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### Author

Grammon, Devin

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# Ideology, Indexicality, and the L2 Development of Sociolinguistic Perception During Study Abroad

DEVIN GRAMMON

*University of Oregon*

*E-mail: [grammon@uoregon.edu](mailto:grammon@uoregon.edu)*

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This article explores one second language (L2) Spanish learner's development of sociolinguistic perception in Peru involving target language variation and social indexicality in a study abroad context. Specifically, it investigates the perceptual mechanism that evolves in this context and enables L2 learners to interpret dialectal target language forms by linking them with elements of character, group traits, and other social attributes. An analysis of ethnographic data revealed two phases in this development. While the initial phase was characterized by the learner's formation of contrastive social and linguistic categories and first-order sociolinguistic indices connecting ways of speaking to kinds of people, the latter phase involved fostering language ideologies that rationalized and justified these links. I claim that this produced an ideological field in which the learner located specific morphosyntactic variants as indexing social qualities like licentiousness and ineptitude via their association with *brichero* and *cholo* social types from the host society. These findings implicate language ideologies as the fundamental perceptual mechanism that enables L2 learners to interpret the social meaning of target language practices. This case study recommends critical pedagogies and innovative curricula to bolster L2 learners' development of sociolinguistic competence during study abroad.

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## INTRODUCTION

A growing number of studies examine L2 learners' development of sociolinguistic perception including their ability to interpret the social meaning of dialectal target language (TL) forms by linking them with elements of character, group traits, and other social attributes (e.g. Chappell & Kanwit, 2021; Escalante, 2018; Michalski, 2023). Overall, researchers find that language and cultural immersion through study abroad (SA) can facilitate this development for some learners (Schoonmaker-Gates, 2020), and that the social-values that L2 learners assign to variable TL forms often reflect pervasive stereotypes about TL groups and standard language ideologies (Carrie & McKenzie, 2017; Davydova et al., 2017; Grammon, 2021, 2024). However, the construction of knowledge in this area is confounded by disparate accounts of the perceptual mechanism that enables L2 learners to interpret the social meaning of TL forms (cf. Chappell & Kanwit, 2021; Carrie & McKenzie, 2017; Davydova et al., 2017; Grammon, 2021, 2024). Moreover, researchers have yet to explore how this mechanism evolves during a SA experience as learners become aware of linguistic differences in the TL and strive to understand their social significance. By addressing these gaps in the current literature, this article aims to advance theory and practice regarding social indexicality as a key part of L2 learners' development of sociolinguistic competence.

The present study focuses on Rita<sup>1</sup>, a L2 Spanish learner from the U.S., and explores how her sociolinguistic perception evolved during SA in Peru regarding dialectal TL forms used by members of the host society. Guided by Eckert's (2008, 2012) theory of stylistic practice, I investigate the linguistic differences that Rita described over time during interviews, how she interpreted the social meaning of these differences, and what her evaluations reveal

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<sup>1</sup> All names herein are pseudonyms.

about the perceptual mechanism that underlay her ability to link dialectal TL forms with social-indexical values. My analysis reveals two phases in Rita's development of sociolinguistic perception. While she developed an ability to link varieties of Spanish and kinds of people in the host community during the first half of her sojourn, a second phase commenced as Rita began to foster language ideologies that rationalized and justified these links. I claim that this produced an ideological field pertaining to the host society, which enabled Rita to connect specific dialectal variants with elements of character, group traits, and other social attributes during the final weeks of her SA program. These findings implicate language ideologies as the underlying perceptual mechanism that enables L2 learners to interpret the social meaning of TL variation in a SA context.

This article advances scholarship on L2 learners' development of sociolinguistic perception in several ways. First, it engages Eckert's (2008) notion of the ideological field to unify previous proposals regarding the perceptual mechanism that enables L2 learners to interpret TL variation via social indexicality. Second, it connects research on the L2 acquisition of variation to research in the third-wave of variationist sociolinguistics that centers the role of language ideologies in the perception of linguistic differences and the construction of social meaning (Eckert, 2012, 2018). Third, it demonstrates the utility of ethnographic methods for understanding L2 learners' sociolinguistic development beyond the native speaker evaluative norms that have guided previous studies. Overall, it presents novel insights that endorse critical pedagogies and innovative SA curricula that can bolster learners' development of sociolinguistic competence during a pivotal time in their L2 learning experience.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### L2 Sociolinguistic Perception

Prior investigations of L2 learners' sociolinguistic perception have focused primarily on their abilities to recognize dialectal variants, identify them as part of regional TL varieties, and link them to social-indexical values according to native speaker evaluative norms (Schoonmaker-Gates, 2020). Overall, researchers find that these abilities correlate with higher levels of proficiency, explicit awareness of dialectal differences gained through classroom instruction, and naturalistic exposure to the TL during an immersive experience abroad (e.g. Carrie & McKenzie, 2017; Chappell & Kanwit, 2021; Davydova et al., 2017; Escalante, 2018; Grammon, 2021, 2024; Michalski, 2023; Solon & Kanwit, 2022). Several studies also suggest a progression in SA learners' ability to interpret the social meaning of dialectal TL forms. Findings reported by Chappell and Kanwit (2021) and Davydova and colleagues (2017), for example, insinuate that SA learners first attend to the overt prestige of the TL forms they are exposed to before developing associations between those forms and covert social qualities such as friendliness, extroversion, and cheerfulness. Moreover, Carrie & McKenzie (2017) find that L2 learners associate more familiar dialectal variants with positive social traits, which implies that SA learners determine the prestige of new TL forms by comparing them to the standard(ized) variety previously acquired in the classroom. Nonetheless, researchers have yet to examine how such comparisons are involved in learners' development of sociolinguistic perception over time in a SA context. Addressing this issue will help to affirm previous findings and elucidate the perceptual mechanism that learners cultivate during SA context which enables them to interpret the social meaning of TL variation.

Indeed, previous studies provide disparate accounts of this mechanism when explaining L2 learners' evaluations of TL forms. Given that it is unaccounted for within current models of L2 perception (Chappell & Kanwit, 2021; Schoonmaker-Gates, 2020), this gap in theory presents a major obstacle in the construction of knowledge regarding the nature of the cognitive representations that are implicated in learners' development of sociolinguistic perception. One proposed mechanism involves language ideologies, or conceptual cognitive schemes that link ways of speaking to kinds of speakers and other social categories (Irvine & Gal, 2000). Accordingly, L2 learners mobilize language ideologies to interpret the social meaning of linguistic differences in ways that reflect particular political and moral interests tied to their positionalities (Grammon, 2021, 2024). Studies by Davydova and colleagues (2017) and Carrie and McKenzie (2017), for example, implicate standard language ideologies in the social-indexical values that L2 learners assigned to specific dialectal TL forms in English. Davydova and colleagues (2017) found that German L2 English learners tended to evaluate the quotative 'say' as more educated, articulate, intelligent, etc. than the quotative 'be like.' In turn, many of these learners associated this latter variant with the U.S. and stereotyped characteristics of U.S. Americans such as a casual, informal demeanor. These researchers propose that L2 learners can link social-indexical values to TL variables via a process of interlanguage ideological extension whereby language ideologies internalized in the L1 scaffold socio-ideological knowledge in the L2. Carrie and McKenzie (2017) offered a similar interpretation of their findings involving L2 English learners from Spain, where dominant language ideologies uphold European dialectal forms as inherently superior to American ones. These learners evaluated a British Received Pronunciation guise as more standard, neutral, correct, pure, etc. than a General American one, and they pointed to specific phonetic and morphosyntactic variants to provide evidence of these claims. Carrie and McKenzie's finding that such evaluations persisted even in cases of dialect misidentification indicates that learners' ability to assign social-indexical values to a dialectal TL form does not depend on a successful mapping of that form onto existing perceptual categories. Nonetheless, neither of these studies addresses how an immersive experience abroad affords the development of perceptive abilities involving social indexicality as they both implicate ideologies prevalent within learners' home communities.

This question is taken up by Chappell and Kanwit (2021), however, who propose a different perceptual mechanism whereby L2 learners link social-indexical values to dialectal TL variants via indexical fields (Eckert, 2008). These researchers examined U.S. Spanish students' sociolinguistic perception of the variable production of coda /-s/ as either [-h] or [-s]—a socially-meaningful variable in Caribbean Spanish. Overall, they found that learners with advanced proficiency and who previously took a phonetics course were more likely to categorize a speaker producing [-h] as Caribbean than novice learners, and that those who had studied abroad in that region also linked [-s] with a higher social status. To account for these results, Chappell and Kanwit suggest that once learners create separate perceptual categories for [-h] and [-s] as part of the same variable (e.g., through explicit instruction), these categories become adaptable to new tokens of linguistic and social experience as exemplars stored in memory (pp. 19). In turn, each exemplar generates its own indexical field given sufficient naturalistic input (e.g. through SA), and each of these fields consists of potential social-indexical values that learners may select from when interpreting the social meaning of TL variation. However, Chappell and Kanwit do not address how indexical fields relate to the language ideologies described in previous studies of L2 learners' sociolinguistic perception. Moreover, their explanation of these fields as emergent properties of individual exemplars

contrasts with that provided by Eckert (2008), who first proposed the idea of the indexical field and described it as a product of an “ideological field” and “an embodiment of ideology in linguistic form” (pp. 464). This discrepancy asserts a need to better understand the relationship between indexical fields and language ideologies to advance knowledge of the perceptual mechanism that develops in a SA context and enables L2 learners to interpret the social meaning of TL forms used by members of a host society.

### **Sociolinguistic Perception and the Ideological Field**

As a framework for conceptualizing interpretive abilities involving language variation and social indexicality, Eckert’s (2008, 2012) theory of stylistic practice links language ideologies and indexical fields as part of the same cognitive mechanism underlying sociolinguistic perception. Eckert (2008) maintains that “ideology is at the center of stylistic practice” (pp. 456), which involves the continual interpretation of differences between language varieties (i.e. “styles”) that index different types of speakers (e.g., jocks, yuppies, US Southerners) within an ideological field. Accordingly, this field anchors stylistic practice and is composed of ideologies of linguistic differentiation (Irvine & Gal, 2000; Gal & Irvine, 2019) which enable individuals to link linguistic variants (e.g., words, sounds, grammatical forms) with elements of character, group traits, and other social attributes (e.g., aggressiveness, pretentiousness, a laid-back demeanor). Eckert describes these ideologies as “schemata” which involve social “categories, groups, types, and personae and of the differences in the way they talk” and reflect a person’s past stylistic experiences and position within the larger social order (2008, pp. 455). To clarify how these ideologies produce social indexicality, Eckert (2008, pp. 463-64) draws on Silverstein’s (2003) notion of indexical order to distinguish between first-order sociolinguistic indices, where linguistic forms index types of people (e.g., y’all and US Southerners), and higher-order (n+1) indices, where those same forms index social qualities associated with the groups indexed (e.g., y’all and friendliness, laziness, conservativeness). Thus, when a person perceives someone as friendly lazy, or conservative who they categorize as a US Southerner, those values become available as possible n+1 indexes for the language variety and linguistic variants they associate with that group as a form of “side-stepping within the ideological field” (pp. 464). Eckert explains that this sidestepping “creates an indexical field,” defined as “a constellation of meanings that are ideologically linked” and pertain to a given variable (pp. 464). In practice, the social-indexical value(s) that a person assigns to a linguistic variant will depend both on the variety in which it is embedded and the perspective of the perceiver. Overall, these details point to the ideological field as the central perceptual mechanism that learners must elaborate in a SA context in order to interpret dialectal TL forms vis-à-vis social-indexical values associated with types of people from the host society.

Although Eckert’s theorization of stylistic practice does not explicitly address how L2 learners develop perceptive abilities involving social indexicality, it nevertheless offers clues to how this process may proceed in a SA context. For those in an unfamiliar host society, a first step will involve the construction of a “sociolinguistic landscape” through the “segmentation of the social terrain, and...the linguistic practices in that terrain” into contrastive categories involving types of people and ways of using language (Eckert 2008, pp. 455; Irvine & Gal, 2000). Eckert (2008) notes that stylistic practice is inherently social and begins with developing an awareness of distinctive speech varieties that “will be noticed in the form of features that the [learner] separates out for notice” as well as “the group or individual that uses it” (pp. 457). For example, a SA Spanish learner recently arrived in Peru may notice (or have pointed out) a

casual youth style of speech in the form of informal (*tú*) commands and unfamiliar colloquial expressions used by young men on the street. In addition to forging these first-order sociolinguistic indices, learners also must elaborate an ideological field from the sociolinguistic landscape to interpret dialectal TL forms as indexing higher-order indexical values associated with social types from the host society. To describe how this occurs, Eckert draws on the work of Irvine and Gal (2000), who stipulate that people foster ideologies of linguistic differentiation as they come to “notice, rationalize, and justify [first-order] indices” (pp. 35). These ideologies will “purport to explain the source and meaning of linguistic differences” and “position linguistic features as expressions and reflections of broader cultural images of people and activities” (pp. 37). For example, a SA Spanish learner in the Caribbean might foster an ideology that rationalizes the existence of phonetic variants of coda /-s/ as proof that locals who typically produce [-h] are lazy and uneducated while those who categorically produce [-s] are articulate and intelligent based on their observations, interactions and experiences with their teachers, host families, and other locals. In turn, as learners begin to foster such ideologies, their evaluations of TL forms will start to locate them “as part of, and evidence for, systematic behavioral, aesthetic, affective, and moral contrasts among the groups indexed” (pp. 37). Ultimately, these evaluations construct ideological representations of social and linguistic differences which, over time, populate an ideological field (Eckert, 2008). Thus, while individual learners “may be more attuned to particular kinds of [linguistic] differences as a function of their past stylistic experience” (Eckert, 2008: 457), the ideological representations that they cultivate will be “suffused with moral and political issues pervading the particular sociolinguistic field and are subject to the interests of their bearers’ social position” (Irvine & Gal, 2000, pp. 35). Overall, this suggests that the ideological fields that individual learners cultivate during SA will differ based not only where they go, who they interact with, and the nature of their exposure to the target language but also their previous learning experiences, linguistic awareness, learning goals, cultural biases, and social positioning within the host society.

These insights motivate the present exploratory study and my analysis of Rita’s development of sociolinguistic perception during SA in Peru. By providing an in-depth analysis that focuses on one learner, my goal is to demonstrate how this development proceeds in highly particularized ways through richly contextualized examples using ethnographic data. I was guided by the following questions:

- 1) What linguistic differences did Rita describe over time in the SA context involving dialectal TL forms and members of the host society?
- 2) How did her interpretations of these differences evolve in terms of first-order and higher-order sociolinguistic indices?
- 3) What did Rita’s descriptions and interpretations reveal about the language ideologies she fostered in Peru as part of her elaboration of an ideological field pertaining to the host society?

## DATA & METHODS

The current study stems from a multi-year ethnographic fieldwork project that examined L2 Spanish learners’ development of sociolinguistic competence during SA in Southern Peru (Grammon, 2018). This fieldwork was centered in the city of Cuzco, an international tourist hub that provides SA learners with language and cultural immersion in a multilingual context. In addition to Spanish, most locals speak Quechua, an indigenous language. Historical contact

between these languages is evident in the variety of Andean Spanish spoken throughout Southern Peru which includes many linguistic forms that index a racialized Quechua-speaking identity (Escobar, 2011; Lipski, 1994). Prevalent language ideologies in Southern Peru position these features as evidence that L1 Quechua speakers are linguistically deviant and deficient regardless of their normative use by many L1 Spanish speakers (i.e., raciolinguistic ideologies; see Grammon, 2022, 2024; Kvietok Dueñas & Chaparro, 2023; Zavala & Back, 2017).

The data for this study were collected during the Spring 2016 program at GLI Cuzco, a SA school, via ethnographic methods consisting of participant observations, semi- and unstructured interviews, audio recording, transcription, the generation of field notes, debriefing and member checking (Bernard, 2017). GLI Cuzco offered 15-week Spanish immersion programs for U.S. undergraduates that featured L2 instruction in Spanish, homestays with local families, and travel to other parts of Southern Peru. As one of various focal research participants, Rita was chosen for the present case study for several reasons. First, she was what many SA practitioners describe as an “ideal” L2 learner abroad: she was outgoing, prioritized speaking Spanish with locals, developed a close relationship with her host family, and conveyed a desire to learn about cultural practices and norms within the host society. Moreover, Rita’s identities and background aligned with the typical U.S. undergraduate SA student. She identified as a White woman, was 20 years old when she arrived in Peru, and attended a large U.S. university where she majored in Latin American Studies with a minor in Spanish. Moreover, Rita was assigned to the intermediate-high Spanish class based on a proficiency exam administered by the school, had not previously taken a linguistics course or learned about dialectal differences in Spanish, and reported no previous contacts with Peruvians or expectations about Peruvian Spanish prior to SA. Rita stated that her primary language learning goals during SA were to “improve [her] conversational skills” and acquire “a more informal variety of Spanish.”

Semi-structured interviews with Rita took place during the first, seventh, and fourteenth weeks of her SA program and were conducted mostly in English. Among other topics, they focused on her evolving perceptions of the host society and the Spanish spoken in Peru, what she had noticed about Peruvians and the way they spoke, and her progress toward her Spanish learning goals. I routinely asked follow-up questions to better understand when, where, and how she had come to differentiate ways of speaking and types of speakers, connect TL forms and typical persons, and interpret the significance of the use of those forms within the SA context. Rita also brought up these subjects during numerous unstructured interviews over the course of the SA program. After each interview, and upon transcribing the audio recordings of our interactions, I documented the major themes, categories, and challenges that Rita described in my field notes as well as my own observations and reflections about what her responses indicated about the development of her sociolinguistic perception in Spanish over time.

To answer my research questions, I identified, transcribed, and analyzed all relevant interview excerpts where Rita discussed aspects of the Spanish spoken in Peru. These episodes ranged from her initial thoughts about the Spanish spoken in Cuzco during our first interview to the critical evaluations of specific speakers’ use of dialectal forms during our last one. In turn, I conducted an ethnographically-informed discourse analysis of these excerpts that involved an iterative process of coding guided by the tenets of critical discourse analysis (Wodak & Meyer, 2016), my field notes, and Eckert’s (2008) and Irvine and Gal’s (2000) descriptions of how speakers come to notice linguistic differences, establish indexical links between linguistic forms and types of speakers and contexts, and forge linguistic ideologies

that purport to explain the source and meaning of those differences and indexical links.<sup>2</sup> Throughout this process, I focused on the descriptors that Rita used to discuss linguistic differences over time, the way that she framed and rationalized these differences, and the particular social values that she evoked when describing local's use of specific dialectal forms. Overall, this process provided a means to establish a relative timeline of the development of different aspects of Rita's sociolinguistic awareness and interpretive abilities, and to connect this timeline to concerns and formative events that she brought to my attention over the course of the SA program. Ultimately, my interpretation of the interview excerpts is grounded in my deep familiarity with Rita and her SA experience as one of her closest contacts in Peru.

Indeed, it is important to acknowledge that my collection and interpretation of data for this study was intimately tied to my own positionality as a White, L2 speaker of Spanish from the U.S. with wide-ranging experiences in Southern Peru and language learning during SA. Since 2013, I have spent approximately 24 months in Cuzco and Southern Peru where I have become intimately familiar with the regional variety of Spanish both as a field linguist and as a near-native speaker of this variety. My relative youth, status as a graduate student, insider knowledge of Cuzco, and prior SA experiences aided me in developing a close relationship with Rita. In turn, she openly discussed how she interpreted aspects of her SA experience with me without fear of reprisal or sounding insensitive. By asking Rita to explicitly reflect on what she had noticed about the host society and local Spanish on multiple occasions throughout the program, I inevitably shaped her awareness of social and linguistic differences over time and thus her development of sociolinguistic perception.

## FINDINGS

Overall, the process of data collection and analysis revealed two phases in Rita's development of sociolinguistic perception during SA in Peru. The initial phase commenced upon Rita's arrival in Cuzco and was characterized both by her segmentation of the linguistic and social terrain of the host community into contrastive categories and by the forging of first-order sociolinguistic indices. During this phase, Rita developed an awareness of different varieties of Spanish, which she interpreted primarily in terms of prestige and standard language ideologies. The second phase commenced halfway through Rita's SA program as she started to openly foster ideologies that rationalized first-order sociolinguistic indices and construct ideological representations of the groups indexed. During this latter phase, Rita described linguistic differences in Spanish not only in terms of contrasting varieties but also specific morphosyntactic variables used by members of the host society. In turn, she demonstrated an ability to link specific dialectal variants to higher-order indexical values by mobilizing language ideologies to locate these variables as evidence of systematic moral and behavioral contrasts between social types in Peru. I claim that these findings indicate Rita's construction of an ideological field through her varied experiences and interactions over the course of her SA program, which enabled her to interpret dialectal TL forms in the SA context by linking them to elements of character, group traits, and other social attributes.

The remainder of this section provides evidence of these claims through an analysis and interpretation of interview excerpts with Rita. First, I describe the initial phase of her development of sociolinguistic perception and the first-order sociolinguistic indices that she forged. I explain how Rita's initial awareness of a distinction between U.S. instructional

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to Eckert (2008) and Irvine and Gal (2000), readers can find more information about how people do this in Gal and Irvine (2019) and Eckert (2018).

Spanish and the variety spoken by Cuzqueños gave way to an avowed difference between the Spanish spoken by locals who were affiliated with GLI Cuzco and the those who were not. Next, I discuss the latter phase and examine how she linked specific morphosyntactic variables in Spanish to social qualities and group traits. I indicate how Rita’s descriptions and evaluations of these variables reveals her construction of ideological representations of local social types—notably those of the *brichero* and the *cholo*—via her fostering of ideologies that purport to explain the meaning and source of contrasting linguistic variants within the host society. Ultimately, I contend that Rita’s development of sociolinguistic perception was an inherently social process subject to diverse political and moral interests tied to her social position within the host society. It proceeded not only through Rita’s interactions with a range of people across multiple communicative settings but also in relation to her goal of becoming more conversationally proficient in an informal variety of Spanish during SA.

### Initial Phase: First-Order Sociolinguistic Indices

During conversations and interviews over the course of her first month in Peru, Rita began to describe general differences in the Spanish spoken in Cuzco. These differences mostly involved comparisons between the general variety of Spanish she encountered in the SA context and the standard(ized) instructional variety that she had previously been exposed to by her teachers in the U.S. Rita interpreted these differences mostly in terms of correctness and complexity. In turn, she positioned the Spanish that Cuzqueños spoke as deviant and potentially deficient compared to the formal classroom Spanish she was familiar with.

Excerpt 1 illustrates these points and took place during an unstructured interview at the end of her third week in Cuzco. Although Rita emphasized that she paid little attention to the structures that Cuzqueños used when speaking Spanish to her, she ultimately described a general varietal difference that she had noted over the preceding weeks.

#### Excerpt 1

*“It’s a different variety...”*

Devin	What do you think of the Spanish that they speak in Cuzco?
Rita	Um. Like I told you like I wish that I observed these things more and thought more critically about the language being spoken to me but I honestly don’t reflect on it that much. Um I just like, you know, like think about like if I understand what people are saying to me and like how to respond to them. Like I don’t necessarily think so much about how they are structuring it like if it’s like- comparing it to what I’ve learned in class and like if it’s correct or not or if it’s like the same variety as what I’ve learned in school. And like for the most part like yeah, I can tell like it isn’t. Like people don’t use like- you know, like these complex sentence structures that like we’re encouraged to use and like we speak in class and like people don’t use like- like any of like the different ways of expressing things that like I had heard before. Like my host mom for example will never say like <i>tener que</i> she’ll always say like <i>hay que</i> . Like, “there is to do like this.” Which, I mean, like I don’t know if that’s like not correct or if it is correct, I just hadn’t heard it before. But like it makes sense to me. I understood what she’s saying.

Rita's discussion indicates that she had forged a first-order indexical relationship during her initial weeks in Peru between Cuzqueños as a whole and a variety of Spanish distinct from the one spoken by her instructors in the U.S. Moreover, she provided evidence of this distinction by contrasting a previously unfamiliar morphosyntactic construction used categorically by her host mother (i.e. *hay que*) and a functionally equivalent one that she had learned previously in the U.S. (i.e. *tener que*). Although Rita did not provide an explanation as to why Cuzqueños spoke the way she described, her interpretation of this varietal difference in terms of correctness and complexity demonstrates how she relied on standard language ideologies to make sense of such observations during the first weeks of her SA program.

Over the course of the next three weeks, Rita's principal distinction between "Cuzco Spanish" and U.S. classroom Spanish gave way to another within our informal discussions and unstructured interviews. This involved an opposition between what Rita described as the variety she was directly exposed to through her SA program and another which she observed when interacting with Cuzqueños unaffiliated with GLI Cuzco. This distinction reflected Rita's frustration with her SA program due to what she described as her "lack of progress" in becoming proficient in "informal Spanish." She blamed this on the program's focus on "general broad standard Spanish" as well as the "classism" and paternalism embodied by the numerous rules that limited where Rita could go during her free time and who she could develop friendships with (see Grammon, 2023). During our semi-structured interview during week seven, Rita described a fundamental difference between the kinds of Spanish spoken by "the people you're not supposed to speak to a whole lot and the people you're supposed to speak to a whole lot." In Excerpt 2, she elaborated on these apparent first-order sociolinguistic indices.

### Excerpt 2

*"Very, very, very different accents"*

I think it's interesting though like talking to people like- people who are introduced to you like from the program, right? Like professors and like Beto, Ángela, Dory like their accent is like very, very, very, very clear. Like very practiced. And then when you speak to somebody um like on the street or in a cab, I'm like sometimes- sometimes you don't understand perfectly because their accent is very, very, very different. And like- probably more of like a Cuzqueño accent than Beto, Dory or Ángela have. Just like thicker [...] like the pronunciation is less clear, the words are more slurred together. Um. Like the vowels are pronounced differently. Like things of that nature. And just like not that I like- like ultimately like wouldn't be able to understand something but just like where I have to ask them to repeat.

Rita's discussion of an inherent difference in the varieties of Spanish spoken by Cuzqueños affiliated and unaffiliated with GLI Cuzco suggests how her language learning goals informed the way that she had categorized and mapped the social and linguistic terrain of the host society during the prior weeks. Indeed, her description of this difference in terms of overall clarity, enunciation, and authenticity indicates that it stemmed from a desire to acquire a more casual and informal variety of conversational Spanish than what was directly available to her through her interactions with her instructors, host family, and the staff at GLI Cuzco. Excerpt 3 provides additional evidence of the way that Rita attributed such qualities to the "more Cuzqueño" variety of Spanish spoken by taxi drivers and locals on the street.

However, it was during this unstructured interview at the end of her 8<sup>th</sup> week in Cuzco that Rita first began to rationalize the first-order indices that she had previously reported. In particular, she alluded to a difference in the way that certain taxi drivers spoke Spanish to her, which she likened to her own abilities in the language as a L2 learner.

### Excerpt 3

*“Maybe Spanish is people’s second language?”*

Devin	So for example when you talk to a taxi cab driver you mentioned that their Spanish is different than the Spanish your host [family speaks
Rita	[Right. Well I mean- possibly. It was definitely a sense that it’s a more casual version. Like it’s a less formal version. But like sometimes I get the sense that like Spanish is people’s second language when I’m talking to them. Um just in the way that like- it’s sort of the way that like I would speak it with like maybe with like a different accent but like slower like more calculated. Like not 100% correct.

Rita’s explanation reveals a key turning point in her development of sociolinguistic perception during SA in Cuzco involving social indexicality. While she continued to maintain the existence of two distinctive varieties of Spanish in Cuzco and differentiate them in terms of correctness, formality, and aesthetic quality, Rita started to note differences in the Spanish spoken by Cuzqueños who were not affiliated with GLI Cuzco. Moving forward, she began to interpret these differences in terms of speaker attributes and locate them as evidence of systematic contrasts between the social groups indexed. Although this initially involved language nativeness, as shown in Excerpt 3, it quickly expanded to include other types of attributes like those described in section 4.2.

Overall, the initial phase of Rita’s development of sociolinguistic awareness in Cuzco involved a general categorization of the social and linguistic terrain of the unfamiliar host society and the forging on first-order indices between distinctive ways of speaking and types of speakers. During these eight weeks, Rita interpreted linguistic differences primarily in terms of comprehensibility, prestige, and standard language ideologies. In turn, she distinguished between social types that were relevant to her language learning goals rather than broad socio-demographic categories. While Rita continued to create new social and linguistic categories and forge new first-order indices throughout her time in Peru, the interview in which she began to rationalize these indices took place right as she began to distinguish ways of speaking among Cuzqueños who were unaffiliated with her SA program.

### Latter Phase: Higher-Order Sociolinguistic Indices

The second phase evident in Rita’s development of sociolinguistic perception involved the fostering of language ideologies that rationalized and justified linguistic differences in Peru in relation to social differences. During the second half of her SA program, Rita’s descriptions and evaluations of linguistic differences often invoked ideologically constructed representations of social types from the host society that were implicated in first-order sociolinguistic indices. She began to locate specific morphosyntactic variables as evidence of systematic contrasts among these social types, including linguistic forms that she was already familiar with before SA.

Rita first demonstrated an ability to link dialectal Spanish forms used by Peruvians with higher-order social indexical values during an unstructured interview that took place at the beginning of her 10<sup>th</sup> week in Peru. This involved formal (*usted*) versus informal (*tú*) forms of second-person address and a distinction between local men who she portrayed as professional and courteous, on the one hand, and lustful and crude, on the other. Rita described this latter category of men as “*bricheros*,” a label that she had learned earlier from her SA Spanish teacher to refer to local philanderers who target tourists. In Excerpt 4, Rita contrasted the categorical use of *tú* by these “cat-callers” and *usted* by store clerks before describing variation in the use of these pronouns among taxi drivers. Her description of this variation reveals that Rita interpreted their use of *tú* as indexing salaciousness and licentiousness—higher order social-indexical values that were the opposite of those she associated with their use of *usted*.

#### Excerpt 4

“Uncomfortable pronouns”

Rita	Like, I think it’s interesting which people like use <i>usted</i> with me and which people use like <i>tú</i> with me.
Devin	Okay so tell me about that.
Rita	Okay [laughs] I mean like. It feels like- so, I don’t know if I’ve been noticing it more or if this is actually like a thing, but I feel like I’ve gotten like cat-called and like jeered at like so much in like the past two weeks. And like, I like genuinely like don’t understand like why or like what I’ve been doing differently or like what it is. But like, I just feel like, I’ve like gotten something from somebody like literally every single fucking day. And like, it’s so annoying and like I don’t know but like the people who catcall you always use <i>tú</i> . The people you talk to at the store always use <i>usted</i> . Like some cab drivers use <i>usted</i> and like they don’t ask you questions that make you feel uncomfortable. Some cab drivers use <i>tú</i> and they do ask you questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

Rita’s description of the inherently different kinds of questions asked by taxi drivers who addressed her using *tú* versus *usted* implies that she had fostered an ideology which located the source and meaning of this variation vis-à-vis an inherent moral contrast among local men related to their sexual intentions and desires. Moreover, it indicates that Rita also had constructed an ideological representation of the *brichero* social type that was indexed by this contextual use of *tú*—a type of local man whose inherent lasciviousness was not only unpleasant but also posed a threat. Rita further explained that many taxi drivers had asked her “if [she] was single” and “looking for a boyfriend” when I inquired about the “uncomfortable questions” she alluded to in Excerpt 4. Moreover, she recalled a recent traumatizing experience where a taxi driver had stopped the car and made sexual advances following what she described as a “friendly conversation” that involved her openness to dating Peruvians. This experience clearly had reinforced the ideological construction of the *brichero* social type indexed by this use of *tú*. “I like won’t talk to taxi drivers anymore if they use *tú* with me,” Rita explained, “I was scared for my life.”

Apart from the *brichero*, Rita also described differences in the Spanish spoken in Peru in relation to the “*cholo*,” a kind of person in the host society that she contrasted with “native

speakers of Spanish” and connected to the “slurred” and “not 100% correct” variety of Spanish she had described previously in Excerpts 2 and 3. Rita stated that she had first learned the word *cholo* in Cuzco during her seminar on indigenous peoples in Peru to describe those who “speak Quechua as their first language” and who are “originally from indigenous communities” in the rural Andes but “live in cities now.” Rita evoked this social type during our final semi-structured interview which included questions about her experience in Puerto Maldonado in the Peruvian Amazon. When asked what she had noticed about the local Spanish in Puerto Maldonado in Excerpt 5, she discussed a widespread morphosyntactic variable in Peru involving the use of a third-person possessive determiner (e.g. *su*, ‘his/her’) versus a definite article (e.g. *la*, ‘the’) in periphrastic genitive constructions (e.g. *su/la mamá de Eva*, ‘her/the mom of Eva; Eva’s mom’: see Grammon, 2022). Ultimately, Rita expressed confusion about why her hosts in Puerto Maldonado, Eva and Adolfo, used these forms when they did not know Quechua.

### Excerpt 5

“...but they aren’t Quechua speakers!”

Devin	What else [have you noticed about the Spanish they speak in Puerto Maldonado]? Maybe like pronunciation or grammar?
Rita	The thing like the um like I’ve never heard Adolfo or Eva or anybody um like here say like “ <i>la madre de Eva</i> ” like “ <i>la mamá de Eva</i> .” Like, it’s always “ <i>su mamá de Eva</i> .”
Devin	Mhm.
Rita	I don’t know like what that means but like that’s just the grammar construction they use for that [...] I had associated it with Quechua but like people who use it here are not Quechua speakers.
Devin	Are you sure?
Rita	Yeah.
Devin	Did you ask them if they speak Quechua? [And they- and they don’t-
Rita	[Yeah I did and because I like I really thought that that’s what that was I was like oh Eva what’s your first language. She’s like Spanish. I don’t speak any other languages. Like I speak some English but like Spanish. Um. And then like Adolfo is from like an Andean town but like he doesn’t speak Quechua.

Rita’s discussion of Eva and Alfredo’s use of possessive determiners implies that she perceived a mismatch between the identity indexed by the normative use of these forms and the one that they claimed as native speakers of Spanish from the host society. Moreover, it reveals that Rita had fostered a raciolinguistic ideology (Kvietok Dueñas & Chaparro, 2023; Flores & Rosa, 2015) while in Cuzco which rationalized the meaning and source of this morphosyntactic variable vis-à-vis an ideologically constructed representation of the *cholo* as a racialized type of person who is deficient in Spanish. Indeed, Rita had been explicitly exposed to this ideology during a Quechua class her 8<sup>th</sup> week in Cuzco when her teacher told a story that connected locals’ use of double possessive constructions to speaking “bad Spanish” due to linguistic interference from Quechua (see Grammon, 2022). The finding that Rita had internalized this ideology became apparent when I asked her to elaborate on why she found Eva and Adolfo’s use of possessive determiners confusing during a follow up interview. She

explained that she had thought that this usage was “an indigenous thing” and that it was something she had focused on because she “always really liked grammar” and “to know the like standardized way of doing it.” In Excerpts 6 and 7, Rita mobilized the ideology to portray *cholos* as deficient in Spanish due to linguistic interference from Quechua by linking the use of possessive determiners with ineptitude—a higher-order value which she contrasted with nativeness.

### Excerpt 6

*“Something that’s not Spanish”*

Devin	What confused you?
Rita	Because I hadn’t really spent all that much time around people, like native Spanish speakers, right? And because then I’m like oh so this is something that someone would say if and only if they spoke Quechua as their first language and this isn’t somebody- something that anybody would say as like a native Spanish speaker.
Devin	Mm
Rita	Um this is like something that like comes from a native language um- from an indigenous language and this isn’t something that’s used in Spanish.

### Excerpt 7

*“You’re not a cholo”*

Rita	The thing with the grammar really fucking like stuck with me. I like don’t know why it was. It was because I heard [...] Adolfo saying the same exact thing, like the same exact way. And I’m like- I’m like I know where you’re from and I know that you’re not a native speaker of Quechua and he like would refer himself- refer to himself as a <i>cholito</i> seri- like, he would refer to himself as a <i>cholito</i> .
Devin	<i>Cholito?</i>
Rita	Yeah. And so, I was like oh maybe you are but then I’m like no you’re not. Like I know you’re not. Like you told me about like where you’re from and like what your situation is and I know like what the situation is and we talked about it later. And I was like, I actually had this conversation with you.

Rita portrayed native speakers of Quechua and Spanish as two opposing types of people within the host society and mapped the difference in periphrastic genitive constructions onto this binary. In explaining her confusion about Eva and Adolfo’s usage of possessive determiners in these constructions, she revealed that she had interpreted the normative use of these forms as indexing native competence in Quechua and ultimately an indigenous identity. In turn, Rita connected this usage to the *cholo* social type by portraying Adolfo’s claim to this racialized identity as insensitive and deeply problematic given “where is from,” and “what his situation is.” Rita further elaborated that although Adolfo was originally from the Andes, he “didn’t speak Quechua at all” and “wasn’t rural”. Moreover, it is likely that Adolfo’s Ph.D. and position as a university professor further distanced him from the ideological representation of the cholo that Rita had formed earlier during her SA experience in Cuzco (Grammon, 2024).

In sum, Rita's development of sociolinguistic awareness during this second phase proceeded as she fostered language ideologies and ideological representations related to first-order sociolinguistic indices in the host society. In turn, she mobilized these ideologies to interpret the meaning and source of linguistic differences in the host society and ultimately connect dialectal forms with elements of character, group traits, and other social attributes. Ultimately, the social meanings that she connected to these forms were not neutral descriptions based on unmotivated observations of types of people from the host society. Rather, they reflected the kinds of interactions she had with locals across different communicative contexts, the various social, political, and moral interests tied to her position in the host society, and her concern with correct grammar as a L2 learner of Spanish.

## DISCUSSION

L2 learners' sociolinguistic perception is a nascent area of inquiry that advances knowledge and practice regarding the L2 acquisition of sociolinguistic competence. The present case study contributes to this research by exploring how one learner developed interpretive abilities over time involving dialectal Spanish forms and social indexicality in a SA context. My findings suggest that Rita's development of sociolinguistic perception was an inherently social process that proceeded in alignment with Eckert's (2008) theory of stylistic practice rooted in an ideological field. During the initial phase of this development, Rita forged first-order sociolinguistic indices as she categorized the linguistic and social terrain of an unfamiliar host society through her interactions with locals across various communicative contexts. Moreover, she developed an awareness of varietal differences in the Spanish spoken in Cuzco, which she described primarily in terms of comprehensibility, prestige, and standard language ideologies. During the latter phase, however, Rita fostered other language ideologies through formative experiences in Peru and began to rationalize and justify first-order sociolinguistic indices involving social types from the host society. In turn, she mobilized these ideologies during the last weeks of her SA program to locate specific morphosyntactic variables as evidence of systematic moral and behavioral contrasts between types of Peruvians such as *bricheros* and *cholos*. In doing so, Rita demonstrated that she had developed an ability to link specific dialectal Spanish forms with higher-order social-indexical values vis-à-vis ideologically constructed representations of these social types. I argue that these findings implicate language ideologies as the perceptual mechanism that enables L2 learners to interpret the social meaning of TL variation in a SA context. By fostering ideologies that purport to explain the source and meaning of linguistic differences in a SA context, learners construct an ideological field that generates links between TL forms and elements of character, group traits, and other social qualities attributed to kinds of people from the host society.

These findings help to clarify both the sequence of interpretive abilities that L2 learners develop during SA as well as the perceptual mechanism that underlies these abilities. Overall, my analysis supports the idea that learners first attend to the prestige of the unfamiliar TL variety they encounter during SA before developing associations between specific variables and higher-order social indexical values (Chappell & Kanwit, 2021; Davydova et al, 2017). Moreover, Rita's initial descriptions of Cuzco Spanish suggests that this initial valuation often will involve standard language ideologies and comparisons to the standardized instructional varieties that learners are previously exposed to (Carrie & McKenzie, 2017; Grammon, 2021). Rita's evaluations of Peruvians' linguistic practices during the final weeks of her SA program, however, show an expansion of her interpretive repertoire to include ideologies linked to

specific social types in the host society. I claim that Rita's discussion of *tú* versus *usted* forms and "double" versus standard possessive constructions indicate the development of an ability to connect specific dialectal variants to more "covert" social traits and qualities (Chappell & Kanwit, 2021). These social-indexical values include licentiousness and ineptitude as attributes that Rita associated ideologically with *bricheros* and *cholos* as social types indexed by the situated use of *tú* and double possessive forms in the SA context. Ultimately, these findings uphold Eckert's (2008) claim that sociolinguistic perception is never neutral but instead motivated by the moral and political interests that pervade a particular sociolinguistic field and a person's position within it (Irvine & Gal, 2000; Silverstein, 2003). This framing not only helps to explain Rita's specific distinction between the varieties of Spanish spoken by people affiliated and unaffiliated with GLI Cuzco but also the pejorative social-indexical values that she attributed to *tú* and double possessive forms. I suggest that these values reflected her experiences and interactions in Peru as a young White woman from the U.S., and as an L2 Spanish learner concerned with acquiring an informal albeit competent and appropriate variety of the TL that did not carry any stigma.

This exploratory study helps point to a future agenda for research and practice concerned with L2 learners' development of sociolinguistic perception involving social indexicality. I argue that this agenda requires an expansion of how we conceptualize and examine L2 learners' sociolinguistic competence to include the language ideologies that learners foster at home and abroad and mobilize to interpret the social meaning of TL practices (Carrie & McKenzie, 2017; Davydova et al., 2017; Eckert, 2008; Grammon, 2021, 2024; Irvine & Gal, 2000). Rita's evaluations of linguistic differences over time in Peru affirm a need to explore the range of ideologies implicated in SA learners' interpretive abilities and how they intersect with L2 proficiency and metalinguistic awareness of dialectal TL differences gained through explicit instruction (Chappell & Kanwit, 2021; Schoonmaker-Gates, 2020). Moreover, future studies are needed that address how the language ideologies that initially scaffold L2 learners' sociolinguistic knowledge may be modified and transformed through an immersive experience in a TL (Davydova et al., 2017). These include raciolinguistic ideologies, which are tied to standard language ideologies and implicated in dominant conceptions of competent and appropriate language use both in the U.S. and in many SA communities (Anya, 2021; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Grammon, 2022; Kvietok Dueñas & Chaparro, 2023; Zavala & Back, 2017).

Above all, current findings endorse critical pedagogies and innovative SA curricula that can bolster SA learners' development of sociolinguistic competence by helping them become aware of the ways that language ideologies are implicated in sociolinguistic perception. This involves developing L2 learners' critical language awareness (Quan, 2020), which Leeman (2014: 277) describes as an "understanding of how language functions in the maintenance of societal power relations," which can "facilitate resistance to domination enacted through ideology and language." Language teachers and SA programs must go beyond providing explicit instruction on the normative use of dialectal TL forms and implement critical pedagogies, collaborative activities, and research projects that center language ideologies, prioritize semiotic function over normativity in language, and help to demystify cultural conceptions behind the dominant language ideologies that learners encounter in a SA context (e.g. Anya, 2021; Holguín Mendoza & Taylor, 2021; Quan, 2021; Loza & Beaudrie, 2022; Vergara Wilson & Marcin, 2022). Had Rita's SA program implemented these practices, she might have avoided cultivating raciolinguistic ideologies as part of her L2 interpretive repertoire and further developed her interpretive abilities involving additional local dialectal

forms and social types. While SA remains an important pathway for L2 learners to develop sociolinguistic competence in a TL, educators must strive to serve their interests in ways that promote equitable multilingualism and social justice for marginalized TL speakers and communities (Flores & Rosa, 2019; Ortega, 2019).

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