

∞ MSU Linguistics Colloquium ∞

“Three Approaches to Age & Aging in Sociolinguistics”

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Abstract

Within sociolinguistics, age may be researched in multiple ways. In Cameron (2007) I proposed that in current sociolinguistic practice one may find three fundamental types of social facts or constructs. These are:

- an act or action of language use that requires, minimally, two interacting people for its performance or one person acting as two.
- language use that is connected to the identity or identities, be they achieved or attributed, of a speaker or speakers.
- language use that is involved in the expression of ideology.

In other words, age or aging may be found in the acts or actions of language use that require two people for their performance or one person acting as both speaker and addressee. Age and aging may be part of speakers' identities. And, age or aging may be associated with ideologies which we may infer from what is said or written. Age or aging are also subject to three general analytic approaches in sociolinguistics. Each approach presupposes a positioning of language and age or aging. I distinguish them here for purposes of exposition. However, researchers may draw on more than one approach at a time. The three approaches are:

- Indexicality Approach: One finds the presence of age or aging as indexed by forms, codes, or acts.
- Discursive Construction Approach: One finds age or aging in the explicit and inferrable details of collaborative, sequential, discursive construction.
- Constraint Approach: One finds age or aging as extra-linguistic constraint or condition on use.

I will discuss each approach basing my talk primarily on data from Spanish. However, as my primary focus is on the role of age or aging in Variationist Sociolinguistics, which falls primarily within the Constraint Approach, I will explore this approach in greater detail. Indeed, sociolinguistic research into Spanish and age has made its greatest contributions within the variationist framework. Both the Indexical Approach and the Discursive Construction Approach, as applied to age and aging in hispanic sociolinguistics, are avenues of opportunity waiting to be explored.

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4:30 PM

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