



## EXPLORING TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF DIALECTAL VARIATION IN THE SPANISH FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY IN GERMANY

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### Abstract:

This study examines opinions and teaching practices on language varieties from the perspective of Spanish teachers who teach at secondary schools in Germany and thus addresses a desideratum of the discourse on foreign language didactics. The question in focus is what teachers think about varieties, what their attitudes are towards them and when, how often, why and how they address them in Spanish lessons. The basis of the analysis is data collected through an online questionnaire, containing both quantitative and qualitative elements and is subjected to a statistical and qualitative content-analytical evaluation. Finally, core aspects are summarized and possibilities for future research are identified.

**Keywords:** language varieties; beliefs; practices; Spanish teachers; secondary school; Germany

### 1. Introduction, state of research and relevance of the study

*“If foreign language teaching is to live up to the world language status of Spanish, this requires a thematization of the pluricentric and plurireal shape of the target language as well as the concrete inclusion of several diatopic varieties in the classroom” (Kruse, 2013, p. 12).*

But if one looks at the development of *variational linguistics* from the perspective of foreign language research and pedagogy in Germany, one can see the dominance of a single standard variety, which was defined as a "teaching and learning standard" in foreign language teaching and to which all participants (curricula and textbooks, teachers and learners) had to align themselves. There is a relatively broad consensus on the need and benefit of such a “teaching and learning standard”, which has an orientation

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function, especially in the language acquisition phase, and represents a learning facilitation for the pupils. What has been and continues to be criticized is the limitations of the approach, because the standard language does not reflect the complex linguistic reality of the target languages to which the learners are to be introduced (Leitzke-Ungerer & Polzin-Haumann, 2017).

There are two main points of criticism here: the lack of inclusion of non-standard varieties such as colloquial or youth language, and the determination of foreign language teaching in German-speaking countries on European standard varieties, more specifically Castilian Spanish. Other standard varieties have received little or no attention.

More specific impulses for a variety-related opening came from the 1980s and 1990s onwards from the didactics of intercultural learning, from language awareness research and from textbook criticism (Leitzke-Ungerer & Polzin-Haumann, 2017).

The topic of varieties in foreign language teaching began to receive more research attention at the turn of the millennium (2000). In the context of pluricentricity research, there is a call for an increased perception of these languages as pluricentric and thus a move away from traditional one-standard teaching. However, the discourse on competence orientation, which also emerged around this time, is only taken into consideration with a certain time lag, so that the question of which competences learners should acquire in relation to which types of varieties is only discussed from around 2010 onwards (Leitzke-Ungerer & Polzin-Haumann, 2017).

Beyond the formulation of learners' competences in the field of Spanish varieties, there are now insights into how the topic of varieties can also contribute to the promotion of other competences of learners, especially the (meta)linguistic knowledge of the diatopic diversity of the target language, inter- and transcultural competences and strategic/methodological competences (Kruse, 2013).

In the field of the didactics of Spanish in Germany the anthology by Leitzke-Ungerer & Polzin-Haumann (2017) is a comprehensive work that illustrates the potential of an interdisciplinary dialogue between foreign language didactics and linguistics, generates new insights and outlines perspectives for future research. At the same time, numerous suggestions are given for teaching practice at school and university. Examples of how teachers can integrate diatopic varieties in the classroom can be found in e.g., Jodl (2013).

Nevertheless, findings on teachers' beliefs and practices regarding varieties of Spanish in the German foreign language classroom are limited. Apart from the study by Reissner (2017) with student teachers of Spanish at a university in Saarland, which investigates their attitudes towards varieties, no other study can be found in the German research context.

From an international perspective, there are studies on teachers' beliefs and practices regarding Spanish varieties in particular, which are mainly to be found at the university level, for example, Moneris Oliveras (2015) and Bárkányi & Fuertes Gutiérrez (2019).

In their article, Bárkányi & Fuertes Gutiérrez (2019) highlight the need to conduct further research in the field of Spanish varieties and to extend this to other educational contexts: *“It would be useful for subsequent studies to address the same questions among teachers at other educational levels and in other institutional settings.”*

In addition, the authors emphasize the need for further research in the area of practices: *“Regarding teaching practices and treat language variety in the classroom is scarce”* (Bárkányi & Fuertes Gutiérrez, 2019, 203).

Moneris Oliveras (2015), in particular, pleads for a stronger investigation of the pedagogical aspects of Spanish teaching that is oriented towards linguistic variation. This is also justified by the lived reality of Spanish as a pluricentric language, as well as by the rapid growth of Spanish throughout the world. Therefore, there would be a need for linguistic features that are representative of different varieties in order for learners to acquire a comprehensive global view of the language (Bárkányi & Fuertes Gutiérrez, 2019).

The preceding outline of the development of language varieties in the classroom from the perspective of foreign language didactics in the German-speaking world, as well as existing findings and formulated desiderata, provide the research motivation for the present study with the following main research questions:

- What training are ELE teachers given about dialectal variation of Spanish?
- What are teachers' beliefs towards varieties and their implementation in the classroom?
- What are the aims and motivations of teachers to address varieties of Spanish in the classroom?
- When, how often and how are varieties implemented in the classroom? (methods, materials etc.)

The primary goal of the current study is thus not only to investigate the teachers' beliefs, but also to focus on the practices in the classroom itself based on their self-reports.

## **2. Spanish varieties as an object of investigation in teacher cognition research in national and international contexts**

Even though the results of subsequent studies were generated in different countries and educational contexts, they provide valuable insights into beliefs and practices regarding dialectal variation in the Spanish as a Foreign Language Classroom.

Beaven (1999) interviewed 38 teachers of Spanish at a British distance learning university who attend specific courses on teaching varieties of Spanish in the classroom. Almost all participants agree to teach Spanish as a world language and in each case the variety in which they feel most confident. Most of the respondents mention Castilian Spanish either for biographical or material reasons, e.g. that many of the teaching/learning materials are produced in Spain. In addition, 40% of respondents agree that to avoid confusing learners when there are differences between the Castilian and Hispanic varieties, the Castilian variety is preferred. To complement this, reference

should be made to a study carried out later by Beaven & Garrido (2000), which shows that only 20% of the students surveyed stated that they felt confused when using different varieties (Monerris Oliveras, 2015). Furthermore, it is interesting to note that most of the teachers (81.5%) interviewed by Beaven (1999) stated that they did not care which variety the learners spoke as long as it was the same.

Andión Herrero (2009) surveyed 50 (prospective) native Spanish L2/FL teachers of two online courses at a Spanish distance learning university. A few years later, Andión Herrero & Gil Burman (2013) extended their study by including 27 non-native and two native (prospective) Spanish teachers enrolled in a face-to-face professional development course in Brazil. The first interesting finding from these surveys concerns the way teachers self-identified. Most of the 79 participants (including both native and some non-native speakers) defined themselves as speakers of the Castilian variety (Monerris Oliveras, 2015). Of the native teachers who were teaching at the time of the study, the majority stated that the Castilian variety was their linguistic model, even if in some cases it was not the one they identified with.

Andión Herrero & Gil Burman (2013) concluded that the choice of a particular linguistic model was determined by the teacher's own variety, the variety represented in the teaching materials and the variety from the teaching context. The prestige of the linguistic model was also identified as an important factor (Monerris Oliveras, 2015).

Monerris Oliveras (2015) investigates dialectal variation in Canadian university Spanish FL classes and examines teacher cognition with respect to the inclusion of dialectal variation in Spanish foreign language instruction practices. All respondents consider the inclusion of linguistic varieties in the teaching of Spanish as central, even if they are not the main focus of the lessons. Furthermore, the interviewees state that their knowledge of sociolinguistic aspects and in particular linguistic varieties of Spanish is limited, which leads Monerris Oliveras (2015) to conclude that teachers need to be specifically guided to address linguistic varieties in foreign language teaching, e.g. through further education and training measures.

Reissner (2017) investigates the attitudes of student teachers towards the subject of Spanish and its varieties as well as their implementation in the classroom. Of the 52 student teachers, most respondents stated that they primarily had experience with European Spanish during their studies. 60% of the respondents had studied one semester in Spain, compared to only 3.9% in a Hispanic American country. This means that experience with linguistic varieties of Spanish was primarily gained in Spain, most frequently with Andalusian. The majority of respondents stated that they considered addressing of varieties of Spanish important in their future teaching (cf. *ibid.*, 249). When asked specifically about the importance of diatopic varieties in the classroom, only 40% of the respondents gave them a high priority.

Costa Venâncio da Silva & Andión Herrero (2019) were able to create a sociolinguistic profile of the teachers regarding their training, prejudices, beliefs and attitudes regarding variation and varieties of the Spanish language based on the questionnaire results of 25 teachers from the states of Rio Grande do Norte and Roraima

(Brasil). For all teachers surveyed, variety-related aspects in Spanish teaching are an important issue and they consider it a key competence on the learners' side. In addition, the authors identify training deficits in particular and point out the need for cooperation with all stakeholders in the Spanish as a foreign language sector.

Bárkányi & Fuertes Gutiérrez (2019) investigate beliefs and teaching practices on the integration of linguistic varieties in the second/foreign language teaching of Spanish in the UK. The results show that the teachers interviewed are aware of the diversity of linguistic varieties and are able to identify their own as well as other varieties. In analogy to the findings of Moneris Oliveras (2015), the results also show that the teachers would like to see more training on ways of embedding linguistic varieties in Spanish lessons, because in order to be able to perceive and distinguish the similarities and differences between different varieties, extensive knowledge is necessary. The lack of this knowledge leads to uncertainty and discomfort among the respondents, so that they mainly inform their learners about the existence of different varieties. In addition, the respondents state that they must comply with existing requirements, such as those imposed by the institution, and are also confronted with prejudices, including those of the learners, which can lead them to distance themselves from their linguistic variety in class.

Nevertheless, almost all teachers surveyed have a positive attitude towards the teaching and learning of linguistic varieties of Spanish and generally assume a pluricentric view of the Spanish language norm. Furthermore, in view of the rapid growth of Spanish throughout the world, the respondents see advantages for learners when linguistic varieties are addressed in class (Moneris Oliveras, 2015).

### 3. Theoretical framework

#### A. Dialectal variation in the Spanish foreign language classroom

Since the focus of this article is not on the description of all variety-specific aspects, the terminological approach is made from a foreign language didactic perspective.

Varieties can be defined as “*different, coherent expressions of a language resulting from its anchoring in space, society and specific communication situations*” (Becker, 2013, p. 274). Furthermore, varieties can be divided into different dimensions:

- diatopic (variation in space)
- diastratic (group-related variation, use of different sociolects)
- diaphasic (language style and register) (Becker, 2013, p. 275).

The “*standard variety*” can be understood as one form of variety, characterized by the following features:

*“Variety that is politically legitimized by a specific historical development of the language area, has a wide communicative range and therefore enjoys high prestige, is institutionally supported by language academies and comparable bodies, is linguistically codified in rules for correct oral and written use” (Leitzke-Ungerer, 2017, p. 43).*

The non-European Spanish varieties are often grouped together as Atlantic or American Spanish, which is contrasted with European Spanish. In addition to American Spanish, the term Atlantic Spanish also includes the varieties of the Canary Islands and Andalusia, as these regions have numerous linguistic similarities (Schäfer-Prieß & Schöntag 2012). The American major standard area, in turn, can be divided into several major zone standards, including La Plata Spanish, which has moved furthest away from Castilian Spanish (Leitzke-Ungerer, 2017).

Most researchers in the field of ELE didactics have argued that regional variation must be integrated into ELE classes from the beginning (e.g., Leitzke-Ungerer, 2017; Moreno Fernández, 2010; Reimann, 2017). In the context of this, however, the possibilities and problems of addressing varieties in the classroom are also discussed.

Leitzke-Ungerer (2017) sees the main problem in the coexistence of different varieties in view of the wealth of forms of the variety-sensitive phenomena in the fact that it can unsettle learners, provoke mistakes, and thus endanger the acquisition of the linguistic basics. This applies specifically to the initial phase (1st year of learning), in which two particularly critical phenomena, pronunciation and forms of address, are taught. In the remaining language acquisition phases, on the other hand, the pluricentricity of Spanish should certainly be considered, especially with regard to the receptive competence in several standard varieties.

This is the reason why Leitzke-Ungerer (2017) considers it sufficient to address the two standard varieties, Castilian Spanish and American Spanish.

The main differences between the two standard varieties can be found in the area of linguistic means (pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar) (Leitzke-Ungerer, 2017).

From a foreign language didactic perspective, Leitzke-Ungerer (2017) argues for the thematization of the following variety-related topics in the first three years of learning:

- pronunciation: seseo/ceceo vs. seseo, yeísmo,
- vocabulary: special topic areas,
- grammar: forms of address (*vosotros/ustedes*), *voseo*, past tenses.

Reimann (2017) also makes a specific suggestion as to which varieties should be addressed in Spanish lessons, among which he mentions Andalusian Spanish, Mexican Spanish, Argentinian Spanish, and Spanish in the US. He justifies this as follows (pp. 79-83):

**Table 1:**

Andalusian Spanish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• exemplary access to dialects of the south (geographical proximity of pupils)</li> <li>• common traits with many varieties of Latin America</li> <li>• pronunciation (<i>seseo</i>, aspiration of syllable-final <i>S</i>, <i>yeísmo</i>)</li> <li>• morphosyntax (loss of <i>d</i> in the ending <i>-ado</i> and of final consonants)</li> <li>• <i>tratamiento unificado</i> with <i>ustedes</i></li> </ul>
Mexican Spanish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• access to other Hispanic American varieties (lexical similarities to peninsular standard)</li> <li>• pronunciation (weakening of unaccented vowels, diphthongization of <i>E</i> and <i>O</i> before accented vowel, intonation progression (<i>entonación circunfleja</i>))</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• morphosyntaxis (formation of gerundive phrases with <i>ir</i>, use of the encliticon <i>le</i> with verbs in the imperative, <i>tuteo</i>, diminutiva <i>-ito</i>)</li> <li>• lexis (archaisms, anglicisms)</li> <li>• <i>español neutro</i> contains traits of Mexican Spanish</li> <li>• highest population</li> <li>• most important Hispanic American trading partner of Germany</li> </ul>
Argentinean Spanish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• South American counterpoint to Mexican Spanish</li> <li>• numerous idiosyncrasies (Italian influence)</li> <li>• avoid comprehension difficulties</li> <li>• pronunciation: <i>yeísmo</i>, <i>zeísmo</i>, <i>feísmo</i>, omission of same-final implosive /s/, omission of d in the ending <i>-ado</i>, r at the end of words)</li> <li>• prosodic features (Italian influence), stretching of accented vowels</li> <li>• morphosyntaxis (<i>voseo</i>, diminutiva <i>-ito</i>)</li> <li>• lexemes of indigenous languages</li> <li>• cultural, historical and geographical reasons</li> </ul>
Spanish in the US	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• language contact between English and Spanish (code switching, code mixing and translanguaging)</li> <li>• addition of English discourse markers, loan words, lexical borrowings, meaning borrowings, loan formations, lexical-syntactic borrowings</li> <li>• pedagogical and didactical recommendation (students' individual multilingualism)</li> <li>• access to the topic of Hispanic-American migration to the USA</li> </ul>

The preceding explanations and recommendations tie in with the call for more attention to be paid to varieties in the classroom, providing concrete guidance for teachers and thus preventing frustration on the part of learners in their encounters with native speakers:

*“Variation is one of the reasons why foreign language (FL) students often experience considerable frustration in their first encounter with native speakers of the target language. [...] Thus, more attention needs to be paid to language use in real life situations, including the use of different varieties. Providing knowledge about variation to our students would be one way to help them reach a more complete understanding of the target language”* (Monerri Oliveras, 2015, p. 1).

### **B. Teachers’ beliefs and practices**

Teacher cognition research, which aims to understand what teachers think, know, and believe, has become increasingly relevant in the last 40 years. Numerous studies show that beliefs, attitudes, professional and subject-related values represent a kind of filter effect and have a formative impact on *“teachers’ thoughts, judgements and decisions”* (Zheng, 2015, p. 2). They thus emphasize the importance of subject- and profession-related beliefs, personal attitudes and experiences for teaching and learning processes and at the same time refer to their social conditioning and situational positioning (Zingerle 2019).

In general, the numerous definitions of beliefs identify four elements: These are the reference to ideas that individuals believe to be true, the intertwining of cognitive and

affective dimensions, the stability and outcome of social experiences, and their influence on practical teaching (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019).

The relationship between teachers' beliefs and classroom practices has become an important part of researching and understanding the cognitive basis of teachers' decisions (Cheung & Hennebry-Leung, 2020).

The assumption that beliefs influence both how teachers teach and what teachers do in the classroom has led to a significant increase in research on beliefs (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019). However, the authors point out that recent work on teacher beliefs should be viewed critically, especially when the previously expressed belief and the subsequently demonstrated teaching practice are compared without critically appreciating the many other factors that make discrepancies between the two very likely (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019).

Farrell & Ives (2015) point out that the influence of beliefs on actual classroom practice is discussed controversially. Some studies report a strong correlation (e.g., Brown et al., 2012), but the results of others show only a low correspondence between beliefs and practices (e.g., Liu, 2011). In particular, this may also be due to the fact that external factors, such as institutional settings or temporal factors, lead teachers to adopt approaches and methods that they would not actually endorse, and this can lead to tensions (Cheung & Hennebry-Leung, 2020; Phipps & Borg, 2009). Borg (2019) attributes a significant role to these contextual factors, as well as to emotional components, when it comes to the interplay between beliefs and practices.

The relationship between teachers' beliefs and their actions is thus dynamic and shaped by "*affordances, one's interpretations of one's own actions, emotions [...] self-concepts, [and] socio-historical contexts*" (Ferreira Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011, p. 286).

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Qualitative and quantitative research approach

A combination of a qualitative and quantitative approach was chosen for this study. Since there are hardly any findings on the subject of the study in the German-speaking research discourse, a qualitative approach with the greatest possible openness to contour the research field is considered appropriate. With a view to the results of international studies, reference can be made to some findings, so that the studies by Moneris Oliveras (2015) and B ark anyi & Fuertes Guti errez (2019) in particular served as a basis for the construction of the survey instrument.

The combination and integration of qualitative and quantitative elements are due to the nature of the questions at hand and their logic (Kuckartz, 2016), so that the object of investigation can be examined both from the breadth and from the depth. Both qualitative (e.g. reasons and motives) and quantitative aspects (e.g. frequencies) are relevant to the primary interest.



## 4.2 Online survey instrument

A questionnaire consisting of 24 questions was developed to explore the subject of the study. The thematic blocks correspond to the above-mentioned research questions, which refer to demographic-biographical information from a variety-related point of view, to beliefs and motivations and to practices.

Following the previous explanations, both closed and (semi-)open question formats were chosen. In addition, the wording of the items, the number of responses and the response options were based on common recommendations accepted in the research discourse (e.g., Daase, Hinrichs & Settinieri, 2014; Flick, 2009).

Regarding the terminology and content of the questions, the current results and discussion of the research discourse were taken into account and, for reasons of didactic-methodological relevance and with reference to the target group, only two varieties (Castilian/Hispanic American) were addressed (Leitzke-Ungerer, 2017).

The questionnaire was created with LimeSurvey, partly for data protection reasons, and sent to Spanish teachers throughout Germany by e-mail.

## 4.3 Data preparation and analysis

The data and answers of the research participants were transferred from LimeSurvey into SPSS and, in the case of qualitative formats, into MAXQDA. The data matrix and individual response data sets were checked for plausibility, e.g., response patterns (e.g., middle clicks for all items on a page) were set in relation to the processing time (Taddicken & Batinic, 2014).

All numerical data obtained are analyzed using descriptive statistics techniques. Here, frequencies, mean values and the standard deviation are calculated in particular. The qualitative data are analyzed using qualitative content analysis according to Kuckartz (2016). The formation of categories is understood as a mixed form of a priori categories and categories formed on the material. First, main categories were formed that structure the thematic blocks of the questionnaire. Subsequently, these are supplemented or refined by categories formed on the material (Kuckartz, 2016). This approach is particularly useful when there are few theoretical assumptions and findings of the subject of the study, which is the case for the areas that are surveyed through open-ended questions.

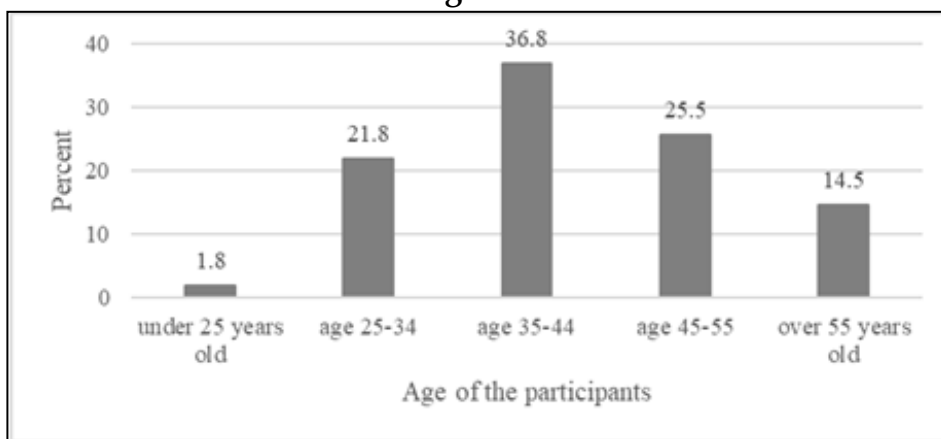
Definitions and paraphrases of the participants' statements were given for the individual categories. The category system was ordered and hierarchized accordingly:

- Objectives and rationale for addressing varieties in Spanish lessons,
- Reasons for the lack of thematization of varieties in Spanish lessons,
- Teaching occasion and teaching phase/sequence for the thematization/integration of varieties in Spanish lessons,
- Implementation of varieties in Spanish lessons (materials, media).

#### 4.4 Sample

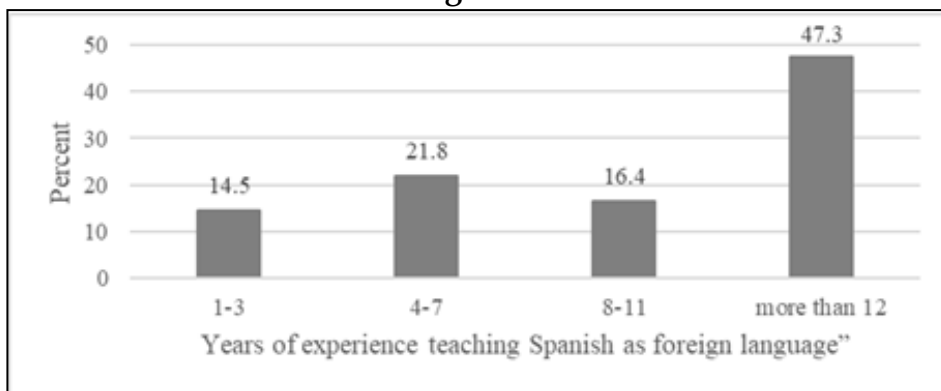
A total of 55 people (n=55) who teach Spanish at secondary schools in Germany participated in this questionnaire study. 87.3% of the respondents are female and 12.7% are male. Most participants are between 35-45 years old. The further age distribution can be seen in the following diagram:

**Figure 1:**



Almost half of all respondents have more than 12 years of teaching experience in Spanish as a foreign language (47.3%). The second largest part (21.8%) has been teaching Spanish at secondary schools for 4-7 years.

**Figure 2:**



Less than half of the respondents (43.6%) teach Spanish in secondary schools in the lower school (grades 5-7). Almost all teachers surveyed (94.5%) teach Spanish in the middle school (grades 8-10) and a high percentage of 85.5% teach Spanish in the upper school (grades 11-13).

In almost all cases (90.9%), Spanish is a foreign language for the respondents. 5.5% state that Spanish is their second language. In only 1.8% of the cases is Spanish their first language. Furthermore, 1.8% choose the other option without further explanation.

61.8% of the respondents assign the Spanish they use to the European linguistic norm, referring primarily to the Spanish used on the Iberian Peninsula. In 27.3% of the

cases, the participants relate the Spanish they use to both linguistic norms (American and European). With a significantly lower percentage of 9.1%, respondents say that the Spanish they use are the closest to the American language norm.

In addition, participants are asked to which language norm they would assign the Spanish they use in class. Here too, the highest percentage (50.9%) is for the European language norm, which is used as a guide for the language used in class. It is also interesting to note that almost half of the respondents (43.6%) state that they would relate the Spanish they use in class to both language norms (American and European). In 3.6% of the cases, the Spanish used in class is exclusively assigned to the American language norm.

If we now take a closer look at the relationship between the Spanish used independently of the school context and the Spanish used in the classroom itself, the following result emerges:

In 41.9% of the cases, European Spanish is used in both non-school contexts and in the classroom itself. For American Spanish, which is used in both contexts, this is true in 3.7% of cases. 23.6% of the respondents state that they use European Spanish in non-school contexts, but always refer to both language norms in the classroom itself.

In the case that the respondents assign the Spanish they use in non-school contexts to both language norms, 16.4% state that they also refer to both language norms in the lessons themselves and 12.7% to the European language norm.

Regarding the training and further education of the surveyed teachers in the area of Spanish language varieties, the evaluation shows that 89.1% have dealt with (partial) areas of Spanish varieties during their studies at university. In the context of the teacher training period, this percentage drops to only 29.1%. The percentage is again significantly lower in the context of continuing education and training. Here, only 16.4% state that they deal with (partial) areas of Spanish varieties.

Furthermore, 11% of the respondents state that they deal with Spanish varieties out of private interest. In one out of 55 cases (1.8%), (partial) aspects of Spanish varieties were dealt with in the context of a doctorate.

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Beliefs towards varieties and their implementation in the classroom

On average, the teachers surveyed are well acquainted with the varieties of Spanish ( $M=2.33$ ;  $SD=.824$ ). 9.1% of the respondents state that they have rather poor knowledge of variety-related aspects of the Spanish language.

The participants consider the discussion and integration of variety-related aspects in Spanish lessons to be rather important ( $M=2.11$ ;  $SD=.875$ ). 9.1% of the respondents are of the opinion that variety-related aspects in the classroom were not important or not at all important to them.

They give different reasons why they use or integrate which variety or several varieties in Spanish lessons. Based on the subcategories formed on the data material, the following reasons emerge (multiple categorization possible):

- Knowledge and (personal) experience (47.3%)
  - e.g., stay in the target country, family/friends
- Specification in textbooks (40.0%)
- Relevance and significance (32.7%)
  - e.g., thematic, geographical, cultural

Following the above explanations of the foreign language didactic research discourse on the beginning of the thematization of variety-related aspects in Spanish lessons, 41.8% of the respondents are in favor of a beginning from the first year of learning. The second largest proportion of participants (25.5%) considers a start from the third year of learning to be sensible.

On average, the teachers surveyed tend to agree that learners should know the differences between standard varieties ( $M=2.11$ ;  $SD=1.160$ ). They generally support the idea that learners should learn one standard variety, either oriented towards the European or American language norm ( $M=2.31$ ;  $SD=1.136$ ). This is also consistent with the fact that respondents tend to disagree that learners should only learn the standard European variety (Castilian) ( $M= 4.09$ ;  $SD=1.233$ ).

Regarding the item of confusion that the topic of several standard varieties could create for learners, the answers of the respondents are in the middle range. They neither agree nor disagree ( $M=3.21$ ;  $SD=1.610$ ). Nevertheless, they tend to disagree that several standard varieties should be used in class ( $M=3.72$ ;  $SD=1.231$ ).

However, the vast majority of respondents fully agree that teachers should know about the characteristics of the two standard varieties ( $M=1.58$ ;  $SD=.809$ ).

Regarding the areas of varieties, it can be seen that, on average, pronunciation is rather important to the participants in terms of integration in Spanish lessons ( $M=1.93$ ;  $SD=.985$ ). Variety-related aspects in the area of grammar are also rather important to the respondents on average ( $M=2.13$ ;  $SD=.914$ ). Diastratic and diaphasic aspects are neither important nor unimportant to the teachers surveyed ( $M=2.92 / 2.87$ ;  $SD=.996 / 1.070$ ).

On average, the participants tend to agree that all varieties enjoy the same prestige ( $M=2.26$ ;  $SD=1.291$ ).

In addition to the closed item on the reputation of varieties, the respondents are asked to specifically position themselves on a variety to which they attach the greatest reputation. However, this was not a compulsory question. The intention of the question is rather to find out the reasons that the respondents give for the prestige of a particular variety. For this purpose, they are asked to complete a given sentence ("The variety with the greatest reputation for me is..., because..."). 21.8% of the respondents did not give any information on this item. 32.7% of the participants state that they consider the different language varieties of Spanish to be equal. 41.8% state that Castilian Spanish is the standard variety, which enjoys a higher standing than the American language norm. Almost all respondents see this "supremacy" of Castilian, which is still partly valid, as

critical. The reasons given by the participants for why Castilian is considered more prestigious are mainly due to the relevance and familiarity of Castilian in the European language area (25.5%) and its correctness and comprehensibility for all Spanish speakers (9.1%).

### **B. Aims and motivations to address varieties in the classroom**

78.2% of the respondents consider the thematization of varieties in the classroom to be very or rather important. With the categories formed on the data material, the following aims and motivations for this can be determined (multiple categorizations possible):

- Teaching (applied) knowledge of pluricentricity and variation in the Spanish language (49.1%)
- Relevance of the varieties of the Spanish language (18.2%)
  - Relations to the surrounding world (stay abroad, media and streaming services (films, series, music))
  - Geographical expansion of Spanish-speaking countries and number of speakers
- Awareness and tolerance of an equal diversity of Spanish language varieties (16.4%)
- Linguistic reality and authenticity (12.7%)
- Promotion of motivation and curiosity (5.5%)

25.5% of the participants do not consider the topic of varieties to be important. The teachers surveyed give the following reasons for this (multiple categorizations possible):

- Additional burden for learners (12.7%)
- Possibility of acquiring the respective language variety in the target country (if required) (7.3%)
- Lack of value and benefit for learners (7.3%)
- Lack of time (1.8%)

### **C. Date, frequency, and way of implementing varieties in the classroom (materials/methods)**

In the context of a lesson (approx. 3-4 weeks), the respondents state on average that they occasionally address variety-related aspects of Spanish in class ( $M=3.23$ ;  $SD=.899$ ).

Textbooks play a central role when it comes to integrating varieties of Spanish into the classroom. Some of the teachers surveyed describe that they find it difficult to deviate from the textbook if it is consistently oriented towards a/one language norm. Often, this also leads to people deviating from the language variety they actually use for reasons of the specifications in textbooks:

- “Due to the widespread variety of European Spanish in textbooks (intermediate level), it is difficult to teach or model another variety in the intermediate level”.
- “I acquired my Spanish primarily in South America. [...] In my lessons, however, I orientate myself on the language norms of Iberian Spanish because of the

textbooks, i.e. I use *vosotros* instead of *ustedes*, use the *perfecto* more than is usual in LA [...]"

In addition, they also state that it is the teacher's responsibility to address different language varieties in the classroom, regardless of what the textbook itself specifies:

- "Even though many textbooks teach the European language standard, in my view it is also the teacher's task to at least address all language standards".

On average, the respondents feel rather well supported by the textbook with regard to the integration of variety-related aspects in Spanish lessons (M=2.73; SD=.972). The participants address various (sub)areas/aspects of language varieties: 80.0% include pronunciation-related aspects (e.g., *seseo*, *ceceo*, *yeísmo*) and variety-specific areas of grammar and vocabulary in their lessons (e.g., the use of *vosotros/ustedes*, *voseo*, *pretérito perfecto/indefinido*, lexical differences).

Regarding the inclusion of diastatic varieties in Spanish lessons (e.g., youth language), 32.7% still state that they take this into account.

In the area of diaphasic varieties (e.g., language registers, *funciolects*), the percentage of respondents who mention them in their Spanish lessons is 23.6%.

The teachers surveyed name different teaching occasions that motivate them to address different (partial) aspects of language varieties in Spanish lessons. By means of the following categories (multiple categorizations possible), the following teaching occasions for addressing varieties can be identified:

- Treatment of topics related to Latin and South America culture and geography (36.4%),
- Orientation towards the textbook and the (time) points suggested in it for dealing with aspects of language varieties (23.6%),
- Work with texts, reading, films or music (20.0%),
- Pronunciation training (20.0%),
- Lexicology/vocabulary acquisition (18.2%),
- Situational awareness (16.4%),
- Listening/audio visual comprehension training (9.1%),
- Grammar work (7,3%),
- Orthography training (1.8%).

In addition, some of the respondents also indicate in their answers in which teaching phases/sequences they mainly address variety-related aspects. These are mostly the introduction and development phases in class, e.g., at the beginning within the framework of pronunciation training or for the preliminary relief of content in listening and reading texts. Furthermore, the materials themselves are often the starting point for the thematization of variety-related aspects, e.g., if they are the subject of a text or film and are then processed further on the basis of this (development phase).

The teachers surveyed use different materials and media to integrate variety-related aspects into Spanish lessons. With the highest percentage, most teachers (85.5%) use the textbook for this purpose, which either already identifies places and time points where the integration of aspects related to varieties is appropriate or is seen as a starting

point to further deal with this aspect. Furthermore, 74.5% use music as well as films and series to integrate varieties into Spanish lessons. Slightly over half of the participants (54.5%) use other publisher-bound materials (e.g., *Ecos* or *Raabits*) for this purpose.

Digital materials and media also play an important role in addressing variety-related aspects. Almost half of all respondents (45.5%) use, for example, blogs, videos, and/or podcasts in Spanish lessons to introduce learners to Spanish language varieties.

With a lower percentage of 40.0%, the teachers surveyed use literary works and play to address variety-related aspects in Spanish lessons.

21.8% of the respondents use self-created material to integrate variety-related aspects in Spanish lessons.

The thematization of varieties in the lessons is realized by the respondents both deductively, e.g., through teacher lectures and explanations, and inductively, e.g., through the discovery of similarities and differences in materials by the learners themselves.

The majority of the teachers surveyed (65.5%) show variety-related aspects in places that occur in the textbook (e.g., words and grammatical content) in texts in the broadest sense (e.g., listening and reading text, film, music). This is incidental engagement with the topic, which does not take much time. In the rarest cases, variety-related aspects are discussed for a whole unit or over several lessons.

Some of the teachers surveyed (14.5%) actively involve the learners in the discussion of Spanish language varieties, for example, by having them discover parallels and differences in the material or by having them rewrite given sentences with a view to lexis and grammar.

## 6. Discussion and conclusion

The results of the study show that teachers consider the issue of pluricentricity of the Spanish language important and have a positive attitude toward the implementation of varieties in the Spanish as a Foreign Language Classroom.

Most of the teachers surveyed are in favor of an equal treatment of all varieties and are aware of the diversity of those, which is reflected in a majority pluricentric view. Nevertheless, they state that the equality of all varieties is considered to be only conditionally given in reality.

A one-language-standard orientation is criticized by teachers, yet teaching reality shows that mainly Castilian Spanish is used as the language norm at secondary schools in Germany.

The respondents cite various reasons for this, which are of a linguistic, didactic, situational and personal nature (e.g., reduction of the complexity of language, orientation framework for learners, lack of time, specifications through curricula and textbooks, personal preferences, interests).

The prestige of Castilian Spanish is also indicated by the geographical proximity of Spain to Germany, the higher relevance for European learners (e.g., relevance to the

world of life) as well as the institutional strengthening (e.g., *Real Academia Española*, Madrid) by the participants. These reasons, among others, also lead to Spanish teachers deviating from the actual variety they use in the classroom (also Bárkányi & Fuertes Gutiérrez, 2019).

For more than half of the respondents, however, neither the one nor the other variety has more prestige. All of the participants can assign the Spanish they use to one variety and also identify with it. The majority of the teachers surveyed stand by their opinion, regardless of what prejudices and traditions of society say about it.

This also goes hand in hand with the fact that most of the respondents mainly and consistently use one variety in Spanish lessons and refer to other varieties at appropriate points, e.g., through specifications in the textbook.

However, even though almost all of the participants consider the topic of Spanish varieties to be important, they tend to allocate less time to it in the lessons themselves, e.g., they do this on a superficial level through short explanations or references to pronunciation, lexis and grammar. Rarely do they spend one or more lessons on this.

Looking at the materials and media used, it becomes clear that although different types of materials are used, the textbook plays a central role when it comes to the concrete thematization of the topic in the lesson.

Most of the respondents state that they are well acquainted with the varieties of Spanish. However, the topic plays only a marginal role in the teacher training period as well as in the continuing education and training. The teachers state that, in view of the workload of teachers and learners as well as the institutional framework conditions, they can only devote little time to such topics.

Even if the pluricentricity of the Spanish language can only be taken into account to a limited extent for the reasons mentioned, the teachers justify the relevance of the topic with the lived linguistic reality and the growth of the importance of the Spanish language in various sectors.

Based on the results of the study, further lines of research can be identified that could be addressed in future studies. Following Bárkányi & Fuertes Gutiérrez (2019), a group comparison between first and foreign language teachers at secondary schools in Germany could be desirable in order to outline linguistic phenomena, their perception and handling from different perspectives. The degree to which varieties are addressed in Spanish classes, as well as the use of materials and media for this purpose, could gain valuable insights with regard to lesson procedures and processes through lesson observations, and the role of the textbook with regard to the discussion of varieties could also be investigated. In addition, a perspective triangulation could be relevant, which collects the learners' perspective, e.g., what learners think about varieties of Spanish, how they feel about the topic, what questions they ask themselves about the topic, but also how they react to the teacher's explanations and materials.

In order to explore the research area of Spanish varieties from a foreign language didactic perspective, further theoretical, as well as empirical research, is urgently needed. This article can be the starting point for this.



### Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

### About the Author

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