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Soraya Suárez Quintas (2015): “Mapping perceptions and attitudes about Galician dialects”
[Póster]. *International Conference on Language Variation in Europe 8 (ICLaVE)*. Leipzig
(Alemaña), 27-29 maio 2015.



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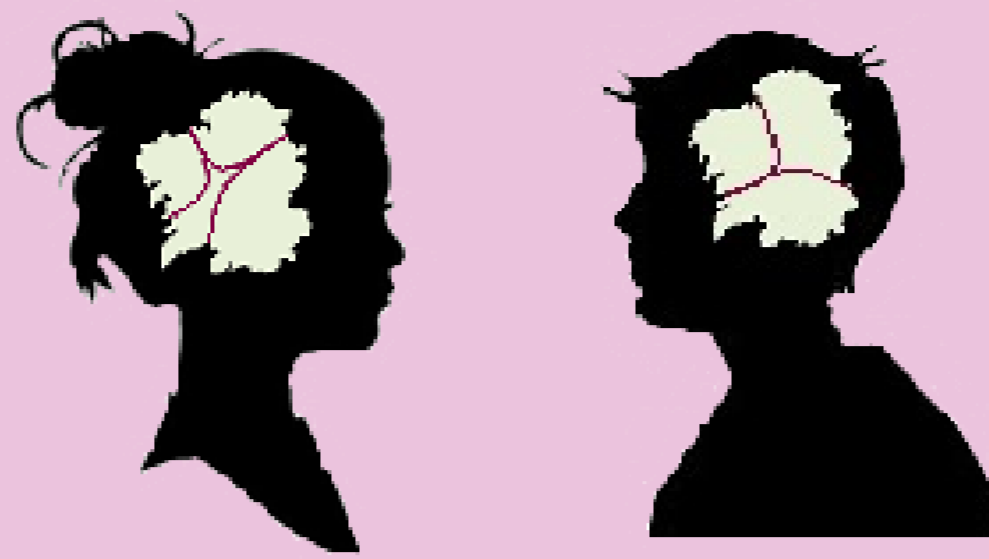
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MAPPING PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES ABOUT GALICIAN DIALECTS

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INTRODUCTION

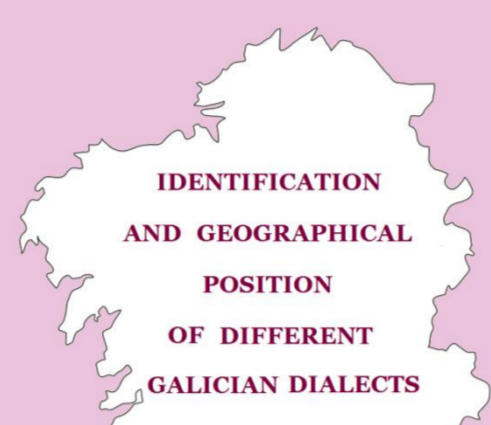
“To be ignorant of how the nonlinguistic community characterizes linguistic facts is to hamper our own usefulness in talking with that very community about the subjects we know most about.” (Preston, 1989: xi-xii)

Traditionally, dialectologists were almost exclusively concerned with identifying and analysing variables and variants which define the geographical varieties of a language, independently of speakers' intuitions about geolinguistic variation. Since Preston's studies in the 1980s, however, there has been a growth of interest in dialect studies examining speakers' perceptions, beliefs and attitudes regarding diatopic variation.

What is interesting about perceptual dialectology is its focus on non-linguists' insights about language (*folk linguistics*). Studies within this framework reverse the traditional roles, putting in the foreground speakers' knowledge about language variation in the spatial dimension. The present study aims to fill a lacuna in Galician language studies and contribute to the growing body of work relevant to perceptual dialectology and research on language attitudes.

OBJECTIVES

This study's chief objectives have to do with two related subjects: the identification and geographical position of different Galician dialects, and subjective judgments about the language's geographical varieties:

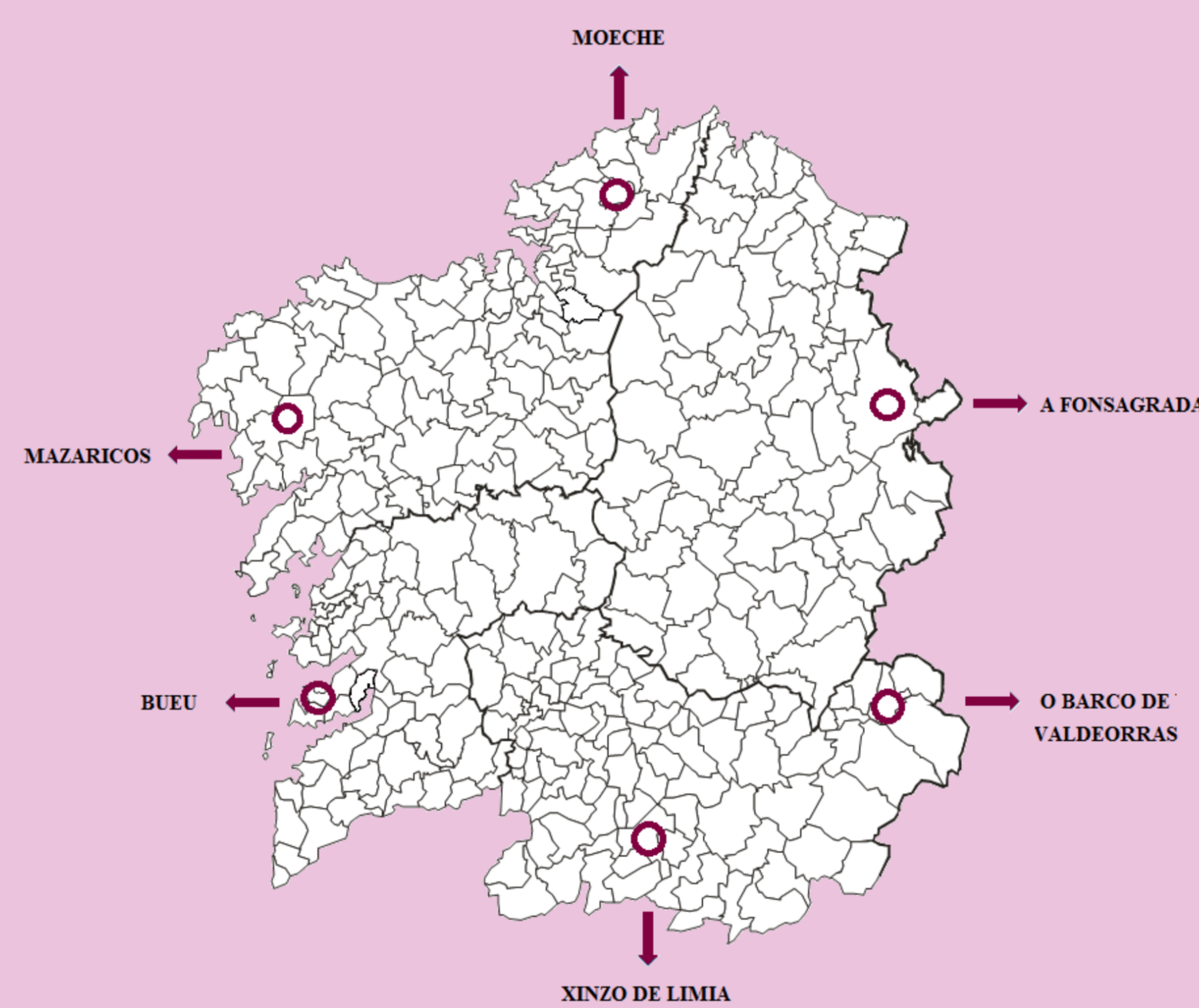


- To identify and analyse non-specialist Galician speakers' opinions and beliefs about dialectal variation in the Galician language.
- To compare the dialect areas they perceive with those traditionally recognised in Galician studies.
- To record speakers' judgments about the different dialects of Galician and, by extension, their speakers.

METHOD

With Preston's and Montgomery's methodological approach as our starting point, a set of procedures was established combining an aural perception test with a questionnaire.

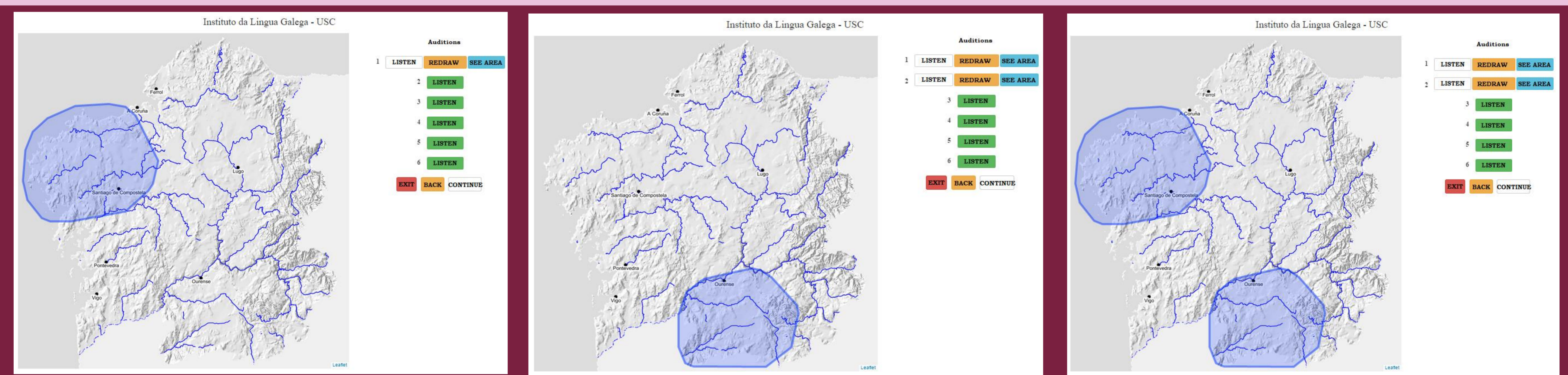
1. Perceptive test: The informants were first presented with a variety of oral stimuli and asked for their perceptual judgments. Seven different audio tracks were played to each participant, and using a computer application they were asked to assign each voice to a specific geographical area.



Places of origin of the oral dialect specimens

2. Questionnaire: following this, informants answered questions about:

- Their knowledge about dialect variation in the Galician language area.
- Their perceptions about how correct and pleasing the language varieties they identify are.
- The degree of difference or similarity between the various geographical varieties they recognise and their own variety.
- The identifying features of each of these dialects and the characteristics they attribute to its speakers.



Examples of the computer application in use

INITIAL HYPOTHESES

- Speakers are aware of dialect variation in the Galician language area but lack mental images with clearly defined geographical borders.
- Their identification of dialect areas is the result of a combination of intralinguistic and extralinguistic criteria.
- The most strongly identifying linguistic features are those that are most stigmatized socially (in the case of Galician, *gheada* and *seseo*, for example).
- Informants' level of education is one of the main variables determining their responses.
- Informants' own dialect is assessed in terms of its value as an identifying mark and as a symbol of belonging to a particular community.
- Speakers' ideas concerning linguistic correctness uphold this relational model: the higher the level of an informants' education is, the more correct they think it is.

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A participación neste congreso foi financiada pola Secretaría Xeral de Universidades (Xunta de Galicia – Fondo Europeo de Desenvolvemento Rexional) ó grupo de investigación Filoloxía e Lingüística Galega (USC)