

Journey with Language – Variations in Spanish (8) Colombia and Venezuela

●Destination - Colombia & Venezuela

In the summer of 2000, Antonio Ruiz from Sophia University and I traveled across South America. We stayed in the city of Bogota (Bogotá) in Colombia and Caracas in Venezuela for four days each. We would meet with the staffs from various research centers and universities for the study of language variations, and spend the rest of the time on sightseeing in the city.



【Picture 1: A Street in Bogota】

In the city center and the suburb of Bogota, there are bases for Spanish studies called *Instituto Caro y Cuervo*. At the institute, we had an opportunity to observe their studies and to present our research results. The city lies in the valley of the northern Andes, and the climate there is moderate even during mid-summer. Japanese students who lived there have also told us it is a nice place to live.



【Picture 2: Parking Lot (*Parqueadero*)】

After a three-hour flight from Bogota, we arrived at Simon Bolivar Airport in Caracas on the Caribbean coast. The city is on a highland, keeping the temperature from being too high. The highways run across the city center in a green valley. The Central University of Venezuela (Universidad Central de Venezuela) carried an extensive study in linguistics, and we made a visit there to exchange some information before we began our own observations in the city. Mr. Ruiz would take notes while I took pictures. We managed to gather much information in a short time thanks to the part-time guide we had arranged in advance.



【Picture 3: City of Caracas】

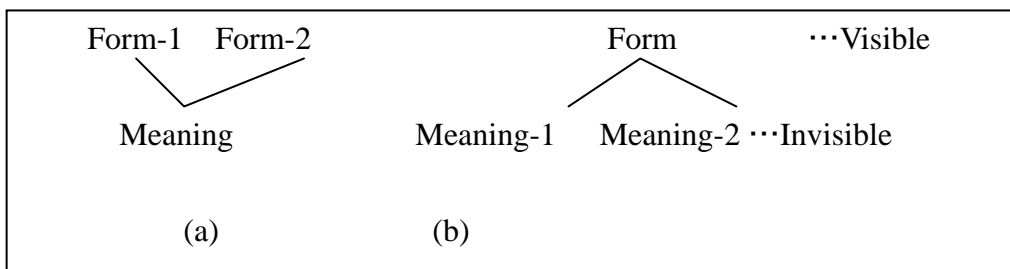


【Picture 4: Caracas from Distance】

When suggesting a coffee break, they say “¿*Le provoca café?*” (“How about a coffee?”) using *provocar* instead of *apetecer* in both Bogota and Caracas. In those adjacent countries, there are commonly used words such as *parquadero* (parking lot) and *bomba* (gas station), yet there are street signs and billboards in which different words are used. The word for “lane” is *carril* in Bogota and *canal* in Caracas.

●Pursuit of Language — Word Forms and Meanings, Syntax

As in the example of *apetecer* and *provocar* shown above, it is easy to distinguish the difference when a single meaning has different word forms in various regions (a in chart below) as opposed to single word form carrying different meanings (b).



Günther Haensch from the University of Augsburg in Germany edited dictionaries of Spanish in America (*Diccionario de Americanismos*) while contrasting the language in America and Spain. This chart shows some of the examples.¹

Word Form	Meaning in Spain	Meaning in Colombia
<i>bravo</i>	brave	angry
<i>comida</i>	lunch	dinner
<i>mono, mona</i>	pretty	blond, blonde
<i>primer piso</i>	2nd floor (above ground floor)	1st floor (ground floor)
<i>tienda</i>	store (general)	(small) food stand

The following paragraph is his conclusion.

Si bien se puede decir que los hechos morfosintácticos, la pronunciación y entonación del español de Colombia apenas dificultan la comprensión entre colombianos y españoles, el léxico del español de Colombia, incluso el de la vida diaria, presenta tantas diferencias que puede haber casos de incomprensión o malentendidos, especialmente cuando a un significante (usual en España y Colombia) corresponden diferentes significados.

¹ "El español de Colombia", *Hispanorama*, 52.

The morphosyntactics, pronunciation and intonation of Colombian Spanish do not complicate the comprehension between the Colombians and the Spanish, but the lexicon of Colombian Spanish, even those of the daily life, have many differences causing incomprehension or misunderstandings, especially when a single word form (common in Spain and Colombia) carries different meanings.

There was a very interesting grammatical phenomenon in Venezuela. Syntactics is the study of word orders and their meanings. Cleft sentences (*oraciones hendidas*), as shown below, are often discussed as one of its main topics.

- *Fue un libro lo que compró Juan.*
- *Un libro fue lo que compró Juan.*
- *Lo que compró Juan fue un libro.*

They all come from the sentence “*Juan compró un libro*” (“Juan bought a book”). With cleft parts “Juan compró” and “un libro”, the emphasis is on “un libro” (“It was a book that Juan bought”). In Caracas, another unique expression is frequently used in colloquial language.

- **Juan compró fue un libro.**

This is not the type of sentence structure we see in textbooks. Your teacher would probably say it is not grammatically correct. Mercedes Sedano of the Central University of Venezuela has analyzed its frequency with following expressions as examples (*Hendidas y otras construcciones con SER en el habla de Caracas*, Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1990).

- *Me gusta la música es moderna.* (The music I like is modern.)
- *Me gustaba más que todo era el estilo libre.* (What I like the most is the free style.)

- *Él está es puro jugando todo el día.* (What he does all day is to play.)
- *Se oye eso es poco.* (It is only a little that I hear it.)
- *Yo les propondría es que hagan un pacto.* (What I would like to propose is to make a pact.)

Some have reported this type of cleft sentence has spread across the northern part of South America, but it is essential to conduct research to see how it is distributed over the entire Spanish-speaking world. We are planning on conducting a survey this year on grammatical variations (*variación sintáctica*) like this.

●Language Variations - “Gas Station”

We found out that the common word for “gas station” was *bomba* in Colombia and Venezuela. *Bomba* is also widely used in the Caribbean (Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica and Panama), Ecuador, Chile and Argentina (**B** in map). However, *gasolinera* (**G**) is most common in the entire Spanish-speaking world, and it covers Spain, the Caribbean, Mexico, Central America, and the Andes (Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile). *Estación de servicio* (**E**) originated from English “service station” is adopted in Spain, Venezuela and the southern part of South America (Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay and Argentina). Others include *bencinera* (**C**) of Chile and *grifo* (**GR**) of Peru.

* Reference: Varilex: <http://gamp.c.u-tokyo.ac.jp/~ueda/varilex/>