LINGUISTIC STIGMA AND POWER SURROUNDING THE SPEAKERS OF *LUNFARDO* AND *COCOLICHE* IN EARLY 20TH CENTURY BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

by

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This paper examines the role of language as it relates to the stigma, discrimination, and ethnic exclusion of speakers of the Spanish-Italian contact languages *cocoliche* and *lunfardo* in Buenos Aires, Argentina during the early 20th century through an analysis of how various theater and popular representations propagated this harmful imagery and stigma. The research draws on existing literature and historical evidence of a high volume of Italian immigration to Argentina over nearly a century and the resulting social subjugation of those immigrants. Through imagery presented in carnivals and theater that represented Italian immigrants as buffoons or uneducated and speakers of a Spanish-Italian contact language as criminals and unworthy citizens, the *porteño* (local) class identified a language with harmful stereotypes. This research has implications for the consideration of contact languages and their value and how they contribute to social hierarchies of prestige languages and who is given power or higher status based on their linguistic expression.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

The use of *lunfardo* and *cocoliche*, two contact languages that combine aspects of Spanish and Italian in the Río de la Plata Basin in Argentina in the late 19th century (Kaplan iii), marked its speakers as first- or second-generation Italian (Ennis 130, 132-133). These speakers, predominantly working-class people who lived in *conventillos* (subsidized government housing for immigrants) and worked in the railroad and agriculture industries, mining, construction, and unskilled positions, and as artisans, sought to make their lives within *rioplatense* contexts. As they integrated into aspects of social, cultural, and economic life, they continued culinary, religious, musical, familial, and other Italian cultural practices while incorporating Argentinian lifeways. Linguistically, the dual pressures of Spanish acquisition and Italian retention led to the creation of *lunfardo* and *cocoliche.* This leads to questions about the perceptions of language use and ethnicity in impacting everyday experiences in *rioplatense* society. In this thesis, I ask: How do language and ethnicity shape the social status of *lunfardo* and *cocoliche* speakers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Buenos Aires, Argentina?

Speakers of *cocoliche* and *lunfardo* faced social stigma because their language marked their identity, positioning Italian immigrants—the speakers of *lunfardo* and *cocoliche*—as inferior to native Argentinians and Spanish speakers. The motivation for this thesis is to explore the social status surrounding Italian-immigrant communities in Argentina and to reveal the relationship between their status as immigrants from Italy, or immigrant descendants, and how that status relates to the language they used. Social stigma of Italian-descended people in Argentina, my research suggests, was communicated through social subordination, discrimination, and ethnic exclusion regarding their place in Argentinian society. This thesis will examine the social stigma and prestige surrounding the Italian-descended speakers of contact

languages in Argentina, specifically in the Río de la Plata Basin, the area surrounding Buenos Aires. The stigmatization that speakers of *lunfardo* and *cocoliche* faced in Argentina resulted from xenophobia towards Italian ethnicity and the role in Argentine society that they were asked to step into; this stigma transfers by association to their speechways and the language they use to be targeted as a marker of their *otherness* in Buenos Aires to maintain the general subordination of Italian immigrants there. Moreover, this thesis examines the languages themselves and their impact on culture and the resulting stigma in certain fields due to the power dynamics between various socioeconomic groups and the perceptions of those of lower classes. Additionally, this research connects stigma and power to language and unpacks how these dynamics relate to and can cause one another.

In the thesis, I draw on theater critiques and reviews about artists and writers like Florencio Sánchez, a Uruguayan playwright, to gain insight into the experience of those speaking the languages *lunfardo* and *cocoliche* (Ramirez, Sanhueza). My analysis is of critiques of various kinds of theater and performance that included representations of *lunfardo* or *cocoliche* speakers. I will be examining the ways in which the perceptions of the languages circulated culturally and were exacerbated by the popularity of stereotypical images of Italian immigrants in some of the works mentioned above.

This thesis will examine sources that include evaluations of the impact that Italian immigration had on the social dynamics and culture in Buenos Aires and how their role in Argentina developed and influenced literature, music, dance, and other important aspects of the culture that shape the mainstream Argentine identity. I will also use a database of Argentine newspapers from this period to make my argument and examine the circulation of perceptions of the languages among the public, the elite, and the working classes.

Historical Background

Cocoliche and *Lunfardo*

Cocoliche, while no longer in use, was a transitional language, a combination of Italian and Spanish. The interaction of two language systems occurs when social and geographic circumstances lead speakers to be in close proximity. These languages in Buenos Aires, examples of what sociolinguists call "contact languages" were, more specifically, created due to language shift and interference in the acquisition of Spanish by Italian immigrants, maintaining sounds and morphosyntactic structures and containing representative phonemic and lexico-semantic features from Italian (Italiano-McGreevy ii, xiii, 3). In other words, *cocoliche* was created through the adoption of meanings, sentence structures, and sounds from Argentine Spanish and several Italian variants, most from Piemonte, Lombardia, Calabria, Sicilia, and Campania but also from other areas of Italy such as Liguria, Veneto, and Toscana (Kaplan 44, Italiano-McGreevy 103, Ennis 136-137, Conde 6, A. Cancellier 74, qtd. in Moosekian 3, qtd. in Soledad Gonzalez 110). When Spanish and Italian came into contact, the two mixed to create *cocoliche* but had no formal written structure as Italian immigrants shifted to accommodate the target prestige language: *rioplatense* Spanish (Spanish spoken by people living in the Río de la Plata region). With a highly variable linguistic system, or lack thereof, *cocoliche* was not strictly maintained over time as there was no firm boundary between Spanish and Italian, facilitating its constant change and evolution, and contributing to the ultimate demise of the language as more linguistic assimilation took place. *Cocoliche* is also unique in that it has roots as an archetype and stage character (Conde 19) in a visiting carnival who spoke Spanish with a heavy Italian accent while mixing the two languages (Italiano-McGreevy xii, 4). The *cocoliche* was also a character in the Argentine *sainetes*, a popular theatrical genre of one-act, three-scene plays that

reflected the struggles of the immigrant working class and their challenges assimilating (Ennis 128, A. Cancellier 75, qtd. in Italiano-McGreevy 30), bringing with it specific ideologies and stereotypes connected to the language as much as the character of Italian immigrants mixing their language with the Argentine Spanish.

Lunfardo is a body of vocabulary and expressions used in conjunction with the standard variety of Spanish used in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and the greater Río de la Plata region. *Lunfardo* originated from an argot, a popular speech created on the margin of the official vocabulary of the area or people (Schijman), and was created as a sort of code meant to be exclusive to those who knew it. It was common to those then in prison and gradually became integrated into the vernacular of the greater Buenos Aires area, disseminating among various groups of different socioeconomic statuses. *Lunfardo* is often described (in Spanish) using the words "*lenguaje*" or "*léxico*" (a lexicon) referring to the grammar and semantics or a body of vocabulary rather than a formal language because it lacks elements like a unique syntactic structure. Rather, *lunfardo* borrows its syntax from *castellano*, the inherited Spanish of Spain, brought by Spanish colonizers to Argentina in the early 16th century.

Context of Immigration Policy and Patterns

Cocoliche and *lunfardo* formed in Argentina beginning around the end of the 19th century due to two large waves of Italian immigration: the first from the late 19th century through the early 20th century and the second before, during, and after World War II. These waves were catalyzed by various historical events such as the Industrial Revolution, World War I, the rise of Benito Mussolini's Fascist state, and World War II (Moosekian 2-3). Specifically, during the first wave between 1876 and 1920, a peak of Italian immigration to Argentina, the country took in more than 2 million Italian immigrants, largely from the Southern regions of Italy (Kaplan 56-

57, qtd. in Italian-McGreevy 41, Conde 6). This created part of the largest voluntary migration in modern history (Kaplan iii) bringing a large influx of working-class people to the area of Buenos Aires. As immigrants and new to the working class, Italians faced judgment from Argentinians, especially those of higher classes, but they became important to the greater society because Italian immigration and artistic development were both key to the development of a strong national culture (Kaplan 14). Italian immigrants became unskilled workers in Buenos Aires and farmers in Las Pampas, living in the *conventillos*, government-subsidized communal immigrant housing where residents experienced similar social and economic pressure (Italiano-McGreevy 21, 23-24). With the development of the rail and port systems in Argentina due to the increased role in agriculture and the Atlantic market (Ennis 116), immigrants were meant to fill the labor shortage for unwanted jobs in construction, mining, agriculture, and in the railway infrastructure (Italiano-McGreevy 75, Kaplan 58). In addition to the *porteño* class—local residents of Buenos Aires (Kaplan iii)—immigrants took up lands formerly owned and controlled by the indigenous populations to help with the agricultural demand. The vast majority, more than 75 percent of the labor by Italian immigrants, was in agriculture or as unskilled laborers, about 10 percent were artisans, and about 3 percent worked in commerce or as professionals (Baily 54). Locals saw this as an invasion of the local labor market by unwanted people which caused tensions and competition between the incoming migrants from Italy and the local Argentinians, leading to increased discrimination and subjugation against Italian immigrants.

During the first wave of immigration from the mid-1870s to mid-1920s, Argentina had opened its doors to European immigrants as a means of attracting a labor force that would also bring a spirit of progress, improvement to the contemporaneous morals, and a practical cultural perspective. The Argentine government also incentivized European immigration by granting free

or to-be-paid-in-installments land to immigrants. Argentina, like many other countries in the Americas, expressed an explicit preference for European immigration from the mid-19th century until the 21st century. The first mandate of this sort in the Argentine Constitution in 1853 stated: "The Federal Government shall foster European immigration and shall not restrict, limit or tax in any way the entry of foreigners who come to the Argentine territory with the purpose of working the land, improving industry, and introducing and teaching the sciences and the arts" (FitzGerald 299). The country did limit or exclude the Romani and eventually Jews, yet did not institute other racial or ethnic exclusions, making Argentina more open than most other countries in the Americas, most of which had at least one restricted category in place. Argentina's immigration policy approached its desire to "whiten" the population with a lack of fear that certain European populations would be a threat, although this does not negate the racial prejudices likely harbored by the population. Argentina received the most European immigrants compared to any other country in Latin America because it sought to populate the large amount of land in its territory. The rapidly expanding economy in Argentina caused this pro-immigration policy, creating a reputation as being welcoming to all immigrants. By the turn of the 20th century, a third of the population of Argentina was not native and most were a part of the working class.

An aspect of the strong desire for European immigration that goes beyond just the political borders was the desire for a perceived "modernity" (FitzGerald 300) of immigrants that fit with the common perception of Europeans. This resulted in immigration incentives for that area, though it was not limited or strictly followed (FitzGerald 300-301). Because Argentina did not restrict immigrants ethnically, as many other countries did, the country received more European immigrants than any other. By 1932, Argentina had received about 12 percent of all European immigrants that came to the Americas in the century prior (FitzGerald 302), all before

the second large wave occurred. This influx was due to varying political and economic factors both domestically and abroad. In the Americas, newfound political stability beginning in the 1860s made possible the expropriation of lands formerly controlled by the indigenous populations (FitzGerald 303), as well as technological advancements that allowed Argentina to gain a foothold in the agricultural market around the Atlantic. These political, technological, and economic changes that Argentina experienced, and the increase of European emigration and more lenient departure policies (FitzGerald 303) created a significant incentive for immigrants to move to Argentina and satisfy the demand for labor there.

Immigrants to Argentina were primarily from Spain and Italy but also arrived from other Western European countries, Poland, Russia, the Middle East, and Japan (FitzGerald 303) and they were encouraged to come and lend themselves to the desired modernity the nation sought. For this reason, while there was a stated preference for European immigrants, Argentina did not rule out non-European immigrants because the desired skills and usefulness of immigrant populations could also be found from other regions. Although racial criteria were not stated in the Citizenship Law of 1869, the state viewed Europeans as likely to be easily controlled, demonstrating a positive discrimination for European citizens (FitzGerald 308). Unlike other countries in the Americas receiving immigrants, Argentina's immigration policy did not limit or tax any immigrant's entry (FitzGerald 305) as the country needed to fill a severe labor shortage in order to keep up with its place in the Atlantic economy. Immigrant residents could own property, be hired by the government, engage in business, and could move around Argentina without restrictions (FitzGerald 308).

As stated earlier, even though ethnic restrictions regarding immigration policies were not explicitly stated (in most cases), racist prejudices and beliefs still resided in the Argentine

population. The Argentine elite demonstrated a preference for the "right kind of European" or northwestern Europeans that exhibited certain political and working or social class traits or lack thereof (e.g., revolutionaries, communists, socialists, etc.) (FitzGerald 312). These beliefs about an immigrant's morality could be found in the documentary control established in 1916 to filter out those who had been recently involved in crimes against the social order and people who presumably relied on public beneficence rather than working for a multitude of reasons (FitzGerald 313). In 1923, then-President Alvear implemented a series of administrative restrictions regarding medical and social reasons to deny migrants entry to Argentina, even as the country still lacked formal ethnic restrictions. This increase in restrictions coincided with the rise of the Eugenics Movement and racially motivated belief of the existence of a science-backed racial hierarchy across the world and in its peak in Argentina (FitzGerald 315).

The second of the largest waves of Italian immigration to Argentina came during the period surrounding World War II and peaked in 1949. Still in need of immigrants, President Perón stated a desire for migrants mainly from Spain and Italy who were skilled and healthy, and who were likely to culturally assimilate and be useful economically to Argentina (FitzGerald 318). This official immigration policy characterized by a preference for a system of selection based on the characteristics of the immigrant in terms of their aptitude for assimilation into the Argentine culture and as non-threats to the authority of the state persists through today in the current version (updated in 1994) of the National Constitution (FitzGerald 330). The notable difference between this policy that was in the books, though, and the actual practices was the discretion that government agents had in excluding certain ethnic groups often hidden behind the veil of selecting immigrants based on their supposed aptitude for Argentine society (FitzGerald 324).

The history of immigration and immigration policy in Argentina and the influx of European migrants over a century has heavily influenced the Argentine identity that was desired, and the culture that the country wanted to build and maintain. Italians played into and were accepted as part of the modern and moral group of migrants expected to make Argentina better and filled a labor shortage created by the expropriation of previously indigenous-held lands. The conflict between the lack of ethnic restrictions and the actual practice of cherry-picking certain characteristics of migrants based on the discretion of the immigration officers and bureaucracy sharpened the focus on groups like Italians as suitable immigrants. However, even though Italians were heavily desired and seen as a more than acceptable class of people, there was a contrasting elitism from Argentinian citizens that subjugated Italian immigrants for many reasons, including their language and their new role in Argentine society. For appearance's sake, Italians were the perfect group of immigrants, filling a labor shortage with (usually) limited participation in social revolution until the mid-20th century and being of a modernity and class that would have been readily accepted with the culture of perceived European supremacy. However, as this paper will elaborate, this did not preclude the Italian immigrants from social subjugation and discrimination that was heavily tied to their differing language use and the social class they occupied upon their arrival.

Languages in Contact

While languages are socially constructed and "different languages (and language varieties) exist in the sense that they have cognitive and social meaning for speakers" (Fuller and Leeman 230), languages in contact rely greatly on the social and ideological context of the people involved in their classification, reputation, and social standing. Languages in contact between people speaking different languages can result in the natural borrowing of a few words

or new languages being formed. These results differ due to the length and intensity of contact, the relationship between the groups (e.g., social, economic, and political), what drives communication between groups without a common language, and if or how their languages differ (Winford). This can happen because of migration and at language borders, and due to the need to achieve communicative efficiency adequate for the purpose of the interaction and the need to preserve a distinct sense of group identity (Winford). When languages come into contact, the change can be the borrowing of new words or a combination of the two languages, codeswitching and translanguaging of speakers, the creation of new languages, and other changes that blend together two tongues. Codeswitching refers to the "alternation or combination of different languages or varieties within a conversation or utterance" (Fuller 82) and translanguaging refers to a concept that recognizes that "in interaction, people may draw from linguistic resources distributed across the boundaries of what have traditionally been labeled as distinct languages" (qtd. in Fuller 82). Language contact also impacts the social relationships between two peoples, as they may be of different or similar social statuses. This convergence can impact relationships between them from the stereotyped attitudes towards each language, the social and political relationships between peoples, the breakdown of the community into subgroups, etc. (Bakkar 363-364). Therefore, these are important considerations in evaluating languages that come in contact or those that form from contact.

"*Una lengua* criolla *generalmente se define como una lengua híbrida que evoluciona muchas veces de un* pidgin*. Las lenguas* pidgin *son sistemas de comuncación extremadamente rudimentarios creados por hablantes que no comparten una lengua en común y que entran en interacción habitual, pero con propósitos muy limitados* [A creole language is typically defined as a hybrid language that, in many cases, develops from a pidgin. Pidgin languages are widely

considered to be systems of communication that are extremely rudimentary [(disputed quality (Chang; Gray))] and are created by speakers that don't share a common language and that interact habitually, but for very limited purposes]" (Klee 81). There is also a connection between pidgin languages and colonialism due to the contact between the language of the colonizers and that of the people being colonized (Hall 125). This connection with colonialist practices of contact has been observed to be between typically dominant or prestige languages and those of the communities being colonized. Many of the known or observed pidgins and creoles that were created out of contact between European colonizers and the native people are often based partially in European languages like English and several Romance Languages.

Another consideration of the existing literature is the research and debate about the term pidgin and the social status of pidgin languages—and closely related creoles. There is an extensive body of research regarding many different pidgins and creoles around the world. So-called pidgin and creole languages are highly stigmatized and "[t]o those who speak European languages, pidgin sounds like a ludicrous mispronunciation of their own tongues; for that reason, it is often castigated as a 'bastard lingo' or 'gibberish,'" (Hall 124) lending to the negative reputation that pidgin languages can have. For instance, in 2015, "the U.S. Census Bureau […] recognize[d] Hawaiian Pidgin English as a [formal] language [category]," and "acknowledge[d] the legitimacy of a tongue widely stigmatized," (Wong *The Atlantic*). While this is incredibly important and "reinforces a long, grassroots effort by linguists and cultural practitioners to institutionalize and celebrate the language—to encourage educators to integrate it into their teaching, potentially elevating the achievement of Pidgin-speaking students," (Wong) it is problematic that pidgin languages and other stigmatized contact languages require legitimization by a formal entity to be recognized by a larger community. The expectation that contact

languages need validation from other sources only serves to reinforce the stigma they carry of being for un(der)educated and lower-class groups of people.

The Problematic Considerations of *Cocoliche* and *Lunfardo*

Cocoliche is often referred to as a so-called pidgin language because of the nature of its creation as the specific events that influenced the meeting of these two groups of people were influenced by colonialism, largely from Spanish coming to the Southern Cone through colonial missions during the 16th century. The term pidgin is contested by sociolinguists because of its reputation and stigma as a lower prestige form of communication than other supposedly formal languages. Some linguists do not consider so-called pidgins to be complete languages, although they are probably the minority. Pidgins also face criticism because they are not written which in popular, non-scholarly opinion, makes some believe that pidgins lack validity. This complicates the nature of *cocoliche* as a formal language and the background of its recognition and place in Argentine society. So-called pidgins have been defined as languages which develop in a situation of language contact and limited exposure to the target language (Wardhuagh 413) or a language that has no native speakers that develops as a means of communication between people who do not share a common language (Holmes 120). Pidgins are considered to have no native speakers, making it no one's native language. Not only does the term pidgin carry negative stigma but it also lends itself to defining *lunfardo* and *cocoliche* speakers as lacking any correlation with this language as a mother tongue when it adapts certain words and semantic information to create a mix of Spanish and Italian. *Cocoliche* adapts specific elements of both Spanish and Italian in the process of the language exchange through circumstance and learning the other language and adding in Italian speakers' own linguistic knowledge and background. *Cocoliche* is, rather, defined as a contact language in this paper to separate it from the stigma associated with being

described as a so-called pidgin which carries its own associations of perceived and assumed inferiority.

Cocoliche has also been considered a transitional language of Italians in Buenos Aires as they learned Spanish (Italiano-McGreevey, ix) which is problematic because of the way the term transitional implies that language exchange is linear and goes only in one direction and that Italian immigrants as a whole would immediately abandon their language to assimilate. *Lunfardo* has also been framed in problematic ways with terms that drive the stigma around languages and varieties that are considered to be less than or non-languages. *Lunfardo* has been defined as a dialectal Spanish variety of the Southern Cone's largest urban sprawl of Buenos Aires (Guillén, vii), the term dialect referring to a particular way of speaking, usually associated with a particular region or group of speakers (Wardhaugh 419) or any set of linguistic forms used under specific social circumstances (Holmes 692). The term "dialect" is problematic in considering languages because it invalidates the status of a language by defining it as less than a formal or supposedly "real" language.

Another important consideration of contact languages in general, but especially in the cases of *lunfardo* and *cocoliche*, is the political dimension of terms like pidgin, creole, dialect, etc., and the background and context of colonization or enslavement that usually accompanies discussions of languages like these. These languages are distanced from European languages which impacts the image of the people who speak the developing language because of their perceived subordinate position as the colonized, not the colonizer (Wardhaugh 254). This is a crucial consideration because of the way that language shapes ideologies and vice versa which greatly impacts the perceptions of languages as less than or not full languages, attaching an image or stereotype to the people who speak it.

With the literature explored so far, there are limited resources that investigate the relationship between social stigma and power and language in Argentina regarding *cocoliche* and *lunfardo*. These sources (Moosekian, Iribarren Castilla, Ennis) highlight the nature of the creation of both languages and how they interacted with the Italian immigrants by influencing their position or reputation in the greater Buenos Aires area based on the language they spoke and where they were from. Much of the stigma surrounding *lunfardo* and *cocoliche* speakers arose from a conflict between non-elite natives, who lashed out by mocking their foreign ways and ignorance, and Italian immigrants who filled a need for inexpensive labor and brought foreign words and language (Cara-Walker 38). The creation of *cocoliche* was, at its beginning, organic, truly a language built from contact between two peoples (Aimasso 32). *Lunfardo* "is the idiom of the Buenos Aires underworld, a thieves' cant comparable to English Alsatian and French *argot* […that was] deliberately coined to serve as a secret language which would be unintelligible to the uninitiated." (Grayson 66) It was created within the Argentine prison system and network of criminals as a language meant to protect them from being overheard by speaking in a language few knew. *Lunfardo*, regardless of having become a part of the everyday language of the higher-class people (Grayson 66), carries negative connotations with the broader Argentine population because of its association with crime and criminals and has negatively reflected on Italian immigrants and communities that spoke or speak *lunfardo* as a result.

Because of its association with crime, organizations like the Real Academia Española (RAE)—the Spanish language authority based in Spain—likened *lunfardo* to the French *argot* (Grayson 66), another unofficial language used by a specific class or group, largely criminalized people or those of a lower social class related to jargons associated with criminals (Conde 3). *Argot* has been identified as a slang that is currently in use in everyday life, in literature, and in

many other places by native speakers. Similarly, *lunfardo* and *cocoliche* are languages that remain unofficial but are used among specific social groups peoples. *Lunfardo's* stigma as a lexicon associated with criminals and lower social classes set the tone for generations of Argentinians to negatively associate *lunfardo* with the most undesirable members of Argentinian society (Moosekian 4). This stigma and perceived relationship to delinquency reveals that there is a paramount relationship between social stigma and power and the use of language. This has been explored at a lesser level in existing literature, most authors stopping at simply stating that there is a stigma but not going further to analyze it even though it is a well-documented reality of the use of *lunfardo* (as stated above).

Many authors analyze and detail the formation of these languages and how they relate to Argentine society, how they have influenced culture, and many more topics (A. Cancellier; Cara-Walker; Civale; Ennis; Kaplan). The main focus of the impact of *lunfardo* is its reputation as a criminal language and its influence on Argentine tango—as it appears frequently in the lyrics (Andre)—and theater. Such impact is well documented and analyzed, highlighting how the criminalized language made its way into such important aspects of the culture in Argentina, but the work does little to point out any stigma besides how the research refers to *lunfardo* and its reputation. As common slangs, it is inevitable that *lunfardo* and *cocoliche* would have an impact on the development of popular culture and media.

The gaps in the available literature exist regarding this specific investigation of *cocoliche* and *lunfardo* as there is limited research or literature about the nature of these languages and their relation to power and social stigma in Argentina. Even though *lunfardo* has been associated with criminals and working-class immigrants and the language is "rich in terms denoting the

various types of criminals and their special crafts" (Grayson 66), few works explore the deeper relationship between the contact language and power as it influences social stigma.

Much of the existing literature about linguistic stigmatization focuses on the relationship between social stigma and language and how it impacts people and discusses that the language itself and the stereotypes or ideologies associated with it might not matter when considering which one causes the other. In their article *Mixed Grammar, Purist Grammar, and Language Attitudes in Modern Nahuatl*, Jane and Kenneth Hill discuss the judgment and stigmatization of people who speak an indigenous language and use hispanisms and how those dynamics relate to the stigmatization of language (Hill). Social stigma can be associated with people regardless of what language they speak. In the cases of *lunfardo* and *cocoliche*, the stigma was likely attached to the group of people or socioeconomic class and therefore, it did not matter what language this group of people spoke. Whatever language they spoke would be stigmatized eventually because of who they were or what they had. The fact that the language is different or perceived as impure automatically makes it a target for stigmatization and judgment from others who speak a so-called purer language.

Because *lunfardo* and *cocoliche* combine two languages with two different systems for conjugations, expressions, and semantics, they can be—and are—viewed as impure because they do not follow a prescribed linguistic rulebook of either major language from which they originate. These contact languages just exist further from the standardized languages that they are associated with, especially Argentine Spanish, earning them a reputation as less pure. To make this even more complicated, many of the immigrants come from smaller regions and bring not only a standard Italian, but a regional variant that strays even further from the "pure" version of the language (Moosekian 12), especially with the early wave of immigration due to the

unification of Italy during the 19th century. This was when the language was standardized across Italy and much of the emigration was in resistance to the new rule, leaving many people who left with their regional variants. These so-called impurities make *cocoliche* and *lunfardo* more likely to be stigmatized because they are different and do not prescribe to a specific set of linguistic rules.

Representations in Media and Art

Italian Immigrants in Theater

Several forms of Argentine theater and performance showed images of Italian immigrants. One important form of theater for Argentina was the *sainete* theater genre which portrayed stereotypes of the working class of Buenos Aires and the struggles of assimilation and acculturation (Sanhueza 8). The *sainete* portrayed everyday life and customs in vernacular language with the characterizations and political irony represented in the *criollo* circus (part traditional circus acts, part vernacular style theatrical representation), from which *cocoliche* caricatures largely derive (Sanhueza 8). The *sainete* presented situations in places like the shared housing *conventillos* and common struggles of the working class to reflect what was happening to them at the time (Sanhueza 9). The *conventillo*, often the setting for *sainetes* and tangos, was an important social space because of the role that they played in Argentine society, from tenant strikes to a carnival's *cocoliche* (Italiano-McGreevy 24). One of the reasons the *sainete* was so influential—in addition to the importance of using the *cocoliche* character—in impacting the propagation of linguistic stigma was the popular use of *lunfardo* in these performances to convey authenticity (Sanhueza 9). By combining the use of the *cocoliche* caricature or "buffoon" (Sanhueza 10) and *lunfardo* slang vocabulary, *sainete* theater contributed to the widespread dissemination of stereotypes, stigma, and social subjugation of Italian immigrants through the use of stigmatized language. The Italian character common to the *sainete* was typically ridiculous, representative of humorous stereotypes, and "primitive" (Sanhueza 10). These representations and stereotypes fuel the discrimination and negative images of Italian immigrants, especially in connection with the origin of *lunfardo* as a prison slang or code that resulted in Italians being heavily criminalized by way of their language use.

In contrast to the common theme of using Italian immigrants and their language as entertainment, many plays by Alberto Vacarezza, José Bugliot, Rafael José de Rosa, and Armando Discépolo used their platforms to reveal the suffering and conditions of poverty of Italian immigrants, demonstrating a different lived reality than that communicated by the government and creating some visibility for those populations (Sanhueza 17). Discépolo in particular presented Italian immigrants beyond stereotypes and created representations of hostile, unfamiliar places where they were promised land and good wages (Sanhueza 10-11). Discépolo gives a kinder and more understanding background to the moral issues commonly associated with Italian immigrants (e.g., the honest thief) and the victimization they suffered (Sanhueza 13-14). Discépolo's works were a welcome departure from the typical representations of Italian immigrants and provided a more honest portrayal that worked against the proliferation of stereotypical imagery and stigma.

In addition to the *sainete* and works of other playwrights, the origin of the *cocoliche* circus performances was detrimental to the image and stereotypes of Italian immigrants because of the way it was created by mocking the foreign accent and language of that population. What began as an actor breaking character and speaking with a circus crewmember from Calabria became a scripted character played by both native citizens and foreigners with an Italian-accented Spanish meant to entertain the audience. This made the linguistic expression of Italian immigrants the focal point of the humor and led to other adaptations and impressions away from the circus stage and gave the mixed Italo-Argentine speech of Italian immigrants its name: *cocoliche* (Sanhueza 16). *Cocoliche* became a derogatory term employed to refer to not only the speech of Italian immigrants but also to insult aspects of their daily lives, clothing, interior decorating, etc. (Sanhueza 16). By attaching a negative stigma to the language spoken by a group

of people, that language then becomes a marker and a vehicle for continued stigmatization and discrimination against them. In this case, this stereotype being presented readily to a wide audience and reproduced frequently, contributed greatly to the social subordination of Italian immigrants as a function of their language and culture.

Florencio Sánchez and "La gringa"

Florencio Sánchez's plays provide a unique insight into the everyday lives of Italian immigrants and are rich sources for examining the stigma they faced and their subordination. Sánchez was a Uruguayan playwright who used his works to represent and highlight the daily life in the *rioplatense* basin and the circumstances that plagued certain communities or peoples in Argentina and Uruguay. His works "M'Hijo el dotor," "Barranca abajo," and "La gringa" have been highlighted by scholars as those most influential and revealing of the social ills in this region during the expansion and influx of immigration during the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Ramirez 586) and deal largely with a similar theme of the *gaucho* character being presented as the last of their kind whose tragic lives evolve from their inability or unwillingness to adapt themselves to the changing society (Ramirez 589). However, for the purposes of this argument, I will examine "La gringa" because of its direct relation to the discrimination against the community of Italian immigrants.

The *gaucho* is one of the most distinctive and popular figures of the *rioplatense* literature that has been related to the *paisano* or *criollo*, (Ramirez 589). *Paisano* refers to a (fellow) countryman and has often been equated with the term *gaucho* (Trifilo 395) and *criollo* typically refers to people born locally with Spanish or European ancestry or of full Spanish descent born in the viceroyalties, entities representative of the (in this case) Spanish monarch (Criollo); a native-born white elite (Donghi 7). In Argentina specifically, *criollo* colloquially refers to people

whose ancestors were already present in the colonial period, sometimes including Black people descended from enslaved populations and indigenous populations as many had assimilated and been integrated into the *criollo* culture (Donghi 19). Much like the Western cowboy of the United States, the *gaucho* is brave, unruly, and the epitome of masculinity but has also been used as an insult meant to convey someone as crafty and skillful in subtle tricks, skills useful in banditry and smuggling (Baretta 604). The *gaucho* remains a prominent national symbol of masculinity, a cowboy of Las Pampas, the fertile grasslands that surround the Buenos Aires area, whose life traditionally revolves around caring for their livestock and practicing an equestrian way of life (Trifilo 403). However, the *gaucho* survives through literature more than in reality.

The social standing of the *gaucho* as a livestock worker typically of *mestizo* (European and indigenous American) descent was of a lower social class, belonging less to an ethnic group, even as they had a typical ethnic categorization by others. The RAE includes conflicting definitions in its *Diccionario de la lengua española* (DLE) for the term *gaucho*. Its historical definition of the noun is defined as a "Mestizo que, en los siglos XVIII y XIX, habitaba la Argentina, Uruguay y Río Grande del Sur, en el Brasil, era jinete trashumante y diestro en los trabajos ganaderos," (Guacho) [*Mestizo* that, in the 18th and 19th centuries, lived in Argentina, Uruguay and Río Grande del Sur, in Brasil, was a transhumant horseman and skilled in livestock]. On the other hand, *gaucho* was also defined as a "Hombre de campo, experimentado en las faenas ganaderas tradicionales," (Gaucho) [Man of the countryside, experienced in traditional farming activities]. These two definitions alone show the progression of the definition of *gaucho*, even though they touch on similar characteristics and habits. The DLE also has two varying definitions for *gaucho* as an adjective describing a person: "Noble, valiente y generosa," (Gaucho) meaning valiant, brave, and generous, and "Ducho en tretas, taimado," (Gaucho)

meaning skilled in trickery, cunning or sly, referring to their reputation as colonial bootleggers who dealt in contraband trade in cattle hides (Nichols 417). This dichotomy of positive and negative stigma carried by one word shows the significance and purpose of presenting this character opposite the new, adaptable Italian immigrant who was meant to fill the labor shortage, an area of expertise for the traditional *gaucho*. This conflict demonstrates a bias that would continue to negatively impact the *gaucho* and greater livestock working class as the Argentine military expropriated the lands of indigenous Americans in Las Pampas during the era in which Italian immigrants rapidly came to settle and work.

By using the *gaucho* character as the center of his prominent works about social conflict and ills in Argentina, Sánchez points to the conflicting identity and perception of those identified (by themselves or others) as *gauchos* and how they related to the rest of Argentine society. This is especially relevant with the influx of immigrants as some *gauchos* supposedly disliked foreigners in tandem with their struggles represented in Sánchez's work "La gringa," a piece about the conflict between two families regarding the purity of their bloodlines and their place in Argentine society due to their origins. The play showed this animosity and racial intolerance for a foreign group that arrived and was given lands, encroaching on the territory of the *gauchos*. The name "La gringa" is very important as well because, in Argentina, the term was used mainly in rural areas to refer to non-Spanish European immigrants; but because Italian immigrants were such a prominent group, the word *gringo* was used to refer to Italians in particular (Crolla 4, Foster 100), especially ones who used *lunfardo* which more easily identified them as foreigners.

Sánchez's role as a sort of sociologist through his works reveals the social tensions at the time manifested in lack of willpower, alcoholism, poverty, the degeneration of the *gaucho*, and others. (Ramirez 587-588). In "La gringa," the protagonist, Don Cantalicio, is a *gaucho* who

loses his ranch to an Italian immigrant named Nicola and when their children fall in love, the stereotypes, and perceptions of *gauchos* and *criollos* play into the Italian family's belief that Próspero, Don Cantalicio's son, is unworthy of Nicola's daughter, Victoria. While the Italian family (and Nicola especially) was portrayed as hard-working as they had come to Argentina looking for a place to live and work, Don Cantalicio was portrayed as a representative of the set-in-their-ways *gaucho* that was intolerant of the Italian immigrants taking up residence, being given land, and stealing his child away. This conflict is also illustrated in the perceived threat to Don Cantalicio's honor from the *ombú* tree being cut down and his strong reaction, seeing it as a personal attack by Nicola (Sánchez 161, Sisto 452). Sánchez pleads for racial tolerance on both sides of this animosity (Ramirez 589-590) by presenting a solution through the marriage of Próspero and Victoria writing, "De ahí va a salir la raza fuerte del porvenir," [From here, a strong race of the future will come] (Sánchez 178) referring to the general intermarriage of industrious Italian immigrants and haughty, indolent *criollos*, (Ramirez 590) and proposing a model of peaceful integration of a new chapter in the face of traditional values and lifeways (Rubio 125). Sánchez grounds a representation of the problem of racial intolerance of Italian immigrants in a realistic setting and offers a possibility of the end of this animosity between the two groups. Sánchez shows the Río de la Plata Basin for what it is and makes the audience confront what plagues them, attempting to rewrite a fundamental ideological narrative that impacted the Argentine national identity.

Sánchez also uses tone and word choice to demonstrate the intolerance that Don Cantalicio has for Nicola and the new Italian immigrants moving in on the farming practices and threatening the *gaucho* lifeways. In the beginning of the conflict between Cantalicio and Nicola, the former is speaking to his son, complaining about the Italian and his takeover of their farm:

> **Próspero:** …per se empeñó en seguir pastoreando esas vaquitas criollas que ya no sirven ni pa…insultarlas y cuidando sus parejeros y puro vivir en el pueblo, y dele al monte y a la taba…y, amigo…a la larga no hay cotejo.
>
> **Cantalicio:** —¡Velay!...Esa no me la esperaba…Llegar a esta edá pa que hasta los mocosos me reten…Salite de acá, descatao!…
>
> **Próspero:** —No, tata. No sea así…"Bisogna eser".
>
> **Cantalicio:** —¡No digo!...Con que "bisoñas ¿no?…¡Te has vendido a los gringos!…¿Por qué no te ponés de una vez una caravana en la oreja y un pito en la boca y te vas por ahí a jeringar a la gente…¡Renegao!…¡Mal hijo!…(Sánchez 140)
>
> [**Próspero:** ...but he insisted on continuing herding those Creole cows that are no longer good even for...insulting them and taking care of his couple and purely living in the town, and give him the bush and the taba...and, my friend...in the long run there is no comparison.
>
> **Cantalicio:** -Velay!...I didn't expect that one...To get to this age so that even the brats can hold me back...Get out of here, uncouth!....
>
> **Próspero:** -No, Pops. Don't be like that... "Bisogna eser".
>
> **Cantalicio:** -I'm not saying!...What you need, right? You've sold out to the gringos!...Why don't you put a caravan in your ear and a dick in your mouth and go around and fuck people up...Renegade!...Bad son!...]

In this brief excerpt, Sánchez demonstrates through his language use and word choice by Don Cantalicio and his son, the hatred the former holds against Italian immigrants. In this quote, not only do Don Cantalicio's speaking parts show such outrage and self-victimization through his anger towards Nicola and his son for somewhat defending him, but he also uses and mocks Italian language specifically as an insult towards Nicola, demonstrating the general animosity for Italian immigrants that *gauchos* had. Specifically, Sánchez frames Cantalicio as defensive and victimized as he lashes out at his son due to his anger at having his farm stolen from him. Sánchez also specifically uses an Italian phrase "Bisogna eser" or "to have to be" to identify the source and direction of Cantalicio's ire: Nicola, who is threatening his way of life and brining foreign ways and language. By having the *gaucho* character tell his son he's "sold out to the *gringos*" or Italians, his strong emotional state is very clear. This is significant because of the way that Sánchez makes Cantalicio play the victim and has such outrage against Italian

immigrants for becoming integrated in Argentine society. He also specifically connects part of Cantalicio's outrage to the use of Italian language and establishes it as a source of mockery against people like Nicola. Sánchez's tone shows the feelings of Argentines and threatened *gauchos* toward Italian immigrants and reflects the animosity between the two groups and how language was a part of the Italian identity that served as a vehicle for their stigmatization.

"La gringa" is important in revealing the role of language as a vehicle for the stigmatization of Italian immigrants because of the foreign linguistic characteristics displayed and used by Nicola (Rubio 118), the Italian immigrant who had supposedly stolen Don Cantalicio's livelihood. By using linguistic characteristics and language expression of mixing Spanish with Italian as a way to denote Nicola's ethnicity (Foster 102), the stereotypes and prejudices of the Italian immigrant population are reinforced through the play, especially when Nicola's character is a threat to the life of the *gaucho* (Rubio 122), an important and long-standing identity in Argentina, and could cause its extinction. Using "La gringa" as the title is also important because it communicates an image and identity that has been linked to accent and linguistic expression by highlighting that someone's accent differs from that of *rioplatense* Spanish (Crolla 1).

Representation in the News

In addition to critiques of and feedback about Florencio Sánchez's theater by scholars, as performances in the National Theater began to circulate, local newspapers spread news of showtimes and occasionally, responses. One of particular interest is by Carolina Muzzilli, an Argentine journalist, industrial researcher, and social feminist activist of Italian descent in the early 20th century (Longa 1). In an article published in the *Vanguardia* newspaper in January of 1909, Muzzilli highlights the importance of works like Sánchez's "La gringa" and "Barranca

abajo," among others, because they not only entertain but also educate as spectacles with a national stage. Muzzilli discusses the importance of authors and art with a platform to educate even though, at the time, there were few (*Vanguardia* 2). She emphasizes that education and impact should be a central focus of theater—both the pieces and the companies—imploring that the public and the producers move away from apathy and insert themselves in theater as a social activity and join literature and science as broader sources of education, advocacy, and change (*Vanguardia* 2).

Muzzilli's perspective as a citizen of Italian descent is valuable in this case as someone who lived through one of the many periods of stigma and exclusions of Italian immigrants and as someone who held a significant role in society as a journalist and activist. By focusing, in this case, on the value of theater as a source for widespread social education through works like those of Florencio Sánchez who explored discrimination and racial intolerance towards Italians in some of his works, she digs into how theater transcends a singular experience and can reach broader audiences through a more appetizing source like entertainment. This is important also because, at the time, many sources of writing, information, and activism were available mainly to the elite who had greater access to popular theater and books or essays. Accordingly, Sánchez presented his social critiques and the ills of Argentina to populations that were mainly the aggressors of intolerance and Muzzilli emphasized how important works like his were to be shared to garner more significant change and attention to societal ills.

In a 1915 article from the Chilean newspaper *El Mercurio*, an unnamed author describes Sánchez as a playwright, not a writer of literature, as he describes what he can see and observe in the society in which he was living and clearly communicates those issues (*Mercurio*). Discussing the success of a particular theater company that hinged on Sánchez's plays, the author credits

Sánchez with representing important lived realities from cases of alcoholism to harsh life experiences in a way that effectively communicates the intense effects from the Buenos Aires society (*Mercurio*). While the author only mentions the play "M'Hijo el dotor" as one that had great success in Buenos Aires, "Barranca abajo" is mentioned as a harsh look at reality and the complexity of human nature in the moral dilemmas that the protagonist encounters (*Mercurio*). Sánchez's works diffused through South American theater, presenting moral dilemmas and unique representations of social ills that plagued Buenos Aires and the Río de la Plata region that resonated with the elite from other countries and communities.

These various sources demonstrate that the framing of people by the languages they speak makes them subject to discrimination and social subjugation, especially in the face of that linguistic stigma being reproduced and shown for entertainment and public consumption by the local Argentines. Plays like Sánchez's confront the stigma against Italian immigrants and reveal ills in the contemporaneous Argentine society even though they do not specifically mention language as a main identifier or marker for stigmatization. Language functioned as a vehicle through which to subject Italian immigrants to discrimination, which was exacerbated by the traveling carnivals with the *cocoliche* character and reflected by Sánchez's plays and articles like Carolina Muzzilli's that circulated through the public.

Conclusions

Language and ethnicity shaped the social status of *lunfardo* and *cocoliche* speakers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Buenos Aires, Argentina through their distinctive linguistic features to mock, discriminate, and socially subjugate them. I investigated the history of immigration of Italians into Argentina, the linguistic backgrounds of *lunfardo* and *cocoliche*, and contemporaneous plays and critiques of theater in order to establish this connection between language, ethnicity, and social status. In this analysis, I found that *lunfardo* and *cocoliche* and their use by Italian immigrants served as markers for and vehicles through which linguistic stigma, social subjugation, and discrimination operated to impact the daily lives of Italians in Buenos Aires in the early 20th century.

These findings are significant because they broaden sociolinguistic understandings of the impacts of language and language ideologies on the perceptions and treatment of various groups of people. They also demonstrate ways in which language serves as a motivation for and conduit of social stigma and discrimination. This particular stigma emerged over a century ago. Nevertheless, these findings highlight the importance of language for examining discrimination, racism, xenophobia, and ethnic exclusion. Better understandings of languages in contact elucidate dynamics of stigma, power, ethnicity, and social status. This critical lens is important in evaluating instances of discrimination and stigma that hide behind language use and informs future studies of linguistic stigma. These results contribute to a larger body of research and further the understanding of these social dynamics and how they are tied to language in contexts beyond that of early 20th-century Argentina (Fuller and Leeman; Lippi-Green).

As people continue to migrate due to social, political, or economic dynamics, as well as political strife, climate change, war and other conflict, the field of sociolinguistics remains

relevant and crucial to understanding social statuses and how groups of people interact with each other, and above all, how language and the multiplicity of language ideologies influence social hierarchies and stigma. As can be seen in the U.S. in the interactions between Spanish and English through code-switching and translanguaging, sociolinguistic analysis like this is important in recognizing the formation of a prestige language or perception of some languages, or ways of "doing" language, as being better than others. This perspective is significant for interrupting the subjugation of minoritized languages and the peoples that speak them and validating multiple ways of speaking. The impact of linguistic stigma on race, ethnicity, and power is crucial for understanding language-based discrimination and social subjugation.

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