as well: ‘In Peru we speak correct Castilian’, compared to ‘Mexicans, Salvadorans, etc. [who] speak an awful Spanish’. (Observe, in particular, the use of ‘etc.’.) Finally, we see an anthropomorphisation of the Spanish language into an entity which can be ‘murdered’ by speakers who do not use it correctly. This parallels numerous other respondents who described Spain as ‘giving birth’ to the language and thus as possessing primary access to the ‘correct’ variety thereof.

While in-depth analysis of these specific ideologies is beyond the scope of the present methodological discussion, these same themes (i.e. tú vs. vos, emphasis on Spain, linguistic purism, etc.) are repeated across a wide variety of respondents (region, gender, class, etc.). The particular utility of the survey method in this respect is that it not only provides us with the opinions themselves, but also individuals’ justification of those opinions—that is, how they rationalise their understandings. These underlying justifications often do not reach the interactional surface in observations of everyday talk due to their being embedded within the other communicative goals of the ongoing interaction; and the same can be said about face-to-face interviewing in that various social contingencies of interaction can be at play between interviewer and interviewee, which can therefore deter interviewees from revealing their true, uncensored thoughts (cf. Bargh, McKenna, & Fitzsimons, 2002; Matheson & Zanna, 1988).

Finally, and perhaps most crucially given the aims of the present inquiry, the survey allows us to see that the very same pronominal and morphological distinctions in which we were originally interested are actively being spontaneously evoked beyond the confines of the particular, site-specific, day-to-day dialect contact situation of southern California where we initially observed them. It thus becomes apparent that any theoretical explication of the ideologies surrounding pronominal reference forms in Spanish must therefore be situated within this larger ideological framework that exists across community-specific boundaries.
**Sparking new interests**

An added advantage of open-ended, free-response questions in a survey of this sort is the identification of previously unanticipated avenues for research. One example of this arose in US respondents’ opinions about their own Spanish. These individuals quite consistently reported an association between competence in written orthography and what they referred to as ‘good’, ‘proper’, ‘correct’, or ‘standard’ speech. That is, in offering opinions about their own speaking abilities, they would immediately jump to their writing abilities, very often negatively assessing the former on the basis of the latter. A few brief examples are included in (3) and (4) below.

(3) Speaking and accent marks

Yo pienso que lo hablo a mi mejo abilidad. Aunque tengo problemas averiguando donde poner los acentos.

*I think I speak it to the bes(t) of my ability. Although I have problems figuring out where to put accent marks.*

(4) Formal words and accent marks

Necesito estudiar para aprender mas palabras formales. Tambien cuando lo escribo me fallan los acentos.

*I need to study to learn more formal words. Also when I write it, I get the accent marks wrong.*

The number of US respondents who mentioned either problems with, or mastery of, accent marks was quite staggering. The ability to correctly place accents in written language thus appears to hold some symbolic correlation with linguistic legitimacy in that, without it, access to any form of ‘good’ Spanish is limited. The question then becomes: Once this particular trend has revealed itself through survey means, where do we go from here?

**Phase three: back to the field**

An overarching trend revealed through survey means need not constitute a stopping point for the researcher, but rather a point of departure. The information attained through this particular methodology is acutely suitable for revealing the end results (i.e. the current opinions/beliefs themselves) without always illuminating the various paths that individuals have taken to arrive at those points of view. In other words, such a survey has unveiled some of the ‘What’s but not necessarily the ‘How’s. While the overarching macro-tendencies — which revealed themselves across this quite diverse pool of respondents, each with his/her own biographical experiences — cannot be ignored, neither can the causal mechanisms that gave rise to those macro-tendencies.

Now that we have a better understanding of some of the overarching correlations that different groups are making, the use of more traditional, ethnographic methods — such as face-to-face interviews — may be able to shed some light on the factors contributing to the state of affairs revealed through the survey. That is, given that we know that the conquest, notions of linguistic purism, written accents, etc. are routinely evoked by speakers in the rationalisation of their beliefs about language, a method such as biographical ethnography (cf., e.g. Krokskity, 2009) might uncover how different individuals come to acquire these beliefs about the conquest, about accent marks, and so on, thereby...
providing a window into the ways in which members of a community go about constructing these belief systems.

As an example of this, take the correlation between orthographic competence and language confidence. Direct questioning regarding accent marks in face-to-face interviews has opened the door to a host of issues which might not have come to the surface without explicit inquiry — and use of a survey such as the one employed here served to equip the interviewer with these otherwise potentially missed avenues of questioning. In-depth interviews have revealed recurrent reports of poor quality instruction in schools, parent/sibling/family member(s) or friend(s) belittling interviewees (either at home or during visits to Spanish-speaking countries), as well as personal frustrations trying to read. The following bilingual story, for instance, was touched off near the end of an interview by the interviewer asking whether or not accent marks held any significance for the interviewee, who had previously made no mention of them specifically:

(5) Inquiry about accents

Q: Do things like acentos affect how you view your own Spanish at all?

A: Oh my God, YES! ¡La ÚNICA clase que tomé en español fue un desastre! [The ONLY class that I took in Spanish was a disaster!] It was ‘Spanish for Spanish Speakers’ and it was terrible. And it was all cuz of freaking accents, man! The teacher was like a Nazi with ‘em, I swear. Una vez, le entregué un papel y me dijo [One time, I turned in a paper to him and he said to me]: “The accents are all wrong. As a Spanish speaker, I can’t read this.” So I thought, like, Oh, I guess I’m not a Spanish speaker. But after a year with him, like, I wasn’t even interested anymore, you know?

In example (5), we see the central role that the US educational system can play in heritage speakers’ construction of opinions about their own speech. Returning to the field to explicitly target the ‘What’s that came to the surface through survey methods gains us more profound access to the personal biographical narratives that individuals are using to form their beliefs about language (i.e. the ‘How’s behind the ‘What’s). Approaching the same issue from a variety of perspectives and with a mix of methodological tools therefore better positions us to critically unpack complex, overarching associations at both the individual- and more macro-levels.

Concluding remarks

In concluding her overview of online and offline qualitative research methodologies, Seymour (2001, p. 165) asserts that researchers in a range of disciplines ‘must embrace the techniques and expansive possibilities presented by the information age’. Similarly, after a detailed overview of the advantages and disadvantages of Web methods, Fricker and Schonlau (2002, p. 365) state that ‘Internet-based surveys are here to stay. The challenge for researchers is to learn to use the new medium to their best advantage’. The present study has attempted to do just that by illustrating how Internet methods can be incorporated into language ideology research. Taking as a concrete example the investigation of Spanish-speaker opinions about the varieties of Spanish spoken in the world, we demonstrated how individual-level field observations can motivate more general, less geographically restricted questions. Exploring these questions through a Web survey is not only cost-effective, wide-reaching, and fast-recruiting, but is also capable of highlighting pervasive, general trends that operate beyond the level of a single field site. Particularly relevant to research on language and its social contexts, the Internet’s multimedia capabilities also allow researchers to selectively de-contextualise and isolate (or even manipulate,
depending on the objectives of the specific study) speech from other components of identity (e.g. physical appearance, gesture, facial expression, etc.).

The broad-spectrum tendencies brought to the surface through such surveys can then both contextualise site-specific observations (as we saw in the case of tú/vos morphology), as well as unveil new avenues for research (as in the case of the association between accent marks and linguistic self-esteem). By inspiring new research questions, Internet methods can essentially act as a springboard to ‘test the waters’ and prepare the researcher for entry into the field, revealing previously unconsidered themes which can then be pursued more directly and individually through subsequent on-the-ground ethnographic methods. Such a combination of methods allows the researcher to get at the core of the formation, production, and re-production of language ideologies while not losing sight of the universality and generalisability of the findings.

The objective, I argue, need not be to replace one method with the other, or declare online or offline research inherently superior to its presumed ‘competitor’. On the contrary, such a decision about methodology should not be a case of ‘either-or’. Rather, just as combining multiple qualitative methods — or qualitative and quantitative methods — invariably yields a richer understanding of a given site or phenomenon, so too can a combination of online and offline data-gathering techniques lead to more profound conclusions in research on language and its complex role in society.

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Notes

1. Transcript conventions follow those of conversation analysis, as described in Jefferson (2004).
2. Survey responses are reproduced here exactly as they were submitted by the respondent (i.e. with any typographical errors), with the exception of bolding for highlighting purposes.

Notes on contributors

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