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The semantics of “Latin America/ América Latina/ Latinamerika” and its impact in Spanish language teaching

Abstract:

The purpose of this presentation is to explore how the concept of “Latin America” is constructed in the region itself and in Europe - more specifically Denmark.

The concept of Latin America is controversial from its very origin. The most extended theory of how the word was coined claims it appeared for the first time in 1861 in the journal Revue des Races latines within a context of French imperialism and with an aspiration of strengthening French colonial intentions in the region. This theory is contested by claims that the term was already in use by Latin American scholars a decade before (Quijada, 1998). Regardless of its origin, the term establishes an antagonism between two Americas, the Anglosaxon and protestant North, on one side, and the Latin and catholic South, on the other. At the same time, it seems to forget/exclude the non “Latin”, original population.

Today the term is widely used on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as around the world, but the question is whether it is conceptualized in the same way and whether it serves the same purposes. In the context of Spanish teaching as a foreign language, there is a tendency in Scandinavia to construct the Spanish-speaking world as consisting of two blocks, Spain and Latin America. In this paper, I will explore what this means for the view that Scandinavian learners of Spanish have of the region, and whether the use of the term contributes to create a Eurocentric and highly simplified view of a vast geographical area consisting of a large number of countries, each with their rich and varied history, society, cultural values and language landscape. My claim is that this dichotomic presentation of the Spanish-speaking world may hinder the promotion of critical cultural awareness in the classroom (Byram, 1997; Risager, 2018; Fernández, in press).

Through corpus analysis and informant consultations in both the region itself and in Denmark, I will try to unravel some meanings and uses associated to the term. NSM will provide a metalanguage for explanations.

References:

