

Using Twitter, Linguists Find Global ‘Superdialects’

By Taylor Wofford

In an attempt to map Spanish dialects on a global scale, linguistics researchers Bruno Gonçalves and David Sánchez analyzed more than 50 million geotagged tweets, looking at certain words which vary from dialect to dialect. The word for sandwich, for instance, can be bocadillo, bocadito, bocata, emparedado, sandwich, sangüis, sangüich, or sanwich, depending on the dialect.

They found “the existence of well defined macroregions sharing common lexical properties” — in other words, people from South America generally speak a different Spanish than those from Central America or Spain. No surprise there. But they also discovered something that did surprise them: in addition to well-known regional dialects of Spanish, there exist two global “superdialects,” as the researchers dubbed them.

The first superdialect — Superdialect α — “is utilized by speakers in main American and Spanish cities and corresponds to an international variety with a strongly urban component,” while the second superdialect — Superdialect β — is spoken mostly in “rural areas and small towns.”

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What does this mean? That a Spanish speaker from urban Madrid, for instance, sounds more like someone from urban Miami than someone from rural Andalucía. Cities, the researchers found, naturally exert a “linguistic centripetal force that favors dialect unification.” In plain English, people living in densely-populated urban environments begin to sound more and more like one another, and more and more like those living in other densely-populated urban environments across the globe. The ubiquity of Twitter and other tools for mass communication have helped the process along.

The report can be found [here](#).

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