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Language portrayals in Paraguayan Fiction: A Sociolinguistic Study of the novel *Hijo de la Revolución*: language identity and ideology

Representaciones lingüísticas en la ficción paraguaya: Un estudio sociolingüístico de la novela *Hijo de la Revolución*: identidad e ideología lingüística

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ABSTRACT

The coexistence of two languages (Spanish and Guarani) in Paraguay has been analyzed by many scholars in the field of Sociolinguistics, undergoing different approaches within the discipline applied to specific collected data. However, the analysis of literary works from the point of view of Linguistics is quite scarce. The present paper attempts to study the language used in a recent novel in order to find the portrayal of identity and ideologies of the language (or languages) used in Paraguayan modern literature. The selected work for analysis is a nationally awarded novel in which the author used the different language variations among Paraguay's population. The research is organized with an introduction to contextualize the study, including a literature review to show what has already been done on the same topic and framework. The next step involves analyzing the collected data; this data is made up of excerpts that showcase different usages of language in the narrative as well as in the character's speech. After having them grouped by similar features, they were described within the framework. After this, the results were presented showing the different attitudes that the book shows towards both languages (Spanish and Guarani), demonstrating the underlying ideologies towards the speakers of both languages, marked by their origin as well (rural speakers vs. city speakers). These results show that the portrayal that the author made is accurate but exaggerated, and it depicts how Guarani is still associated with the lower class of the people whereas Spanish is the language of the educated.

Keywords: Paraguayan literature; Guarani; Paraguayan Spanish; language ideologies; language identity; language attitudes.

RESUMEN

La coexistencia de dos lenguas (español y guaraní) en Paraguay ha sido analizada por muchos académicos en el campo de la Sociolingüística, aplicando diferentes enfoques dentro de la disciplina a datos específicos recolectados. Sin embargo, el análisis de obras literarias desde el punto de vista de la Lingüística es bastante escaso. El presente trabajo intenta estudiar el lenguaje utilizado en una novela reciente con el fin de encontrar la representación de la identidad y las ideologías del lenguaje (o lenguas) utilizadas en la literatura paraguaya moderna. La obra seleccionada para el análisis es una novela galardonada a nivel nacional en la que el autor utilizó

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las diferentes variaciones lingüísticas entre la población paraguaya. La investigación se organiza con una introducción para contextualizar el estudio, incluyendo una revisión de la literatura para mostrar lo que ya se ha hecho sobre el mismo tema y marco teórico. El siguiente paso implica analizar los datos recolectados; estos datos están compuestos por extractos que muestran diferentes usos del lenguaje tanto en la narrativa como en el discurso de los personajes. Después de agruparlos por características similares, se describieron dentro del marco teórico. Posteriormente, se presentaron los resultados mostrando las diferentes actitudes que el libro muestra hacia ambas lenguas (español y guaraní), demostrando las ideologías subyacentes hacia los hablantes de ambas lenguas, marcadas también por su origen (hablantes rurales vs. hablantes de ciudad). Estos resultados muestran que la representación que hizo el autor es precisa pero exagerada, y describe cómo el guaraní sigue asociado a la clase baja de la población mientras que el español es la lengua de los educados.

Palabras clave: Literatura paraguaya; Guaraní; Español paraguayo; ideologías lingüísticas; identidad lingüística; actitudes lingüísticas.

Introduction

Background - The literature

Paraguayan literature is not widely known on a global scale, particularly after the "*Boom latinoamericano*" (Latin American Boom) era, during which Augusto Roa Bastos emerged as one of the region's greatest writers among the biggest names of Latin American literature. Since then, there have been no major authors from Paraguay who have achieved significant global recognition.

As of today, Roa Bastos' works are the only ones that can be easily found, for example, in Taiwanese university libraries as well as in other countries and translated into several languages. While Paraguay is well-known in the field of Sociolinguistics as a bilingual country, with numerous scholars including data on it, the sociolinguistic analysis of literary works from Paraguay is quite scarce or even nonexistent.

According to Roa's explanation (cited in Benisz, 2014), the "absence" of Paraguayan literature does not refer to the empirical fact of whether Paraguayan works and writers exist or not, but rather to the failure to establish the fundamental pillars of a national literature that constitutes a cohesive body of work.

“Hablo de esta literatura existente, entendida no como carencia de algunas buenas obras del género narrativo, sino como inexistencia de un *corpus* de obras cualitativamente ligadas por denominadores comunes” (Benisz, 2014, p. 24).

Here Roa speaks of this existing literature, understood not as a lack of some good works in the narrative genre, but as the nonexistence of a corpus of works qualitatively linked by common denominators.

Background - The novel

Tragedy, adventure, excitement, anarchy in fateful days, deaths, disappearances, and exile in this novel that take place in the first quarter of the twentieth century, in a turbulent period of Paraguay's history.

It develops a dramatic story that takes place during a raid of *montoneros* (rebels) in a ranch. A 14-year-old girl is abused by a drunken soldier; a child is born and grows up without knowing the truth of his origin. Concealment and deception to save the honor of the girl-mother. Hate and revenge, love and forgiveness, all this in this novel by Maribel Barreto. (*Hijo de la revolución*, 2019).

She is also the author of textbooks, novels, essays, and children's books. National Literature Award 2019.

Background - The language

As mentioned before, the coexistence of Spanish and Guarani in Paraguay has been written in many books in the Linguistics field, specifically in Sociolinguistics publications. There are though different approaches and opinions regarding the situation of bilingualism in Paraguay.

Pic-Guillard (2004), as cited in Alcaraz* (2020), refers to this situation as "the myth of a bilingual country" explaining that the legal status of bilingualism and the actual usage of both languages have various nuances that need to be analyzed and neither of them can be taken for granted.

Melià (1997) asserts that "Paraguay is bilingual, but only a few Paraguayans are bilinguals," highlighting the distinction between social bilingualism and individual bilingualism.

According to the National Institute of Statistics in its permanent household survey from 2021, there are more people who consider themselves bilingual than those who are monolingual in either Spanish or Guarani (*Última Hora*, 02/21/2022). This last piece of information can depict how important both languages are, socially speaking.

All of this background fostered curiosity and served as the motivation to undertake this research, organized around the research questions.

- 1) How does the novel portray language attitudes and ideologies within Paraguayan society, particularly regarding social class and rural-urban dynamics, and how do these attitudes shape language identity?
- 2) What linguistic markers or language choices in the novel indicate social class distinctions among the characters, and how does this influence their language identity?
- 3) In what ways does the author use language representation and narrative techniques to convey language attitudes, ideologies, and the negotiation of language identities?

Literature Review

Language identity

For this study, it is used the approach suggested by Bucholtz and Hall (2005). They stated five fundamental aspects that highlight the connection between language and identity.

- 1) Identity is not something you have; but is something you do. Instead, identities are constructed through social behavior. Self-labeling (e.g., 'gay' or 'straight'), or indirect indices which indicate sexuality within a particular culture (e.g., rainbows as a symbol of LGBTQ identification).
- 2) There are multiple levels of identity. These include identification with enduring social categories but also situational roles and interactional stances of similarity and difference.
- 3) Various linguistic means can be used to construct identities. Explicit naming, or the use of a particular language to index an identity.
- 4) Identities are constructed in relation to other people.
- 5) Numerous factors contribute to the formation and development of identities. It can be unconscious; It may be imposed upon individuals by others; (Kroskrity 2000, 113) or they may be severely constrained by others' perceptions (Bucholtz and Hall 2005).

* Ladislaa Alcaraz is the Minister Secretary of Linguistic Policies in Paraguay since 2013.

Language ideologies

As cited in in Kroskrity (2000) Irvine and Gal conducted research on the mediating role of language ideologies, specifically focusing on linguistic variability across different populations, places, and time periods. They developed three analytical tools, namely iconization, fractal recursivity, and erasure, which are based on semiotic principles and are effective in uncovering productive patterns in language-ideological understanding.

The researchers argue that these language-ideological processes are universal and have a significant impact on both the formation of linguistic differentiation and the creation of linguistic description. In other words, language ideologies play a crucial role in shaping how languages are perceived and understood, influencing the way linguistic differences are conceptualized and described. The three underlying features mentioned, namely iconization, fractal recursivity, and erasure, are fundamental aspects that contribute to language-ideological reasoning.

Gal and Irvine's (1995) *Iconicity, erasure, and recursivity* framework helps to analyze the ideologies that the languages undergo in the process of shaping the perception of the users. The relationship between language and social groups is seen as *iconic*: language does not just index a social group but is perceived as sharing features with it. *Erasure* occurs when certain information about languages is ignored in order to support a particular ideology. Relationships between languages are *recursive*, meaning that they are repeated on different linguistic levels.

Language attitudes and ideologies

In this framework, the scope downs to the Paraguayan situation regarding the languages that coexist there: Spanish and Guaraní. Being one the language that was brought to the *new world* by the colonizers, and the other, the auctoconous language spoken by one of the many indigenous groups, the differences are several. They are both different in terms of family, structure and, what is the matter in this paper, status. The functional concepts usually are “the language of the conqueror” (Spanish) and “the language of the conquered” (Guaraní) (Melià 1997).

In the words of Melià (1997), the use of Spanish or Guaraní obeys sociolinguistic norms that are discriminatory; the Spanish language acquires the characteristics of the language of domination, while Guaraní appears as the language of the dominated.

What people think of these languages is influenced by how people use them. The use of Spanish or Guaraní is governed in Paraguay by social factors and by regional factors because it is fundamentally dislocated in two semantic fields that hardly overlap. Spanish is of the middle and high class, it covers almost the entire field of expression, whether technical, administrative, or colloquial; on the other hand, Guaraní cannot penetrate certain semantic fields, specifically those of science and technology.

Alcaraz (2020) took Melià's ideas and reexplains that Guaraní, the majority language, has been minorized; this is an attitudinal factor that to this day has had an impact on the recovery of its position in society as a language positively valued and considered a valid language for formal uses. As a popular language of the colloquial level, it is highly appreciated and used in the family, in the community, and with friends. It is the language of relationships based on trust. The perception of people diverges depending on whether they are considering Spanish or Guaraní individually or in relation to each other.

Later on, Shaw N. Gynan (2004) conducted a quantitative analysis, using a survey about language attitudes as a tool in order to have a more accurate answer on what people really think, not only inferences based on perceptions. The results of this study were satisfactory in terms of data and could help to depict better what Melià has said way before.

Complaints about Guaraní texts are raised informally, particularly by monolingual Spanish speakers who perceive the largest gap between the texts and the spoken norm. Monolingual Guaraní speakers also report a significant difference but hold a positive attitude toward the written standard of Guaraní.

Bilingual groups, including monolingual Guaraní speakers, exhibit more positive attitudes toward the new norm compared to the monolingual Spanish group, which expresses the most negativity.

Additionally, monolingual Spanish speakers hold negative attitudes toward the variety known as *jopara* and use it less compared to other language groups. Monolingual Spanish speakers clearly exhibit more negative attitudes towards *jopara*, which is associated with the use of Guaraní rather than Spanish; when monolingual Spanish speakers encounter *jopara*, they may perceive it as a deviation from the standard Spanish they are accustomed to, leading to their negative attitudes towards it.

In 2011, Shaw N. Gynan revised the situation of Guaraní in contact with Spanish for *The handbook of Spanish Sociolinguistics*. On attitudinal dimensions of Paraguayan bilingualism, he mentioned that Melià had observed that in present times, Paraguayans perceive the Guaraní language as a defining element of their identity, both for themselves and in how they are defined by others. On the other hand, the state, through its policies and communication, identifies itself primarily through the use of Spanish because of its economic power, despite the 1992 Constitution declaring Spanish and Guaraní as official languages of Paraguay (Melià, 2005). Another great work that he considered was Joan Rubin's pioneering study on Paraguayan bilingualism revealed contrasting attitudes toward the country's two main languages. Guaraní is linked to national identity, while Spanish is seen as having greater economic value (in Gynan, 2011). In summary, despite the time gap, the studies conducted by Melià (2005), and Rubin (1968) highlight the contrasting perceptions of language in Paraguay, with Guaraní being linked to national identity and Spanish being valued for its economic significance.

Finally, Gynan concluded that Paraguayan Spanish is not a language that is heavily influenced by the indigenous Guaraní language. While speakers of Guaraní who are less proficient in Spanish may exhibit interference between the two languages, this interference is more commonly observed among less-educated individuals who are usually native Guaraní speakers. Among the more educated population, who tend to have Spanish as their native language, the interference phenomena described tend to disappear.

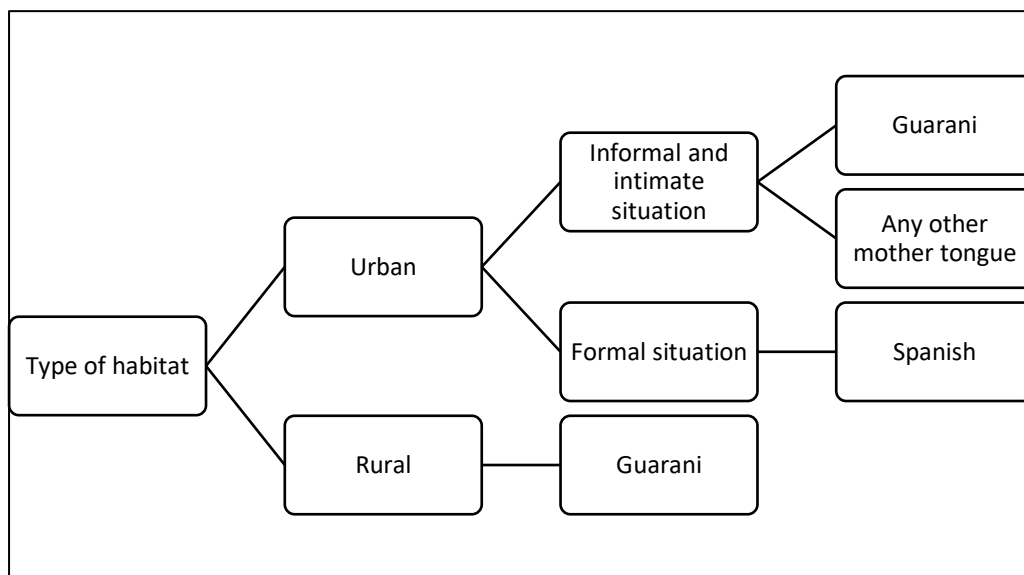
However, Choi (1998) presented significant data suggesting that even among Spanish-speaking individuals, there are patterns of preference for non-standard forms. These preferences may indicate a convergence towards certain linguistic features that deviate from standard Spanish.

In summary, the statement highlights that while interference between Guaraní and Spanish is more prominent among less-educated Guaraní speakers, educated individuals, whose native language is Spanish, tend to show fewer interference phenomena. Nonetheless, there may still be preferences for non-standard forms among Spanish speakers, indicating a certain level of convergence. This can explain, then, that is Spanish non-standard use is not strictly influenced by Guaraní.

Language choices

José Luis Blas Arroyo (2004) took into consideration Rubin’s work as well. This mention supports the framework of language choices of the Paraguayan population. What, as interpreted by Arroyo, Joan argues in the late sixties, is shown in the graph 1:

Graph 1. Language choices in Paraguay, according to Rubin (1968)



This is a strong visual statement that shows how widespread Guarani is.

According to the Cambridge Dictionary:

We use formal language in situations that are serious or that involve people we don’t know well. Informal language is more commonly used in situations that are more relaxed and involve people we know well.

Formal language is more common when we write, informal language is more common when we speak. However, there are times when writing can be very informal, for example, when writing postcards or letters to friends, emails, or text messages. There are also examples where spoken English can be very formal, for example, in a speech or a lecture. Most uses of English are neutral; that is, they are neither formal nor informal.

Formal scenarios or scenarios where a formal language choice is needed are fewer than informal ones, and therefore less chosen. What, as explained previously, changes the perception is that having to choose Spanish as the formal language exclusively, gives it the status that Guarani does not have and furthermore, bias and shape the users’ attitudes and perception about both languages.

Methodology

The methodology for this study involves identifying the dialogues that showcase the specific features to be analyzed. Once the relevant dialogues are identified, excerpts are extracted and classified based on their similar characteristics.

The next step is to group the extracted excerpts together for a more systematic and organized analysis of the features under investigation.

After the classification process, the researcher proceeds to explain the found features. This involves providing a detailed analysis and interpretation of the identified characteristics,

discussing their significance, and exploring possible connections or implications within the context of the study.

By following this methodology, researchers can effectively analyze dialogues and gain a deeper understanding of the features present within them, contributing to the overall analysis and interpretation of the data.

Data and source choice

Why this novel and how it can be useful and meaningful:

This novel won the National Literature Award in 2019, and it's analyzed in college literature courses as a historical novel due to the historical episodes that are narrated through the characters.

The author attempts to use colloquial language in the text falling into some Spanish variations (regional, social), and code-switching with Guaraní, although most of the text is written in Spanish. That language choice has been analyzed as if it was some technique to make the book "more international" (Pintasilgo, 2023). This linguistic setting throughout the book has made me want to review what it is showing to the world.

Professor of Spanish Language and Literary Theory. She was president of the Paraguayan Writers Society (SEP), vice-president of Associated Paraguayan Women Writers (EPA), and vice-president of the Paraguayan Academy of Language. This way, she represents a local expertise as well as a respected scholar in the fields of language, literature and education.

Analysis

The diverse extracts are grouped in two: bosses' language, representing the higher-class characters; and workers' language, representing the employees, peasants and lower class characters in general. This grouping also goes under two cross-cutting concepts of classification: language variation and bilingualism.

Language variation

Labovian sociolinguistics emphasizes the study of language variation in relation to social factors and how it reflects and shapes social identities and relationships. It examines the different linguistic features, such as pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, that are associated with specific social groups or contexts.

The concept of language variation highlights that language is not static but constantly evolves and adapts within different social settings. By analyzing language variation, researchers can gain insights into the social dynamics, power structures, and identity construction within a community or society.

Bosses' language

This portrayal shows the choice of very educated lexical items such as in (1), as well as the phonetical representation of standard Spanish, meaning it's full represented in contrary to what it shows in the workers' excerpts.[†]

- (1) a. Los caminos de Dios son insondables.
- b. God's ways are unfathomable

[†] Examples are not italicized, instead, corrections of the vernacular Spanish are italicized, and Guaraní words are bold faced.

Workers' language

The language in (2) showcases how the author includes Guaraní words in the utterance as well as the phonetical representation of vernacular Spanish in the ellipsis of the grapheme (-s) as the plural marker as well as the (-n) in the plural conjugation of the verbs. Specially the /-s/ in coda position dropping is a mark of the Paraguayan Spanish (José Ignacio Hualde, 2014).

- (2) La señora, aquí *vamo* a pasar la noche, *lo bueye ko necesita*
 a. alimentarse como *lo caballo* y *debe* tomar agua aquí en el arroyo y descansar.
 b. Señora, aquí *vamos* a pasar la noche, *los bueyes necesitan* alimentarse como *los caballos* y deben tomar agua aquí en el arroyo y descansar.
 b. Ma'am, we're spending the night here, the oxen need to be fed like the horses and should drink water here in the creek and rest.

Bosses' language

- (3) a. Veré cómo están las cosas... y luego volveré a Asunción.
 b. I will see how things are... and then I will return to Asunción.

In (3) there is a counterpart to (2a): tense choices. In the bosses' language there is a preference for the usage of simple future (represented on an independent conjugation in Spanish) whereas as it can be seen in (2), the workers' language presents the verb periphrasis *be + going to (ir + a + infinitive)* in Spanish). This is also a regional variation, associated with the region called *Río de la Plata* that includes Paraguay, Argentina, and Uruguay (RAE, 2010).

Workers' language

- (4) a. La señora, aquí *vamo* a pasar la noche...
 b. Señora, aquí *vamos* a pasar la noche...
 c. Ma'am, we're spending the night here
- (5) a. Señora, *vamo* a cenar ya, *sentimo* hambre.
 b. Señora, *vamos* a cenar ya, *sentimos* hambre.
 c. Ma'am, we're having dinner already, we're hungry.
- (6) a. Toribio primero va a quedar de guardia, *depué ko* yo *via* guardar.
 c. Toribio primero va a quedar de guardia, *después* yo *voy a* guardar.
 b. Toribio will be on guard first, then I will be on guard.

In these excerpts of the workers utterances, it is shown how the author continuously worked the use of the verbal periphrasis *be going to + infinitive*, and in (6a) it can be seen the phonetical representation of the contraction of the going to future (like English *gonna*) in *via* representing *voy a* in the way people say it orally.

Bilingualism and code-switching

As for this, it is used (Su, 2015) explanation as code-switching involves the intermingling of elements from multiple languages or dialects within a single sentence or conversation. While there may be debates surrounding the specific terminology of code-switching and code-mixing, the term "code-switching" is commonly used to encompass both phenomena.

Bosses' language

- (7) a. Un rato después, la viejita murió **aichenjáranga**.
 b. A moment later, the old lady died poor thing.
- (8) a. Los **tahachi** son débiles y flaquitos.
 b. The police officers are weak and skinny.

The choice of Guaraní here is not functional in terms of grammar, but it is in terms of semantics. The intention of the words is more likely to be emphatic within the dialogues and interaction.

Workers' language

- (9) a. Vos **ko** solés pesar el algodón *de nosotros*.
 b. Vos solés pesar *nuestro algodón*.
 c. You usually weigh our cotton.
- (10) a. Es el lugar donde se queda los carreteros *kuéra*.
 b. Es el lugar donde se quedan los carreteros.
 c. It's the place where the cart drivers rest.
- (11) a. ¿vos *piko* no sos el hijo de don Emilio Recalde?
 c. ¿Vos no sos el hijo de don Emilio Recalde?
 b. Aren't you Mr. Emilio Recalde's son?

In these excerpts there are several things going on. First of all, the presence of Guaraní is deeper than just the usage of some words. In (9a) there is a syntactic calque, which is a very common phenomenon among bilingual Paraguayans (Penner et al, 2012), therefore it does not correspond at all with standard Spanish, in fact, the assimilation of this structure it is ungrammatical. Secondly, the usage of function words from Guaraní, even though they are meaningless in Spanish sentences, is presented only by the workers, showing a major control of Guaraní. These are the question marker *piko*, and the plural marker *kuéra*.

Conclusions

Firstly, when it comes to the ideology presented in the work, the novel shows a clear difference between the language portrait of different social classes represented on one side by the educated boss family. These people in their different roles (soldiers, teacher, landowner) are in a higher power position which can be demonstrated by the standardization of the language of use. As the setting suggests, the characters are people of high economic power that are always close to the opposite party of the government, living their lives in both their ranch in the countryside and the capital (by the time, the only metropolis).

On the other hand, the poor people, portrayed by the peasants, employees and specially the land laborers use of their vernacular language, a variety of Spanish mixed with the Guaraní stratus that is called *jopara* which literally means “mix” since is a noun as the result of being mixed. This *jopara* understood as the mere presence of Guaraní in the intended Spanish utterances is associated with less education (Rubin, 1968. Gynan, 2011. Melia, 2005, Alcaraz 2020).

This can account for the ideology of the language standard associating it to the class/environment where the users belong to as well as their own identity even though this information cannot be taken out of the characters.

Secondly, the examples extracted are very clear regarding the second research question, about the linguistic markers or language choices in the novel that indicate social class distinctions among the characters, and how does this influence their language identity. Here it could be shown how functional and structural Guaraní influence is only associated to the low class, whereas the standard -and even over-standard- Spanish is associated with higher class and its implications (they have the economy and social power, as well as a higher education, probably by that time, some peasants were not educated at all).

Finally, the third question, regarding the ways the author uses language representation and narrative techniques to convey language attitudes, ideologies, and the negotiation of language identities. It can be stated that the representation of the language that the author shows is inaccurate and exaggerated, tending to use a language that countryside people don't use (high educated vocabulary and grammar correctness, as well as non-existent use of functional Guaraní). This accounts to show the identity of the differences between social classes and the attitudes that Paraguayan languages undergo as well as the ideologies of the standard language as a gesture of power and higher hierarchy.

Based on all the literature that had been reviewed, this portrayal is not accurate with the language choices of Paraguayan people still decades after the time set of the novel (Rubin, 1968. Choi, 1998) where formality is the main setting for the dominant language, and even more for its standardization.

The limitation of this work lies in its narrow scope, as it focuses on the analysis of a single work due to limitations of time and access to other texts. Therefore, further research could be conducted to broaden the investigation.

There are several books written by the same author, as well as other works set in the same historical period as the one being analyzed. These additional sources could potentially be considered to identify patterns in both the author's language usage and how other authors depict this era, and this way complement these conclusions.

It should be noted that this study does not rely on empirical data, and therefore, cannot be regarded as a reflection of real beliefs and attitudes. However, it could suggest the need for further research on the topic to build upon the existing scholarship cited throughout the paper.

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