

Abstract

This thesis aims to explore the generation and use of queer and inclusive language in Spanish. The approach behind my thesis deems the reappropriation of a language of oppression such as Spanish, as an actively decolonial practice, and recognizes queer and inclusive conceptions of gender and sexuality as inherently decolonial. Rebellious pronominal evolution within gendered languages provokes virulent debates on fidelity, patrimony, orthodoxy, and purity. The generation of queer slang, whether it be rooted in foreign borrowings or domestic inventions also brings about discussions of speaker community dynamics, exclusive “in-group” markers and shared experience of queer people in Hispanophone countries. Examinations of inclusive language and queer slang have often been contextualized within linguistic discourses centered solely on borrowings, the controversy of altering language, the feasibility of adopting an inclusive Spanish (i.e. being recognized and endorsed by institutions such as the Real Academia Española) and the question of LGBTQ+ visibility and acceptance. However, many of these writings have reinforced the idea that language allowing visibility to LGBTQ+ people is indicative of modernity and imitative of Anglo/European languages that already possess non-gendered or neutral pronouns and labels. This thesis will aim to counter these colonizing and hegemonic frameworks of reference, avoiding the use of a “Western minoritarian model of homosexuality,” as defined by Brian James Baer and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and steering away from a paradoxical conception of homosexuality and queerness as modern and progressive. Instead, the theoretical discussion of this thesis will be focused on employing perspectives of queer theory, reflections on sexuality and colonialism from queer scholars such as Edgar Solíz Guzmán, queerness and indigeneity, and post-structuralism, along with close reading and speaker interview data to argue for the decolonial nature of queer and inclusive language.

Keywords: inclusive language, lenguaje inclusivo, cuir, queer, queer linguistics, queer slang, jerga cuir, sociolect, reappropriation, in-group, speaker community, speaker ideologies, language ideology, colonial, decolonial, indigeneity, non-binary pronouns, LGBTQI+, prescriptivism, trans identities, queer identities

Reframing Queer and Inclusive Language in Spanish:
Challenging Ideologies and Affirming Queerness in Language as a Decolonial Tool

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Introduction: The Centering of Indigeneity in the Queer Discourse

Although mainstream acceptance for the LGBTQI+ community has grown within the global North, yet the perception of gayness and queerness is veiled under a fallacy of modernity and newness. Those who do not conform their existence to the cis-heterosexual hegemony are seen as the exception to the norm, labeled as one of the many minority groups that must fight for basic human rights and respect within society. Being tolerant and accepting of queerness (although I would argue that acceptance of queerness/queer identities lags far behind more binary ideas like homosexuality) is a progressive thing to do, that shows you are not someone who is old-fashioned and intolerant. Being one of these progressive individuals indexes a person as a member of a “developed” mindset and atmosphere. This ‘Western’¹ minoritarian model of homosexuality reduces gayness (and minoritizes queerness even more so) to a relatively small, set percentage of the population who deviate from a standard, and who seemingly, have only recently (throughout the span of humanity) come into existence, and done so openly (Sedgwick 1990). This reality, in which non-binarism, ambiguous, multi-faceted identity, and queerness exists—not even as the norm—and is recognized by society—in a usually far from peaceful or uniform fashion—is seen as a current and developing phenomenon of ‘Western’ progress. In reality, when one looks to life before European imperial conquest in the Americas, the existence of queerness, and its exploration were fixtures of many—if not all—pre-colonial, indigenous realities. The same identities, histories and dynamics that were violently ripped from queer indigenous civilization have now been co-opted, misrepresented and erased by the dominating white-washed, binary, commodified narratives of homosexuality in the colonized world.

Recently, linguistic and social movements within queer communities who speak grammatically gendered languages have developed inclusive and/or non-binary syntax. These linguistic practices are indicative of a crucial shift towards restoring the queerness that once freely existed within society. Along with these grammatical forms, these speakers also employ specific in-

¹ Going forward, I will probably not use the term “Western” when referring to things that are commonly labeled “Western,” I will only use it when referring to specific theory that utilizes this term to refer to the global north, specifically anglophone countries like C.A./U.S./U.K. and Western Europe. I believe we should label them as *imperialist* and *colonial* practices, ideologies, realities, etc., otherwise we contribute to the erasure of indigenous realities. The same issue arises with the word “American” which has been monopolized by U.S. Americans; truly the word means “America”, as in North, Central and South America (unless specified), i.e. Brazilians and New Yorkers are both “Americans.”

group slang within their queer communities. By integrating representative and affirming modes of language, people are able to reproduce and restore some of the same community and culture that existed within indigenous (and queer), precolonial society. However, given the hegemonic discourse on gayness, language allowing visibility to LGBTQ+ people is also labeled progressive, as in indicative of *modernity* and progress, and imitative of Anglo/European languages that already possess non-gendered or neutral pronouns and labels. This notion is inherently flawed and rife with colonial violence, as it negates the fact that the majority of the indigenous languages and communities that previously held sovereignty in Latin America held space for gender fluidity and queerness. Binary language and cis-heteronormative exclusive dynamics in society began with the colonialism: the systematic genocide of indigenous peoples and their cultures. We cannot engage in this white supremacist paradox: the fallacy that queerness or the acceptance of it is inherently white or anglophone. In order to successfully reconcile and integrate history with the language and society, Hispanophones in Latin America must affirm that the celebration of queerness, specifically in language, is indigenous and restorative, not just “progressive.” My thesis will put forward the argument that the emerging queer and inclusive language in Spanish can be recognized one of a restorative, decolonial practice.

By integrating queer, postcolonial and sociolinguistic lenses, this thesis will be able to address the political, specifically colonial, and social history that brought about Latin America’s erasure of indigenous queer language, the installation of the local Hispanophone hegemony, and its interaction with the global anglophone hegemony. It will discuss how these realities have shaped the evolution of languages spoken in the region and the social and cultural ideologies they perpetuate, specifically the widely held notion that inclusive and queer language is “modern” or “new” and my counterclaim that it is inherently decolonial, seeing that it is rooted in indigenous, pre-colonial realities. This multi-theory discourse, that starts in the introduction but is threaded into the entirety of my thesis work, will serve to background the entire question of contemporary implementation of inclusive and queer language and the language ideologies that surround these usages.

In order to approach the question of queer and inclusive language in contemporary Hispanophone America and its virtual spaces, it is crucial to preface this discussion with a historical

contextualization of this language within the indigenous, precolonial context. Backgrounding the entire question of the contemporary implementation of inclusive languages, is the fact that binary gender, sex, and language along with heteronormativity in the Americas were established by and began at colonialism. Pre-Hispanic indigenous communities and their languages commonly possessed (and continue to after restorative efforts from elders) varying but present degrees of fluidity in their gender identities and sexualities. Such realities can be evidenced by the records of the *World Atlas of Language Structures Online*, and its findings on the number of genders in indigenous languages and language families in Latin America. The index on “Number of Genders” has recorded information for only 37 indigenous languages/language families of Latin America; for scale, just Guatemala has 22 distinct indigenous languages. This index defines gender as gender systems which can be demonstrated on the basis of agreement evidence and/or pronoun distinctions, not noun class contrasts/lexical gender (Corbett 2013). Of these 37 languages/language families, 25 of them do not have a gender system,² 6 had a binary gender system,³ three had a ternary gender system,⁴ two had a quaternary gender system,⁵ and one had five or more genders in its gender system.⁶ In another index from *WALSOL*, labeled “Gender Distinctions in Independent Personal Pronouns,” records of 76 different indigenous languages/families in Latin America. It defines independent personal pronouns “as separate words capable of taking primary stress” (Siewierska 2013). Of the languages included in this index, 56 possess no gender distinctions, 11 have gender distinctions in independent personal pronouns in the third person singular only, and 9 made gender distinctions in third person only, but also non-singular personal pronouns. Finally, in its “Sex-based and Non-sex-based Gender Systems” index, *WALSOL* reports on 34 recorded Latin American indigenous languages/families. *WALSOL* defines “Sex-based and Non-sex-based Gender Systems” as gender systems that are sex-based or not, those

² Cocopa, Yaqui, Nahautl, Otomí, Totonac, Zoque, Pipil, Tol, Rama, Ika, Epena Pedee, Awa Pit, Quechua, Qarao, Carib, Ndyuka, Shipibo Konibo, Jaqaru, Cayuvava, Urubú-Kaapor, Canela, Sirionó, Guaraní, Mapudungun, and Rapanui.

³ Chinantec, Hixkaryana, Macushi, Mosestén, Apurinã, and Camapa.

⁴ Retuarã, Barasano, and Wari’.

⁵ Paumarí and Pirahã.

⁶ Mixtec.

that don't use varying bases of animacy instead (Corbett 2013). Of these 34 languages/families, 23 had no gender system, 8 had a sex-based gender system, and 3 had a non-sex based gender system.

Lexically, representations of gender and sex diversity also took form in non-binary titles such as two-spirit/*doble-alma*,⁷ *muxe*, *tida-wina*, and identity spectrums that included many types of gender presentations: masculine woman, feminine woman, feminine man, and masculine man, two-spirit man, two-spirit woman, and two-spirit (bbc.com/mundo, Allard 2013). Two-spirit/*doble-alma* functions as an umbrella term for a gender role that exists all across indigenous nations. The English term for this lexical representation of gender was originally conceptualized as “an attempt at self-determination across linguistic barriers...because existing language, foreign and imposed violently on the indigenous people of North America, was both offensive and deeply colonial in its gaze” (Neptune 2018). The idea of Two-spirit can be difficult to define within non-indigenous languages as it is an exclusively indigenous identity and each nation has its own “understanding of gender and sexual diversity...grounded in specific spiritual beliefs” (Neptune 2018). These unique understandings and conceptualizations lead to nation specific words and definitions for Two-spirit. An example, in Lakota the Two-spirit word *Winkte* means “to be as a woman,” “[referring to] two Lakota people who transgress boundaries of gender from what may be considered male to female” (Neptune 2018). In Danette, the Two-spirit word *Nádleehe* means “those who transform,” and can refer to one of the following: masculine feminine, masculine masculine, feminine masculine and feminine feminine (Neptune 2018). Those indigenous communities that possess a conception of Two-spirit historically held Two-spirit nation members in “high regard, and often [considered them] sacred or divine” (Neptune 2018). The respect given to Two-spirit community members also put them in positions of power, such as “matchmakers, medicine people, or warriors on the front lines of battle...[being allowed to choose from] roles traditionally assigned to both men and women” (Neptune 2018).

Muxe describes another non-binary identity that exists only within the Zapotec indigenous communities of the Istmo de Tehuantepec region in the state of Oaxaca, in Mexico (Synowiec 2018). *Muxes* are respected and given their place by the indigenous community that recognizes them, their

⁷ This is an umbrella term; each indigenous language has its own specified term for its own community. <https://greennetworkproject.org/es/2019/06/04/dos-espíritus-un-corazón-cinco-géneros/>

validity and ambiguity never questioned. The Zapotec language allows for this flexibility in representation, given that it lacks grammatical gender, speakers are not forced to navigate binary pronouns or inflection when referring to themselves. Some *muxes* describe their identity simply as the “third sex” while others describe the *muxe* identity as more of an ambiguous mixture, saying *muxe* could refer to what ‘Western’ perspectives label as “cross-dressing” men, a trans woman, an effeminate gay person, or a masculine gay person (Synowiec 2018). One *muxe* says that the identity could be seen as “anyone born as a man but that does not act in a masculine way” (Synowiec 2018). Given these various and oscillating definitions one could at least conclude *muxe* would not be an identity for a cis-woman (Synowiec 2018). However, the one fixed characteristic about *muxe* identity is its tie to Zapotec ethnicity, since it is not only a “sexual gender” identity but a “social gender” identity in the indigenous community life (Synowiec 2018). The Zapotec nation holds its own cultural vision on sex, in which *muxes* have identified as heterosexual, bisexual or asexual. Relationships with *muxes* don’t lead to the questioning of a heterosexual man’s sexuality within the Zapotec culture, and traditionally a *muxe* would not seek out relationships with gay men or other *muxes* (Synowiec 2018). Clearly the identity is very fluid in its definitions and each *muxe* feels identified by the term in a different way. Traditionally, *muxes* fill an important role in household life, because the men are expected to be fishers and the women are expected to sell the fish at the marketplace, the *muxe* are expected to stay at home and fulfill domestic duties or become an artisan or a salesperson at the local markets (Synowiec 2018). In many cases, *muxes* “aren’t allowed to have long term relationships or get married because they are expected to stay home and take care of their mothers when they get older” (Synowiec 2018). Many *muxes* take an active role in local, indigenous syncretic holidays and ceremonial celebrations; they make costumes, adornments and decorations for baptisms, communions, and weddings. Ultimately, “the *muxe* identity does not depend on sexual orientation, it is a cultural gender, with a social function and identity, and no characteristic of sexual desire towards anyone specific” (Synowiec 2018).

Varied, ambiguous, and fluid realities were violently overridden by the imposition of cis-heteronormativity at the outset of colonial occupation in the Americas. Enslavement and genocide labeled as Catholic and Christian missionary agendas wrought destruction on indigenous cultures and

civilizations. The colonizer's religious and racist ideas of gender and sexuality were forcibly imposed and internalized over time within the indigenous collective consciousness, forcing assimilation to European binary ideologies in order to survive. As put by theorist Michael Horswell, "the colonial discourse reduced the indigenous sexual diversity to forms and practices that were acceptable under the Catholic and humanist orthodoxies from the beginning of the modern period."

Although some indigenous traditions of queerness persisted, many members of indigenous communities hold gender, sex and sexuality binaries as absolute truths about the indigenous condition, leading many to deny the legacy of queerness within indigeneity and label it a modern phenomenon. Denial takes shape in two-spirit peoples being censored and their unions banned, gender non-conforming people being ostracized, stripped of their land rights or right to work within their communities, gay/lesbian relationships being banned and treated as corrupt, and an overall insidious belief that queerness has nothing to do with nor has a place within indigeneity. Currently, queer indigenous leaders face the challenge of reasserting the place of queerness in indigenous identity and community. Queer leaders everywhere are tasked with countering the commonly held misconception of queerness as a "symptom" of modernity. This problem stems from the colonizer-constructed ideal of heterosexual purity that many indigenous communities now hold as truth.

Writer, producer, director, and Bolivian queer activist Edgar Solíz Guzmán discusses this dilemma in his manifesto-like historical analysis titled *La Imposición de la Heterosexualidad en el Mundo Indígena*, or *The Imposition of Heterosexuality in the Indigenous World*. The piece is prefaced by Solíz Guzmán's assertion that colonial literature is proof of indigenous gender and sexual diversity, seeing that colonizers outlined "sexual deviances" and promptly deemed them sinful. Then, in the interest of "political, religious, economic, patriarchal, and heterosexual hegemonic power" and justification for the Spanish invasion, colonizers manipulated and exerted linguistic power over these sexualities in order to adapt them to the "objectives of the Spanish conquest" (Solíz Guzmán 2020). Solíz Guzmán's analysis begins with questions that clearly illustrate the obstacles at hand for queer indigenous activists:

Five centuries later, how do we approach the indigenous, rural and farming communities of the Andean area of Bolivia to talk about sexual and gender diversities knowing that they have

naturalized the heterosexual norm? How do we name these sexualities while taking into account that LGBTI+ is an acronym that is both urban and from the end of the 20th century? How do we conceptualize the symbolic violences of the Judeo-Christian judgement over these sexualities, that underlie other violences such as their indigenous identity, access to land, the exiles, and the silencing of those who are most visible?

Solíz Guzmán's line of questioning serves as evidence of how the Spanish succeeded in the reframing of queerness, and how this hegemonic framework has been absorbed into and proliferated within popular indigenous discourse. Solíz Guzmán's interviews with indigenous community members show how queer people are described as “‘foreign problems to the community,’ ‘products of the cities,’ [a symptom of] the ‘consumption of chicken’” or products of “another type of culturization” (Solíz Guzmán 2020). This “chicken” fallacy alludes to the various mythologies that have been fabricated and perpetuated within popular homophobic rhetoric, in which drinking too much milk, eating too many eggs or consuming too much chicken is said to be the explanation for “rising” homosexuality and general queerness. Proponents of these myths believe that the hormones/chemicals/antibiotics used in industrialized farming to increase yields of chicken, eggs and dairy are to blame for queerness. This narrative implies that queerness was not an “issue” until it “began” at the dawn of factory, chemical-driven farming, rather than being a natural element of the indigenous culture. This mythologized denial indexes the notion that the collective “indigenous imagination still thinks of itself as the ‘moral reserve of society,’⁸ which...is nothing more than the idealization of “the noble savage” legacy of the colonizer ideology” (Solíz Guzmán 2020).

Those who do recognize the existence of queer indigenous people, usually fall into the sodomythic narrative of labeling queer people as embodiments of “depravity and moral corruption” (Solíz Guzmán 2020). As Solíz Guzmán puts it, given the cultural and linguistic erasure executed by the Spanish, it has become normal that “the indigenous communities don't speak for themselves, but

⁸ Spedding y Vichevich in the article “Homosexualidad rural en los Andes: notas desde los Yungas de La Paz, Bolivia” refer to the condemnation of homosexuality by Indianist ideology that idealizes and essentializes indigenous people, alluding to the declaration of former president Evo Morales regarding indigenous people as “the moral reserve of humanity” under the Incan motto of “ama sua, ama llulla, ama quella” (don't steal, don't lie, don't be lazy) and don't be homosexual or transexual either. And if the indigenous person violates this moral norm it is because they have been affected by “the West.”

through the Judeo-Christian discourse and its patriarchal heterosexual model to explain the other sexualities through the biblical rhetoric and its corresponding condemnation as biblical mandate” (Solíz Guzmán 2020). Additionally, this “colonial Evangelist discourse” persists strongly within the indigenous community life through its physical presence in Evangelical and Catholic churches in villages. These churches and their services offer indigenous communities “[discourses] of salvation and protection of the “natural” or traditional family” that revolves around the cis-heterosexual norm, indigenized and internalized through the ideal of the *chacha-warmi* (Solíz Guzmán 2020). Solíz Guzmán explains how the *chacha-warmi*, or in english “man-woman,” ideal is the indigenous term used to set heteronormative social mandates in indigenous communities like the Aymara, who “defend this model, [and] consider [it] as “natural and complementary” in couple relations” (Solíz Guzmán 2020). The *chacha-warmi* dictates stereotypical gender norms, the assumption of cis-ness, “perpetuating the family, [and] linking sexuality to reproductive ends” (Solíz Guzmán 2020).

Solíz Guzmán moves to emphasize another consequence of colonial narrative distortion; contemporary LGBTI+ spaces and concepts in Latin America play a role in perpetuating contemporary racism and classism that furthers the narrative of “modern” queerness and further pushes away indigenous queer people. Through the words of Bolivian human rights and sexual diversity activist, Ronald Cespedes, Solíz Guzmán explains how the neoliberal, elitist and white supremacist conceptions of queerness seek “to erase identities so that there is no trace of the *cholo*⁹, the *campesino*, the indigenous, the dark-skinned, in our own constructions of sexual orientations and gender identities” (Solíz Guzmán 2020). This framework sterilizes the queer reality and “[marginalizes] subjectivities and corporealities that don’t conform to the hygienic habitus of capitalism: old, AIDS-ridden, *maricas*, *machorras*, *travas*, *sudacas*, migrants and indigenous people” (Solíz Guzmán 2020).

⁹ In Latin America it is a historically derogatory and racist term, that can denote several groups of people depending on the context: indigenous people as a whole, mestizo or mixed people of indigenous and european lineage, mestizos that look particularly indigenous because of their features, an indigenous person that has taken up “Western” customs/aesthetics, or a person with bad taste, habits or a tacky appearance. In English, depending on the context it was used in Spanish, it could be translated as: half-breed, half-civilized “indian,” dark-skinned person, outsider, tacky person. Recently, in Latin American Spanish it has been reclaimed and repurposed by some of those it refers to, used in defiance and pride for being of indigenous blood and throwing it in the face of a speaker society that uses it to insult and otherize indigenous people. In this case, Solíz Guzmán is using *cholo* to refer to himself throughout his piece, to reclaim the slur and use it as a source of rebellion and pride.

Solíz Guzmán's analyses along with his personal commentary are both a call out and call to action, stating clearly and concisely how the history he has addressed nullifies the hegemonic narrative and affirms an indigenous, intersectional reality of queerness. Solíz Guzmán, along with the voices of many indigiqueer activists, demand the mainstream discourse on sexuality recognize that these sex, gender, and sexuality binaries are colonial inventions. In doing this, Solíz Guzmán (2020) hopes we see that "LGBTI+ label does not adequately define or represent the indigenous sexual diversity, because it is a contemporary, urban category that imposes a habitus as a first world neocolonial gesture:"

What we define today as homosexuality, bisexuality and transness,¹⁰ existed historically, exists now and will continue to exist in indigenous communities. It is not a matter of finding the first, original word for naming these sexualities, but a matter of revealing the oppression that these communities have been prey to as a product of the colonial imposition of heterosexual order.

Indigenous queer people necessitate a shift in academia and media's focus towards remedying the colonial violence that they and their ancestors have undergone and continue to suffer through. To do so, we must reframe queer discourse away from 'Western' minoritarian models of homosexuality and queerness and instead fight for queer indigenous representation and existence. In this case, this thesis is discussing how this revindication is beginning to occur sociolinguistically.

¹⁰ Soliz Guzmán used "transexualidad," but in English "transexuality" isn't used very much anymore, and in the context of this sentence I do think he is referring to transness in general so I chose this word instead.

1. Inclusive Inflection and Pronominal Forms

This first chapter addresses the generation and use of inclusive language, specifically pronominal forms, or pronouns, and inflection,¹¹ are used to counter some instances of grammatical gender. Not only will this involve a breakdown of the syntactic iterations of these new forms, the prescriptive rules that they follow and break, but it also will address political and phonetic tensions and competition among forms, the types of Spanish each is attributed to, and the activist movements that brought them about.

As discussed in the introduction, binary gender and androcentrism remain a violently entrenched legacy of colonialism, their traces deeply engraved into the contemporary society of the Americas. All languages contain some degree of lexical gender—also known as semantic gender, where isolated words exist for the same thing on the basis of gender, usually when talking about animals, family relationships and professions; these are words such as mother and father, or hen and rooster. Many dominant languages also possess some degree of gender systems, most of which are binary, such as pronominal gender (ex. he/she in English) and grammatical gender, which goes beyond personal pronouns and has gendered articles for all nouns and agreement in the items attached to these gendered entities (ex. *El camino corto*, the short path). Since first wave feminism, initiatives for inclusive language mainly started with practices that visualized women in careers that have been dominated by masculine words (in Spanish *el doctor*; the creation of *la doctora*) and later creating gender neutral terms for words that refer to groups of people (mankind to humankind, chairman to chair). However, Romance languages (which are dominant in many of the colonial powers of Western Europe) pose another hurdle for inclusivity and visible queerness in language: grammatical gender.

Grammatical gender—gender spread even beyond that of personal pronouns, where all nouns have gender, their articles and their attached possessives, adjectives, verbs, or adverbs are also gendered—is quite commonplace in dominant Latinates like Spanish. Completely restructuring all noun-class gender agreement (abolishing grammatical gender) would be not only difficult, but unrealistic and counterproductive to the inclusion sought after. The gender assignment of most nouns,

¹¹ The change in the form of a word to mark such distinctions as tense, person, number, gender, mood, voice, and case, can be a single letter, a syllable, etc. Ex. In the word dogs, -s is plural inflection.

such as *computadora*, *productividad*, *agua*, is arbitrary and not inherently problematic. However, modifying and evolving personal pronoun systems and their agreements in order to be more representative of people is feasible and adoptable. Queer people across several dominant languages with grammatical gender have pushed for more inclusive systems to be created and used so that they can be accurately and respectfully referred to. All of these inclusive language generation movements, whether in Spanish, French, Portuguese, etc. have been spearheaded by grassroots trans-activists and feminists, leading to their cause being met with prescriptive and transphobic antagonism.

There are two clear motivations behind the creation of inclusive language structures: rejecting the masculine as the default for existence and visibilising the existence of non-binary people. The first goal focuses on decentering the masculine and rebelling against prescriptivist hegemony that deems the masculine as the universal. In Spanish (and almost any other Romance language), masculine pronouns and their inflectional agreements, along with masculine words, are designated as the standard and as synonyms to personhood in both the plural and the singular: when referring to humankind as a whole, expressions like *del hombre* (of man) are common, when referring to “everyone” the masculine *todos* is the prescriptive standard, as well as when one is referring to “us” or “we,” *nosotros* is the default. Not unless a group of people or entities is exclusively feminine will feminine inflectional endings be used, otherwise the presence of one or more masculine entities, or the unknown identity of an entity, converts the entire word with masculine endings. An example would be, if one is referring to a group of 100 women in a room, one would address them as *todas ustedes* (all of you/you all fem.). If a man were to enter the room, one is then supposed to address the room of 100 women and 1 man with *todos ustedes* (all of you/you all masc.). If one is unsure of one’s audience, one is taught within standardized Spanish to employ masculine words, pronouns, and inflection as the neuter. The notion of being able to address non-binary people does not even exist in this “standard” Spanish, one would be told to use *todos*, since it is the neutral according to the prescriptivist Spanish language authority, the Real Academia Española.

The second motivation behind inclusive language goes in tandem with the rejection of the aforementioned “neutral” terms. Inclusive language also aims at verbalizing and visibilising the existence of non-binary people and utilizing a true neuter gender in language. Those who refuse to

adopt language practices that set the masculine as the standard, must instead create their own representative pronouns and suffixes given that, as mentioned before, most colonial languages of the Americas, specifically Latin America's Romance languages, have layers of gender integrated into their syntax.

These grammatical inclusive language practices in Spanish started with the modification of gender agreements that marks binary personal gender. In other words, it meant abandoning -o (masculine) and -a (feminine) and replacing them with symbols or letters that weren't associated with binary gender in Spanish. The three main and prevalent inclusive inflections in Spanish have been “@,” “x,” and “e.” This means that *ella es bonita* or *él es bonito* (she is pretty/he is pretty) is modified to *ell@ es bonit@* / *ellx es bonitx* / *elle es bonite*. The first sentence can pronounced as *ella es bonita o el es bonito* and the last two are pronounced as *elle es bonite* when being read, regardless of the way they are written, since “@” and “x” are not pronounceable in these positions under Spanish's phonetic system. These inflections are also used to change “neutral” masculine words, such as turning *todos* into *todes*, *nosotros* into *nosotr@s*, and modifying gendered articles when used to refer to individuals, turning a phrase like *lo vi* (I saw him) into *l@ vi*, *lx vi* or *le vi* (I saw them).

Given that inclusive linguistic items are products of unregulated and indefinite amounts of exchanges on the internet there is no way to pinpoint their creators or their “coining.” A precise chronology on the generation and appearance of inclusive inflection does not exist but their emergence on the internet started around the nineties, their exact origins continue to be debated, and research in Spanish on inclusive language origins is very sparse. This void in academic writing is in part due to their birth on and off the internet in underrepresented and under-studied queer populations. However, many queer linguists and proponents of these inclusive suffixes seem to reach a sort of consensus that they have appeared on the internet and disseminated in this order: “@” (in the late nineties early 2000's), then “x” (early 2000's-2010's), and more recently popularized (2010's beyond), “e” (Gonzalez 2020, Watkins 2020, Monreal 2018).

The “@” seems to provide a visual combination of the feminine (-a) and masculine (-e), creating a hybrid neutral representation of “both and/or neither.” As what seems like the earliest inclusive inflectional invention for Spanish widespread, there is no person or institution that is cited as

its creator. Since “@” was primarily limited to the internet and therefore was not concerned with pronunciation or phonetics it does not offer a clear sound for readers or speakers to pronounce. One isn’t intended to actually pronounce the “@” in actual speech as *arroba* (the word for the at-sign in Spanish). The “@” is simply meant to represent a third option beyond masculine and feminine inflection when writing on the internet or can be pronounced as both the feminine and masculine forms in speech, for example *chic@s*, being read as *chicas y chicos*. This option however, excludes the possibility of gender neutrality, forcing the pronunciation of both the masculine and feminine.

The “x” inflection, which got noticed in the mainstream by academia around 2014, has disputed origins. There has been some limited speculation on social media that the inflection began in trans and non-binary activist circles in Brazilian Portuguese,¹² and that it was then transplanted into Spanish. Others hypothesize whether it was perhaps an allusion to the “x” present in many indigenous languages, the new inflection being a way to recall indigeneity in queer language.¹³ And some see that it could be an allusion to the “x” present on many protest signs during historic feminist and civil rights marches, where the “-o” endings of words like “todos” were crossed out by women to symbolize representation beyond the masculine (Gonzalez 2020). However, public perception seems to largely attribute the “x” to anglophone academics and/or Spanish speakers in the U.S.. Many Spanish speakers have taken to denouncing the “x” suffix as a form of linguistic imperialism on the part of U.S. Americans trying to impose gender-neutrality on the Spanish language or an invention of *agrindade*¹⁴ Spanish speakers. Due to its mainstream association to the U.S. and academic, many people both within and outside of the queer community in Spanish look down upon the “x”, especially because it has been popularized in mainstream media by English-speakers who pronounce it “Latin-eks.” This pronunciation reinforces the idea that the “x” inflection goes against the Spanish phonetic system, is a U.S. import, and is basically unpronounceable for Spanish speakers. Given this perception, most who

¹² [Black Sapphic Twitter Thread on "-x"](#)

¹³ [Black Sapphic Twitter Thread on "-x"](#)

¹⁴ *Agrindado, agringada, agringade*: negative adjective, slang for Americanized, but more specifically, “gringo-like.”

read the “x” form aloud choose to pronounce it instead as “e,” turning a word such as *lxs* into *les* when saying it aloud. Negative reception aside, the “x” is used by some Spanish speakers on the internet to neutralize pronouns and individualized words, turning *los/las* into *lxs*, *lo/la* into *lx*, *nosotros* into *nosotrxs*, *el/ella* into *ellx*, etc. However, given its apparent unpronounceable nature for many, the “x” is usually limited to written Spanish.

Finally, the third inflectional form, which led to the formation of the inclusive pronoun *elle*, is “e.” This inflectional form is both orthographically and phonetically used, as it is perfectly pronounceable for Spanish speakers and neatly forms an equally pronounceable and “Spanish-sounding” pronoun for non-binary people *elle* (pronounced *eh-yeh*). It started to gain heavy exposure and popularity within the last five years, especially after its use in Argentina during public debate on the legalization of abortion, and more recently during the protests in Chile where it was seen painted on the streets of downtown Santiago (Marcos and Centenera 2019). In Argentina especially, the “e” has become extremely popular among LGBTQI+ public school teenagers (Marcos and Centenera 2019). So much so, that in a 2019 article on inclusive language, *El País* finished off with the following passage:

¿A qué amigos vas a invitar a la fiesta de cumpleaños?”, le pregunta una abuela argentina a su nieto un par de semanas de que este cumpla nueve años. El niño enumera a siete varones y la abuela, extrañada, le pregunta si es que no vendrá ninguna niña a la celebración. “Sí. Obvio. Es que dijiste amigos y no amigas”, le responde. Esta escena real se repite cada vez más a menudo entre la clase media progresista de Buenos Aires y otras ciudades argentinas, mientras los sectores más conservadores rechazan ese tipo de cambios lingüísticos de forma abierta.

Which of your friends (*amigos*) are you inviting to your birthday?,” an Argentine grandmother asked her grandson a few weeks before his ninth birthday. The boy responds “Seven boys.” The grandmother, surprised, asks, “So, no girls are coming to your birthday party?” The boy responds, “Yes. Obviously. But you said *amigos* not *amigas*.” This scene repeats itself more

and more frequently within the progressivist middle class of Buenos Aires and other Argentine cities. Meanwhile the conservative sectors openly reject this type of linguistic change.

Creation and dissemination of inclusive language has been largely bolstered by the use of social media and the internet, which allows for the creation of a multi-national, multi-lingual queer exchange. Online spaces such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, blogs, etc. have become environments for these exchanges, and are where contemporary inclusive language has developed. These social media sites have been able to bring inclusive language into the forefront of conversations we are currently seeing within romance language speaker communities today. This linguistic and cultural network not only allows for the creation of safe spaces for people to share with other queer people, especially if their local physical queer community is very small and scattered or non-existent. These spaces become a prime medium of community organization, culture creation, and information consolidation. Virtual communities have been catalysts for the gathering of information, sharing opinions and creating a more inclusive representation. Historicists, activists and grassroots organizers, and smaller, specialized community members, are able to document precedents, current ideologies and their mutual language needs in order to develop and spread solutions.

The three different inclusive inflections and the pronoun *elle* have been very affirming for many queer Spanish speakers, especially trans and non-binary people who have been erased from their language. The -e and *elle* have been most popularized in South America, but especially Argentina. Argentina has been at the forefront of institutional acceptance of inclusive language, given that activist and youth movements have popularized it to the point of motivating the Argentinian President Alberto Fernández to both recognize *todes* (everyone with -e) as valid and use it in public communications.¹⁵ The BCRA (El Banco Central de la República Argentina) has formally recognized the use of inclusive language (of any form) as valid in its communications, memos, forms, documentation, and institutional productions (bcra.gov.ar/Noticias). A selection of universities in South America have also recognized inclusive language as acceptable in varying capacities (academic works, university memos, etc.), including Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata,

¹⁵ [Fernandez Reivindico La Necesidad de Hacer Uso del Lenguaje Inclusivo](#)

Universidad Nacional del Centro, Universidad Nacional del Rio Negro, the social sciences department of Universidad de Buenos Aires, and others.

As with most activist initiatives for queer representation, inclusive forms have also been met with violent criticism and aggressive opposition to employing or even recognizing them in speech and writing. For example, a notable retranslation of *Le Petit Prince* by Argentinian translators who used the “e” inflection throughout, and while many applauded it, sadly, yet unsurprisingly, it received some virulent backlash from Spanish speakers across Latin America and Spain, predominantly from Mexican men on social media (Monreal 2018). A more prescriptivist, as well as transphobic and androcentric, antagonist to inclusive inflection has been and continues to be La Real Academia Española (RAE). The RAE is viewed as the foremost authority on Spanish, it has held influence since its founding in 1713, producing the dictionaries and rules disseminated in Spanish-language education. As an institution that has been entirely male-led up until recent decades, it has been very vocal in its criticism of inclusive language. It has expressed that it is not even willing to tolerate the double-gender form presentation of nouns, meaning *todos y todas* (masc/fem), it considers all iterations of the double-gender inclusion “unnecessary and contrived” (Moretti 2018). The RAE declares that the masculine “o” form is appropriately inclusive because it is “unmarked,” meaning the default for existence. The director of the RAE, Darío Villanueva, states that inclusive language should not even be considered because it is “a problem born from confusing grammar with machismo.”¹⁶

¹⁶ [Como Utilizar el Lenguaje Inclusivo from Copy Writing Para Web](#) - Originally, ““el problema es confundir la gramática con el machismo.” Translated by Mimi Urizar-Avila

2. Queer Lexicon and Sociolect Building

Having addressed the creation of new syntactic mechanisms for the sake of queer representation in grammar, this chapter will look at the ways in which queer people have further taken this rebellion within the lexicon of their sociolects. This chapter will serve as a discussion of just a portion of the vast queer lexicon: its origins, its usages, and its perception among its speaker community and those outside of it. Applied and sociolinguistic study of the Spanish-speaking queer lexicon by Spanish-speaking and/or Latine academics has been fairly limited within Latin American academia. One of the purposes of this chapter and this entire thesis' inquiry is to add to the small body of work that addresses these linguistic phenomena and give this sociolinguistic and etymological discussion a place within scholarly writing.

As explained by the director of Teaching Projects at Babel, Vitor Shreiber, a linguist in History and Gender Studies, “when a group of people doesn’t have the freedom to speak about their identity or their ways of loving, it is likely that a need for an alternative language will arise”¹⁷ (Ámbito.com). Given that queerness, especially that of Spanish speakers, goes against the white-cis-straight majority discourse on sexuality and identity, queer people all over the world and in all languages are faced with creating vocabulary that allows them to communicate their realities. When it comes to the Spanish of queer people in Latin America--where queerphobia seems more openly and widely institutionalized and the life expectancy for trans and *travesti* people is 35 years old¹⁸--creating an alternative, coded language is even more important for community building. Mexican poet, essayist, literary critic and editor Sergio Téllez-Pon emphasizes the idea of a secret community language in his 2013 essay *De maricón, puñal, y otras joterías*,¹⁹ in which he responds to the then recent federal ban by the Mexican Supreme Court of the words “maricón” and “puñal” as homophobic slurs. Téllez-Pon points out that these words only became subjects of a federal case because a straight

¹⁷ “Cuando un grupo no tiene libertad para hablar sobre su identidad y sus formas de afecto, puede surgir la necesidad de crear una lengua alternativa para comunicarse” - Translated by Mimi Urizar-Ávila

¹⁸ [NOW THIS Originals: Florencia Guimaraes Garcia is Redefining Transgender Identity](#)

¹⁹ If translated to English: “From f*ggot, to f*ggot and other queerness”

journalist had been insulted with the words by another straight colleague, not because a gay person had brought them into question. His essay shows just how absurd banning these words is, especially on account of a straight man's ego, when gays and queers have "used humor to revert their homophobic weight" and taken this "arsenal of words and defined [themselves],"²⁰ reappropriating these slurs as part of "semi-secret languages made to create complicity"²¹ (Téllez-Pon 2013). In addition to individual words themselves, this language takes shape in "mannerisms, expressions, idioms, interjections (we'll place "Ay,..." before anything), filler words and neologisms"²² (Téllez-Pon 2013). Téllez-Pon further elaborates the importance of queer sociolect generation by equating it to "Marcel Proust's concept of 'the identity of the glossary,'"²³ where one's lexicon is a proof of membership and individual reality, and "Didier Eribon's definition of [this language] as 'the collection of bonds' that 'create a network' in the 'gay subculture'"²⁴ (Téllez-Pon 2013, Eribon 2001). Therefore, this lexicon becomes important for distinguishing in-group from out-group within each dialect and across them. Knowledge of and proper usage of these words indexes membership of the queer community when appearance of them in queer and non-queer spaces allows speakers to distinguish themselves and others, either subtly or overtly in conversation. Of course, this behavior is not limited to the *gay* subculture—which at this moment could be qualified as the hegemony within the LGBTQ+ community—it exists within every facet of non-cis-heterosexual reality.

The lexical and semantic processes most commonly used in queer language making have been re-appropriation, in which targets reclaim slurs, and repurposing (or a re-connotation), in which words are reframed within the queer context. This is the same process that has turned *queer*, a word which has long been pejorative and hateful, into the much-used, reclaimed, umbrella term seen so heavily

²⁰ "un arsenal de palabras para definirnos y usarlos con burla para revertir su carga homofóbica," the original was translated and reorganized to fit the sentence.

²¹ "Son lenguajes casi secretos formados para crear complicidad," translated into English by Mimi Urizar-Ávila.

²² "modismos, expresiones, frases hechas, interjecciones (para todo anteponemos el "Ay,..."), muletillas y neologismos," translated into English by Mimi Urizar-Ávila.

²³ "Proust llamaba "la identidad de glosario," translated into English by Mimi Urizar-Ávila.

²⁴ "Didier Eribon define como esa 'clase de vínculos' que 'forman una red' en la 'subcultura gay' (*Reflexiones sobre la cuestión gay*, Anagrama, 2001)," translated into English by Mimi Urizar-Ávila.

throughout this thesis. Language making also takes its most literal form in neologisms, which the Spanish-speaking queer community has made use of as well. In addition to these three methods, the internet, once again, has given queer people across borders the opportunity to exchange terminology. Therefore, borrowings, especially those from English queer slang, which predominates mainstream gay media, are seen within the Spanish queer lexicon.

The creation, collection, and use of these words in virtual and physical spaces is an affirmation of existence and solidarity for queer Spanish speakers; they are tools of social indexing, bonding, and world-making. The queer slang presented in this chapter is not all encompassing, given that each dialect of Spanish possesses its own conventions and therefore its own queer community will as well. Yet, as Téllez-Pon highlights, queer slang words are an important way for distinguishing in-group from out-group within each dialect and across them; knowledge of and proper usage of these words indexes membership of the queer community. The appearance of these words in queer and non-queer spaces allows speakers to distinguish themselves and others, either subtly or overtly in conversation.

Sociolect building will be discussed in terms of the four methods mentioned: re-appropriation, repurposing, neologisms, and borrowing. Using specific examples of queer slang, collected from social media and community authors, I will break down the semantic processes that bring about new, queer meanings. Analysis will also include a discussion on translation and loan words--given that some words claim origins in such phenomena--and how these linguistic processes are representative of world making and rebellion through language.

2.1 Re-appropriation

It is no novelty to have slurs for queer people. Either these words start out as insults, given that colonized society has deemed anything outside of the cisheteropatriarchy as perverse and undesirable, or their *status* as words for queer things has semantically degraded them over time and brings them to the level of general insult. Such could be said for the word *gay*, originally a word for “jovial or happy,” which even up until recently is used as a way to say something is uncool or weird by teenagers.

Consequently, in Spanish, words to insult queer people exist and continue to be used as insults. However, as aforementioned and as seen within the Anglophone context, words that have been historically used to degrade people for their status of queerness, are being reclaimed, as self-ascribed badges of honor and rebellion. Linguist Melinda Yuen-Ching Chen explains that “‘reclaiming’ refers to an array of theoretical and conventional interpretations of both linguistic and non-linguistic collective acts in which a derogatory sign or signifier is consciously employed by the ‘original’ target of the derogation, often in a positive or oppositional sense” (1998:130). The driving force behind reclamation or reappropriation is “the right of self-definition, of forging and naming one’s own existence,” as explained by linguist Robin Brontsema (2004:1). This linguistic process and the meanings it brings about are all the more important on a social level because they are “formed not in one’s own terms but those of another,” therefore “[they] necessarily depends upon the word’s pejoration for its revolutionary resignification” (Brontsema 2004:1). The most common of these reappropriated words in Spanish have been pejorative terms for gay men and gay women. The word *marica* and its variants—*maricón*, *maricones*, *mariquita*, *mariconada*, *etc.*—could be considered one of the most prevalent gay insults used in Latin America. *Marica* is denoted by the Real Academia Española (the prescriptive authority of the Spanish language), as “a diminutive of the name María” that colloquially defines an “effeminate man, of little courage and effort” or “a homosexual man.”²⁵ Its most common variant, *maricón*, is defined as a “vulgar” word for *marica* that also means “sodomite.”²⁶ The word is often used to refer to men when they are not sufficiently performing traditionally *machista* masculine behavior (Téllez-Pon 2013).

Gay men, and queer people in general, have disrupted the pragmatic²⁷ link between the word, its negativity and its intention to shame, using it to formally refer to themselves and reversing the words’ semantic derogation. A prime example of this re-appropriation is seen in the way Edgar Solíz Guzmán, the indigenous queer theorist referred to in the introductory chapter, refers to himself as

²⁵ *Marica*. (Del dim. de María, n. p. de mujer). || 3. m. coloq. Hombre afeminado y de poco ánimo y esfuerzo. || 4. coloq. Hombre homosexual.

²⁶ *Maricón*. m. vulg. *marica* (? hombre afeminado). || 2. vulg. Sodomita

²⁷ Pragmatics, the subfield of linguistics and semiotics that studies how context contributes to meaning, looks at conversational and real-life usage of words, linked to connotation versus denotation.

“maricón,” hosts a radio show in Bolivia called “Nación Marica,” and is a leader in the “Movimiento Maricas Bolivia” (Soliz Guzmán 2020). The new term reaches beyond the gay category, now being utilized to refer to queer people in general. For example, I am a member of a Central American queer discord server named “Centromaricones,” which, along with myself, includes people of varying gender identities and sexual orientations that wouldn’t traditionally be defined by the word *marica*. Other reclaimed insults of this category are *puto/a* (whore masc/fem), *loca* (crazy person in the feminine form), and *jota/joto* (J in masc/fem). *Puto/puta* and *loca* are not necessarily queer specific words that are now colloquially used to refer to oneself, but *loca* has “expanded to be one of the most common terms one uses to refer to oneself when in the [queer] community” (Téllez-Pon). It is important to note that *loca*, has evolved in a similar way to English “bitch” or “sis,” which are also feminized/marked feminine nouns used colloquially by certain groups of gay men. *Jota/o* is also a pejorative descriptive word used for gay and/or effeminate men, but it is particular in its historically significant origins, which date back to the beginning of the 20th century (Sanz-Sanchez 2009; 148). The word derives its meaning from famous “*baile de los 41*” that took place during the early hours of November 18th, 1901 in Mexico City (2009:148). On this day, capitol police raided a party hosted by a group of men—some of whom were dressed in skirts, makeup and wigs—and arrested them for indecent behavior (2009:148). It was rumored that those who were arrested were placed in cells marked with the letter “J” (*jota* in Spanish), leading to the development of the word *jota* to label effeminate gay men (2009:148). *Joto/a*’s variant *joterias* (plural noun form of the adjective), has grown to encapsulate a new meaning, used to represent what in English one could translate to “queerness” or “queer things.”

When it comes to specifically lesbian or women-targeting insults, words were originally meant to police women’s femininity and degrade them for their presumed masculinity. One example of these words would be *machorra*, which started as a colloquial pejorative that means tomboy or butch, but can also be used to describe a sterile female animal. This polysemy exhibits the ways in which these

women-targeting insults intend to bring women lower on the animacy hierarchy²⁸ of Western semantics, degrading them by comparing them to animals. *Machorra*'s phonetic aspects—the [macho-] that can also be heard in the word *macho* (masculine) and the [-rra] that can be heard in female animal nouns (which also serve as insults to women) like *zorra* (fox) and *perra* (dog)—also emphasize the intention of lowering non-conforming women to the status of animals (in a Western European perspective). *Marimacho/a*, which started as a pejorative for butch/dyke, mimics the *macho* phonetic and semantic trend. Another word in this category includes *lencha*, meaning bisexual or lesbian woman, which also utilizes the [ch] sound found in *macho* and the [l] that starts the word *lesbiana* (Así Hablamos Glossary).

Travesti, *trava* and *travítas*, started as pejoratives used to insult trans women, trans femmes and transvestite or effeminate men. This generalized insult usage is problematic in itself, as it collapses various identities as well as sexualities. As discussed, these pejoratives have now been reclaimed and they are used as labels specifically by trans people in Latin America, an example being the name choice for the Argentinian group *Furia Trava* (Trava Rage), a trans activist collective named after the protest chant, “¡FURIA TRAVESTI!,” of the late Lohana Berkins, a trans activist in Argentina (García, Perugino, and Olimpia 2017). By turning these words into protest chants and titles of large, organized activist collectives, trans people are able to override their pejorative history not only by placing them in positions of power and resistance but by specifying them to be a celebration of transness. Florencia Guimaraes García, a member of *Furia Trava*, elaborates on the connection between these reclaimed words, saying that “there’s [no] difference between a comrade that calls herself trans or me calling myself a *travesti*...it’s not like one has four boobs, another has three, another has two. No, we are talking about a political stance” (Guimaraes García 2019). Guimaraes García’s synthesis of trans and *travesti* identities, their shared meanings and experiences, undermines and nullifies the previously transphobic and homophobic understanding of the word *travesti* (in English translating to

²⁸ Animacy hierarchy: a scale of noun phrases' relative animacy or capability to function as agent of a sentence. Categories higher in the hierarchy are more animate/ “powerful” and categories lower in the hierarchy are less animate/“passive.” Within Western colonized/European semantics, male humans would be considered at the top, while down the scale would be animals of decreasing agency and ability, at the bottom would be inanimate objects. This does not apply of course, to indigenous semantics and culture where being associated with or equated to animals increases status and agency for a person, animals and nature not seen as lesser than.

“transvestite”) and renders it powerful, instead of an emblem of misconstrued and flawed understandings of transness.

2.2 Repurposing

The repurposing of words and phrases by disrupting the semantic link that ordinarily exists between them and their referents draws parallels across categories and applies them to the queer context. This subversive reshaping of meaning defamiliarizes words and redefines them so that only certain speakers can discern their true meaning during in-group and out-group conversation, engendering neologic *use* of existing words. Expressions like *de ambiente* (of the scene) or *ser del gremio* (to be of the trade), have no particular implied referents in mainstream Spanish, yet they have been specified to the queer context through repetitive use and discreet reference. These phrases then serve as subtle markers to identify people within the queer community without explicitly saying so, becoming optimal tools for use outside of the queer community setting when trying to determine in-group members. Other, more humorous expressions to express queer community membership such as these include *cantar en el coro* (sing in the choir), *tener pluma* (used for easily identifiable gay men, meaning to have feathers), and *entender* (to understand, implying to be part of the queer community).

Some words have been reworked to be used as specific community descriptors for heterosexual individuals, such as *buga*, thought to have come from the word *bugambilia* which is the word for a type of flower, but also the name of a restaurant in Mexico City that existed during the Porifirato²⁹ where only “rich and ‘respectable’ people were allowed and gays were prohibited from entering.” As a reference to this restaurant it is believed that gays began calling straight people *buga* (Virota 2011). Another such term is *paqui*, a pejorative term coined by 60’s lesbians for straight people, coming from the word *paquidermo* meaning pachyderm (the group of animals that hippos belong to), meant to connote that straight people are boring and lame (<https://www.noticiasnet.com.ar/nota>). In addition to *paqui*, other words with animal nouns as a donor field³⁰ are found repurposed

²⁹ The rule of General Porfirio Diaz as “president” of Mexico, that lasted from 1876 to 1911.

³⁰ What category or group of words a new word comes from. Ex: donor field for the word “bitch” is animal names.

with queer meanings, such as *mariposa*, literally meaning butterfly but used in slang to describe a flamboyant, “obvious” gay man. Two others are *nutria*, which originally means a medium sized semi-aquatic rodent (*nutria* exists in English for the same definition) but is used to refer to skinny, small and hairy gay men and *ninfa*, coming from *ninfa* meaning “nymph,” used to describe this same kind of individual (Téllez-Pon 2013, Chuy94 2019).

Specific words for lesbians seem to favor food as a donor field, with words like *tortillera* (woman who makes tortillas), *arepera* (woman who makes arepas), *pastelera* (woman who makes cakes), *panadera* (a woman baker), and *bollera* (woman who makes/eats bread rolls) (Mosca de Colores Diccionario Lesbiano). Reference to food and food eating acts could be interpreted as reference to both “female” genitalia and oral sex, as well as references to promiscuity, as seen in the use of *panadera* for prostitute in medieval times (Vasvari 1983). These food-related words for lesbian started out as insults, and continue to be used in such a way as well, but have since also been humorously reappropriated by lesbians. Another word commonly used to describe lesbians is *lencha*, seemingly popularized around 2005, which is the familiar nicknamed form of the name Lorenza, a term may have originated because of the films that included women characters named Lorenza that went against feminine gender norms (Mosca de Colores Diccionario Lesbiano). When specifically describing very masculine lesbians, words such as *trailerera*, *camionera*, *martillera*, *jefona*, *soldadora*, *troquera*, and *leñadora* have been used. Their roots, *trailer*, *camion*, *martill-*, *jef-*, *solda-*, *troqu-*, and *leña* refer to truck driving, hammers, bosses, welding, and lumber working.

Reworking of words to describe sex is just as common in Spanish as in any language; for instance, the words that mean top/bottom/vers became *activo/pasivo/versatil* or *inter*, as was detailed on the a blog post from user Chuy94 titled *30 palabras que todo gay debe conocer* or *Thirty Words That Every Gay Should Know*. Included in this list were other semantically reworked words such as *entrón* (originally meaning meddlesome or daring, used to describe a person who is sexually reckless and/or kinky and probably dominant), *dulcero* (originally meaning a person with a sweet tooth, used to describe a person who likes to take a lot of drugs in the scene and especially during sex), *lobo* (originally meaning wolf, used to describe a hairy and muscular hot guy), *a pelo* (originally meaning

naked, used to describe unprotected anal sex), and *cuarto oscuro* (meaning dark room but used to refer to the private rooms found in queer clubs where people can have sex).

2.3 Neologisms

Linguist Gloria Guerrero Ramos explains that “[neologisms] are the principal way we have to measure the vitality of a language. In fact, we can affirm that a language that lacks neologisms could be considered a dead language” (2020:153).³¹ She reaffirms that fact that neologisms have and will always be needed, to represent new concepts and realities (2020:153). Regardless of the resistance new words and linguistic practices are met with, those who create and use them are free to do so with those who understand them. The inclusive grammar discussed in the last chapter has brought about the creation of neutralized neologisms, such as *amixes*, *amix* (both referring to *amigos*), internet slang such as *bbctx* (neutralized and elided *becita/o*), *chiques* (neutralized ‘kids’), *amigues* (neutralized friends), and so on. These newly coined words are becoming more and more common in internet use, but also within the academic sphere, especially in more amenable speaker communities, like that of Argentina (where there seems to be some general support on a government level and support from university departments).

Outside the realm of inclusive grammar, other neologisms have popped up over the decades, among the queer community in order to fill lexical gaps.³² Words like *chacal* (meaning a gay man with a rugged, buff appearance who doesn’t necessarily concern themselves with style), *chichifo*, and *chichifear*. These last two are corresponding noun and verb forms referring to a person who is or the act of being a handsome gay man who engages in discrete sex work that allows them into a higher social circle and guarantees them economic benefit from the *chichifeado* (the person they are with), in a similar way to a sugar baby (Chuy94 2019).

³¹ “Es la principal manera que tenemos de medir la vitalidad de las lenguas. De hecho, podemos afirmar que una lengua que carece de neología puede ser considerada una lengua muerta” translated by Mimi Urizar-Ávila

³² Lexical gap: a missing word or a word that does not exist for something that exists in the world, the need for a term to describe a concept/phenomena/entity that does not yet have its own word.

2.4 Anglicisms

Lastly, we arrive at anglicisms. While anglicisms are absolutely not the only possible form of borrowing in language, the Spanish queer lexicon has been influenced by the fact that English predominates the internet, a space vital to Latin American queer community solidarity and exchange. Spanish speakers have either directly taken unchanged words from English and utilized them as such, translated them according to the English word, or derived (phonetically and semantically) new words from the English one. Cleancut borrowings, or the first group of words just mentioned, would be words like *gay*, *queer*, *drag king/queen*, *straight*, *LGBTQ+*, *butch*, *barebacking*, *bottom*, *top*, *escort*, *fisting*, *NSA* (no strings attached), *trans*, *bisexual* (would be spelled the same anyways), and *twink* (Chuy94 2019). Words that were translated, or calques, include words such as *transgenero* (from *transgender*), *queer de genero* (genderqueer), *oso* (a translation of bear, referring to big, hairy, gay men), *tijeras* (meaning scissors, referring to the English expression scissoring), *estar en el closet/armario* (to be in the closet), *genero no conforme* (gender non-conforming), *disforia de género* (gender dysphoria), and *no binarie/o/a* (nonbinary). Words that were derived from English words that don't necessarily carry the same meaning as they do in English but pull both semantic and phonetic information from English include *bise* (another word for bisexual), *buchis* (meaning a gay man that never dresses as a woman, derived from *butch*), *closetero* (a closeted/secret/in denial gay man, derived from the expression in the closet/closeted), and *scort* (derived from *escort*).

This chapter is by no means an exhaustive list of all the slang used by Spanish speaking queer people, yet it provides a window into the lexical, semantic, and phonetic processes behind our language. By reframing existing words and birthing novel ones, queer people are not only realizing a new, representative language for themselves, but they are also, in a way, reconstructing the linguistic reality of pre-colonial indigenous diversity, putting words to the queerness that has existed and continues to exist in Latin America.

3. Motivation: Theoretical Framework and Speaker Attitudes

The third chapter will present an analysis of the usages of queer slang and inclusive language through two methods: close reading and Spanish speaker interview data.

The first will be an analysis of inclusive language & queer slang occurrences in publicly available articles and other pieces of writing. I will analyze the virtual spaces in which this language is used and promoted within by executing a close reading of the resources in which I have found information on inclusive language and queer slang for the purpose of my research. I will explore the theoretical frameworks presented within publications and webpages that discuss these language phenomena, the platforms used to disseminate the chosen pieces of writing, and the authors behind them.

The second method of usage analysis will be the presentation of a small collection of findings from interviews with Spanish speakers who use inclusive language and queer slang. Interviews were conducted in Spanish and/or English with 8 participants; the requirements for participation being the ability to speak Spanish and the usage of queer slang and/or inclusive language in their Spanish. Interviews consisted of 14 questions, conducted virtually, and took place from March 22nd to April 2nd 2021. Interview questions aimed to learn about the individual's experience with inclusive language and queer slang: their introduction and exposure to these phenomena, the dialect of Spanish they use them within, the settings in which they choose to employ them, their perception of them as social and linguistic tools, and most importantly, their motivations behind using them.³³ The ultimate goal of these interviews was to see if these speakers perceived their linguistic choice to use inclusive language and/or queer slang as decolonial in any way and if they shared any motivations in their usage of these linguistic tools.

I hope this data will support my hypothesis and that the usage of these linguistic elements can be associated with decolonial speaker attitudes given the subject matter of the discussions in which they are used and the language ideologies held by those who use them. The goal is to use public and personal linguistic data to assert that usage of inclusive language and queer slang presupposes specific

³³ Interview questions available in Appendix

political, linguistic and social ideology that all point towards a decolonial mindset and motivation. The crucial connection needed to make this claim lies in the theory presented in the introduction and elaborated throughout this thesis, which confronts the fact that heteronormativity, along with gender and sexual binaries—and therefore language that represent them—are colonial; therefore, language that aims to break these constructions can be decolonial and those who use them could be aligned with this approach.

3.1 Close Reading

Two pieces of writing that show exceptional and explicit examples of decolonial speaker attitudes behind queer and inclusive language are *¡Furia Trava! Las travestis tambien somos sujetas políticas* and *The Case FOR 'Latinx': Why Intersectionality is Not a Choice*. While the first piece simply employs instances of queer slang and inclusive language throughout and the second is a direct argument for inclusive language. Both display clear-cut theory alignments that reflect the ideologies—social and linguistic—backgrounding queer and inclusive language usage.

The first text, *¡Furia Trava! Las travestis tambien somos sujetas políticas*, was written in Spanish in 2017 by *Furia Trava* members Florencia Guimaraes García, Silvina Perugino, and Gala Olimpia. Florencia Guimaraes García is an Argentinean *travesti*, self-described as a militant activist, communist, abolitionist and photographer who serves as the Argentine Workers' Central Union Secretary of Gender. Her work centers around the employment, safety and quality of life of trans and *travesti* Argentines, whether it be legal abortion, prevention of gender-based violence or the upholding of Argentina's "Diana Sacayan Law"—named after the trans activist—that requires 1% of state positions be filled by trans people or *travestis* (Guimaraes García 2019). Guimaraes García also leads The House of Diana and Lohana, a community space and advocacy center for trans and *travesti* Argentines. Silvina Perugino is an Argentinean feminist lawyer and writer who specializes in "Gender and Communication, UNLP researcher, part of the interdisciplinary team at Gender Secretariat in School of Journalism" (Cáceres 2019). Gala Olimpia is an Argentinean *travesti* woman activist and performance artist. Their writing was posted onto *Marcha*, an online journalism site described as "a popular and feminist view of Argentina and the world" (Marcha.org). *¡Furia Trava! Las travestis*

tambien somos sujetas politicas, meaning “Trans Rage! *Travestis* are also political agents,” can be described as a manifesto for *Furia Trava* claiming the place of trans people and *travestis* in the political sphere, asserting their right to political power, human rights, and quality of life, declaring grievances and demanding the government to honor the Diana Sacayan Law, justice for victims of *transvesticidio* (trans murders), the complete implementation and enforcement of the Gender Identity Law (that demands self-determined gender be respected), and various other specific measures meant to assure the safety of trans and *travesti* people. The manifesto is also used to clearly position *Furia Trava*’s ideological stances, through a denouncement of the “patriarchal system that oppresses us until it kills us, one that we all fight together,”³⁴ a call for collective action among “comrades of dissident sexual orientations, genders and ideologies”³⁵ and defining *Furia Trava* as an anti-patriarchal, anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, popular, and feminist collective that “[breaks] from biologism and the man-woman dichotomy”³⁶ (Guimaraes García, Perugino & Olimpia 2017). The manifesto achieves its goals not only through the consistent use of queer slang such as *trava*, *travesti*, *travitas*, but also through the fluid usage of the “-x” inclusive inflection, in words such as *nosotrxs* (we), *juntxs* (together), *companerxs* (comrades), and *lxs oprimidxs* (the oppressed).

The second text was written by María R. Scharrón-del Río and Alan A. Aja in 2015, titled *The Case FOR ‘Latinx’: Why Intersectionality Is Not a Choice*. María R. Scharrón-del Río is currently “Interim Associate Dean of the School of Education & Professor of the School Counseling Graduate Program” at Brooklyn College (CUNY) in the U.S. Their focus is on “ethnic & cultural minority psychology & education, multicultural competencies, intersectionality, LGBTQ issues, gender variance, spirituality, resiliency, & well-being” (brooklyn.cuny.edu). Alan A. Aja is currently a professor and a chair in the Department of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies, with research interests in the racial wealth gap, economic democracy, collective action and sustainability. Their piece was published on the *Latino Rebels* website, the non-profit organization describes itself as a bilingual and

³⁴ “El sistema patriarcal que nos oprime hasta matarnos y al cual combatimos juntxs.” Translated by Mimi Urizar-Ávila.

³⁵ “Compañerxs de orientaciones sexuales, géneros, ideologías disidentes.” Translated by Mimi Urizar-Ávila.

³⁶ “Romper con el biologismo y el binomio dualista varón-mujer.” Translated by Mimi Urizar-Ávila.

bicultural “group of like-minded individuals...who believe in authentic, unfiltered and independent voices” (latinorebels.com). Their content covers politics, Latin America, “Afro Rebels,” and immigration. Scharrón-del Río and Aja’s writing can be described as an opinion response piece. It was written in response to the distribution of a piece written by Gilbert Guerra and Gilbert Orbea from Swarthmore College on the email list of the *National Institute of Latino Policy*, which was titled *The Argument Against the Use of the Term ‘Latinx’* (*The Phoenix*, Nov. 19, 2015). Scharrón-del Río and Aja present an explicit theory and history driven argument that pushes for the use of inclusive inflection, specifically using the “x” inflection, through the “[reapplication of] sections of Guerra and Orbea’s arguments...with [Scharrón-del Río and Aja’s] specific responses” (Scharrón-del Río and Aja 2015). It is important to note, Scharrón-del Río and Aja’s piece does not argue against the “e” inflection, most likely because it had not become as widespread or well known when the article was written, but it does criticize the “@” inflection for its embedded binary (since it represents the masculine “o” and feminine “a” simultaneously). Scharrón-del Río and Aja address five specific anti-Latinx arguments made by Guerra and Orbea, “Latinx is a ‘Buzzword,’” “Latinx is Linguistic Imperialism,” “Latinx is Nonexistent,” “You’re No Longer Spanish,” and “Latino is Fine.” In response to Guerra and Orbea’s first argument, Scharrón-del Río and Aja explain that “reducing Latinx to a ‘buzzword’” is a deliberate form of “invisibilizing non-binary and trans people of Latin American descent.” They point to the fact that “identity is fluid and dynamic” and cannot be limited to “static, rigid terms, nor based on absolute markers,” making the point that Latinx allows for a greater amount of people to be represented, regardless of whether they speak Spanish or not.

Scharrón-del Río and Aja move on to refuting Guerra and Orbea’s argument that Latinx is a form of linguistic imperialism from the U.S., promptly and clearly pointing to the fact that the “most blatant form of linguistic imperialism for Latin Americans” is Spanish. They emphasize the need for awareness of “[conquistadores’] acts of genocide” and the reality that “a few thousand indigenous languages existed in the Americas, and a few resilient hundred continue to be spoken today” that “range from the genderless to the multigendered, going beyond the binary.” Scharrón-del Río and Aja clearly label Guerra and Orbea’s claim of linguistic imperialism and defense of Spanish as what it is, “[a marker] of colonization: the erasure of indigenous history and its cultural legacy” that “advocates

for continuing a status quo (imposed by colonization) [while marginalizing and invisibilizing] those that do not adhere to hegemonic masculinity and gender conformity.” Their response includes a description of “a decolonizing approach,” one that requires we recognize the paradoxes of being colonized; that “language can act simultaneously as oppressor and liberator” and that “we are at once colonized and colonizer” (Scharrón-del Río and Aja 2015).

The third argument from Guerra and Orbea claims that “Latinx is Nonexistent” in Latin American speech or writing. Scharrón-del Río and Aja quickly refute this with the findings from simple Google searches that proved “x” and “@“ are in fact used in “hundreds of thousands of websites, articles, and blogs written by Latin Americans living in their countries of origin” (Scharrón-del Río and Aja 2015). Guerra and Orbea’s fourth claim alleges that removing grammatical and pronominal gender from Spanish equates to the “erasure of Spanish” (Guerra and Orbea 2015). Scharrón-del Río and Aja not only point out how problematic and reductionist this argument is, but once again state that:

This is certainly another symptom of unexamined privilege and internalized colonization.

Moreover, it also implies that our Latinx identity is so frail that without protecting the integrity of the language of our colonizers, we risk losing the main instrument of colonization that still binds many of us.

The last anti-Latinx argument presented by Guerra and Orbea is simply that, “Latino is Fine.” Our pro-Latinx scholars break down the ignorance and privilege behind this opinion, reiterating the fact that androcentric complacency with the word “Latino” perpetuates cis-hetero-patriarchy and disadvantages those who do not fit that imposed construction.

Both texts vary in their purpose and audience, one is an Argentine trans manifesto and call to action, the other is a U.S. American academic op-ed response. The identities and ideologies of the scholars behind these different texts, the virtual spaces in which they were published, and most importantly the social and theoretical frameworks within which their arguments were contextualized present clear linguistic motivations. After dissecting the manner in which each text demonstrated theoretical and syntactic ties to indigenous and queer realities, anti-capitalist and leftist political

alignment, and desire for the visibility of non-binary personhood in language, one can see how users and proponents of queer and inclusive language share decolonial speaker attitudes.

3.2 Speaker Interviews

First, I will briefly introduce each interviewee's sociolinguistic profile, so that findings discussed afterwards can be contextualized within the dialects of Spanish, ethnic/national/immigrant histories, and age groups of the individuals interviewed. All interviewees were adults, 18 or above. It is important to note that six of the eight interviewees are at least proficient in English, and these six people do use inclusive language such as "they" in their speech as well as varying amounts of queer slang. All quotations presented will be in English, no transcripts of the interviews exist, for the sake of confidentiality. Interviewee #1 (Y), is in her forties and was born and raised in the US, specifically the New York City area, where she continues to live. She identifies as Spanish; her mother is from Bogota and her father was from the Dominican Republic. She considers her dialect of Spanish to be a version of Colombian Spanish learned from her mother and the Nuyorican dialect she grew up around; however, it wasn't until she got into high school that she began to actively immerse herself in Spanish learning, speaking and Hispanic culture. Interviewee #2 (M), is a Guatemalan person under twenty. M currently lives in Guatemala and is starting university. M's dialect of Spanish is Guatemalan and it is their first language. Interviewee #3 (A), is a Hispanic Latino in his early twenties, born in Colombia and raised in the US from early childhood, he is currently attending university in New York City. A's dialect of Spanish is *Paisa* Colombian Spanish, it is his first language, and none of his family speaks English. Interviewee #4 (E), identifies as a Latina and an Argentine-American; and she is half Argentine and half U.S. American. E's Spanish is from Buenos Aires; it was her first language, she went on to attend bilingual school from K-8th grade and took some Spanish classes in high school. Currently she lives and studies at university in Houston. Interviewee #5 (O), is a Colombian Latino in his forties living in Bogota, speaking the Bogota dialect. Interviewee #6 (M.T.), is a mestizo Mexican in his twenties from Chihuahua, his first language is Spanish, specifically the Chihuahuan Mexican dialect. M.T. is now living and studying at a university in New York City. Interviewee #7 (E.L.) is French and in her early twenties, she was born and raised in France but now lives in Buenos Aires,

where she has some family living nearby. E.L. heard Spanish growing up from her father who worked in Argentina, and she learned it in school, now her dialect of Spanish is Porteño from Buenos Aires. Interviewee #8 (R), is Ecuadorian Latine and in their early twenties. R was born, raised, and is now living in Ecuador, their dialect of Spanish is Costeño.

The most consistent data from the interviews was that all interviewees, regardless of whether Spanish was their first language or not, were never taught, by their family/caregivers or teachers any inclusive language. Interviewees learned standardized Spanish that teaches only the *el/ellos, ella/ellas, usted/ustedes* and encountered inclusive language later in life through their social experiences in queer circles and through queer discourse and community on the internet. A couple of the younger interviewees, MT and R, specifically cited Tumblr as a source of learning about queer political vocabulary, inclusive language and queer slang. Consistent in interviews was also the perception that those who use inclusive language are one of two people: allies to queer people or actual queer people. The assumption that those who use inclusive language are part of the queer community was only expressed by one interviewee, the other seven expressed that they would wait to hear and learn more about the person before trying to assume speakers were queer just because they used inclusive language.

Another consistent point in data was the motivation behind using inclusive language. All interviewees brought up the question of respect. As O explained when asked about why it is important to use inclusive language, it is about emphasizing that “someone is a person first and foremost.” R went further to emphasize the importance of representing non-binary people like themselves in language, saying that it:

Transforms the discourse, when we start talking about non-binary people and their existence, we can start to talk about how to meet their needs. It gives visibility but also the chance for material changes to follow...we need to give them existence as a group. If they don't exist in the imaginary, in the collective thought, then they can't exist in the material, we have to think of the marginalized communities first to then help them.

The themes of respect and inclusion were consistent throughout interviews, as were reasons behind decision making when it came to choosing whether to use inclusive language or not in a given

setting. All interviewees said they would only use inclusive language in certain settings, with three main criteria leading them to use it or not: intelligibility, safety, and community. When it comes to intelligibility, E.L. specifically mentioned that as an L2 Spanish speaker she worries that people might think she can't speak Spanish properly if she uses it in language teaching settings (she tutors French language learners). R also brought up a similar concern, saying that they will use both inclusive language and queer slang when speaking or writing to friends, but in formal or academic settings they worry about being penalized if they turn in written work with inclusive language. However, R did say that they make a conscious effort to use the “-e” almost all the time even if it makes people uncomfortable, [because they know that] it can make that one person who might be closeted feel more comfortable or visible.” In general it seems that the level of formality (and therefore prescriptivism) expected in a given situation will play a part in dictating whether speakers decide to initiate inclusive language usage or not. This ties to safety as well, seeing that interviewees in Latin America who mentioned workplace, professional, or academic settings expressed hesitation to initiate inclusive language usage in these spaces until they felt more comfortable and integrated, if ever. If inclusive language was already presented in the setting, interviewees in Latin America would use it. Continuing on safety, interviewees consistently said they wouldn't usually use inclusive language with family they weren't out to and/or weren't comfortable enough with.

In terms of community, all interviewees said that they would feel comfortable using inclusive language with other queer people and employ inclusive inflection if a person asked to be addressed that way. Latin American-born or based interviewees under thirty were consistent in expressing comfort using inclusive language with other people their age that seemed open-minded even if they weren't queer.

The difference in choices lay more in whether interviewees would deliberately integrate inclusive language consistently into their speech and writing. Half of the participants (M, M.T., E.L., and R) said they make efforts to consistently use inclusive language in their speech and writing if they felt safe enough to do so, whether queer people were interlocutors or not. It is to be noted that this first half of the participants were not very U.S. based; M is Guatemalan and lives in Guatemala City, M.T. is a Mestizo Mexican immigrated to the U.S. from Chihuahua, Mexico around middle school, E.L. is

French and recently moved to Buenos Aires, and R is born, raised and lives in Ecuador. Regarding the other half of participants, who will only occasionally use certain inclusively inflected words (adjectives such as *todes*, *todxs*, *Latine*, *Latinx*) in their speech and writing and will use inclusive inflection if a person asks them to be addressed as such, three are based in the U.S. (either born and raised or moved in early childhood: Y, A, E), while the fourth (O) is based in Colombia. The U.S.-based vs. not-U.S.-based inclusive language choices presented in these eight interviews don't provide support for the dominant narrative that inclusive language as a whole is a *gringo* imperial export imposed on Latin American Spanish speakers. In this second half, two interviewees (A & E) are in their early twenties and two (Y & O) are in their forties. The first half of participants were all below twenty or in their early twenties. Of course, age cannot be deemed an absolute determining factor. Socialization also plays a key role in any language usage, seen in an example given by E.L. of her 85-year-old grandfather who uses inclusive language. E.L. said that her grandfather lives in Buenos Aires and works in filmmaking and art and has made projects with the LGBTQI+ community in the area, probable cause for him to adopt inclusive language.

Some interviewees expressed overt preference for the “e,” at least in spoken Spanish, over the “x” inflection. The “@” inflection was never brought into discussion by interviewees. It should be noted that among the interviewees who expressed this preference for the “e”—A, E, E.L., and R. All four are ethnically or personally tied to South America; it can also be said that at least three of these four speakers who prefer the “e” inflection consistently participate in a larger Spanish speaker community. E & E.L. have ties to Buenos Aires where the “e” has been said to be notably popularized. E uses *Latine* and says that when it comes to the “x:”

There is an argument to be made for why some of its manifestations are colonial...[it] came from queer Mexican Americans..but the way that it kind of only exists in these elitist circles...[and is] used by people who aren't *Latine* themselves.. and the kinds of attitudes you see on occasion of like telling *Latine* people what language they should use.

E also discusses how in a phonetic and grammatical sense the “x” doesn't make sense and comes off as anglicized. E.L. also discussed the “x” as problematic and not usable in speech, before the “e” became more popular, with Spanish speaking Peruvian friends in France. E.L. says she uses the “e” in

her speech but aesthetically prefers writing “x.” The third pro-“e” interviewee (A), who is Colombian and lives in the U.S. but has no English-speaking family, has strong opinions when it comes to the “x” vs. the “e.” He explained that when it came to inclusive language he first heard about Latinx in 2017 from his English-speaking university, and that none of the Spanish-speaking people in his community or family was using it. As A saw more on the “x” he felt that proponents “hyper represented our whitest counterparts,” and that he really only observed “gringos say it a lot [and] young Latin American folks whose politics to me are very much non-nuanced, not complicated.” A also was very bothered to see a white Latino gay man on Twitter “pathologizing Latinos who don’t use Latinx as blowing a transphobic dog whistle.” The only other people he would expect to use it were Latin Americans with “an anti-Latinidad politic, [who] also probably have a radical anti-Spanish politic.” In A’s opinion, the “x” will forever be unintelligible to Spanish-speaking society and will be out of reach for the majority of people. When it comes to the “e,” A is a fan, even if he doesn’t actively use inclusive language in his speech and writing. He really likes *Latine*, and thinks that those who use the “e” would be young Latin American students from GenZ or Millennials in touch with their culture “who want to participate in what they believe is the right thing but have enough “common sense to question Latinx and come to the conclusion that they don’t want to want to participate in that.” A thinks that the “e” makes sense, that it is learnable, teachable, while the “x” doesn’t have that faculty. The fourth, pro-“e” interview is R, from and based in Ecuador. While R never made an explicit argument for “e” throughout their entire interview, they almost exclusively used “e” inflection when speaking Spanish for the majority of the interview.

While they shared varying opinions and usages of it, interviewees were consistently aware of inclusive language and its various iterations. Meanwhile, interviewees’ awarenesses and uses of queer slang varied much more. This differentiation makes sense, considering inclusive language is not dialect specific as queer slang can be. What was consistent in interviews was that queer slang was predominantly, if not only, used with other queer people and was closely associated to gender play and neutrality in pronouns and words. O deemed queer slang to be “all inclusive words, without established gender, that refer to people as persons,” M.T. said that queer slang could be described as

more gender neutral or feminized words, and E.L. said that part of queer slang could be men referring to themselves with *ella* or in general feminizing everything instead of using the masculine.

Each person detailed a very specific experience and opinion about queer slang, presenting different individual words, and some gave very localized definitions and explanations of the words and their usages. Y's experience with queer slang was very negative, as she expressed that she could only still view words such as *marica*, *maricón*, and *pata* as slurs and insults and she didn't participate in the reappropriation of words such as some queer people do. She would use a couple words, such as *lesbiana*, *novia*, *cuir*, *gay* that could be deemed queer slang. M says that they use words such as *amix*, *todes*, *todxs*, and different pronouns (*el/ella/ellx*) for themselves depending on how they feel. O explained that he only learned about the notion of queer slang recently in the past two years, but that he had already created a word himself to describe people that are feminine or masculine but acted in a transgressive way for their gender norms. O uses the word *arroba*, literally meaning @, to describe individuals who mix and play with femininity and masculinity and their attitudes, behaviors, and aesthetics.

When first asked about the topic, A brought up the fact that in his experience, the word *cuir* (the aforementioned calque for queer), is used and said by people with certain social capital and upward mobility. He observes that these people also have proximity to U.S. American culture and discourse. A elaborated specifically on how certain queer slang affirms him, breaking down his conception of *marica*, a word and an identity that is very special to him. For A, *marica* "encapsulates [his] sexuality..if someone is a *marica* that is it automatically implies most likely gay but not straight....certainly implies that there's some sort of homosexual activity." A went on to explain how culturally specific *marica* is, bringing up an instance where a white classmate was presenting in their Spanish class and claiming that "James Charles is a *marica*." As A explains, "James Charles could never embody *marica* because he's a gringo and he's white, he's a white [U.S.] American," the *marica* identity is one that A sees not only as exclusively Latin American but rooted in South American queer subculture. He says that he would never be bothered to hear another non-South American Latine use *marica*, but for himself he would never use what he deems a Mexican word like *joto* to describe himself. A illustrates this distinction using examples in English of gender identity terminology for the

black community: stud and fish. These terms are for black lesbians, yet non-black lesbians use them; they were originally culturally specific, but this appropriation makes the word lose its specificity and its sacredness.

When reflecting on other queer slang, A discusses how many of these words not only confuse gender, as seen in expressions like *los maricas*, *las marimachos*, *las machos*, but also tend to collapse gender and sexuality in one term. He uses *marica* as an example, a term he sees collapse two different kinds of people with very different experiences: feminine gays and trans women. A points out that apart from this collapsing of meaning, words such as *marica* and *travesti* are used by many people that would be defined differently in the US or in English:

A lot of people can label themselves as *travesti* or just *marica* as an identity... ‘I’m not trans, I’m *travesti*,’ it just makes a *gringo*’s head spin.. they’re just too culturally specific, not able to be fully translated.

Personally, I see this collapsing of meaning deeply tied to the fact that many of these words started off as insults, by people who didn’t care at all for the nuance of the identities that they were referring to. These words originally served the purpose of designating something cis-straight people didn’t know and didn’t deem acceptable. That muffled nuance is reflected in how targets of the insults reappropriate the words and feel represented by them.

When it comes to E.L.’s experience with queer slang, she views it as a sign of belonging and community, “of affirmation and creation of one’s own world through language, a bond different from the heteronormative standard.” She gave a couple examples of some more unique words she has learned through her queer community in Buenos Aires, the first being *xadres* [eks-zad-res], an “x” inflected version of the masculine, *padres* (parents). She first heard the word used by her friend, to refer to her parents as parents. She says it has proven difficult for her to use herself but has seen it used by some people around her. She’s seen others avoid the awkward “x” initial word by using the word *viejes*, the “e” inflected version of *viejos*, another word used to refer to one’s parents. The third word she brought up was *hijo/hija/hije de yuta*, a play on the original *hijo de puta* (son of a whore/bitch), that replaces *puta* with *yuta*, an Argentine slang word for cops or military. The expression pulls from

the usual insults which demean women and sex workers and aims to be sex positive and anti-police/military. Lastly, E.L. says that simply avoiding “incarnating” things into gendered entities and using conceptual words, such as avoiding *los niños* (masc. the children) using words like *la niñez* (“the youth”).

Lastly, R shared their view on queer slang, which they see as “neologisms used by the LGBTQI+ to identify themselves, and communicate their experiences.” They explained that they use the words *lesbiana*, *macha*, *marimacha*, *tortillera*, *torta*, and *no binarie* to identify themselves. They emphasized that they would only use these words, especially *tortillera* and *torta* with other queer people since they “use them in a reclaimed way, so [they’re] only comfortable using them with other people who don’t have that systemic power over [them].” they also add that using these reclaimed words outside of queer spaces can just be more of a security concern rather than a historical or linguistically pragmatic one. R also touches on the idea of locality and cultural specificity, discussing how queer subcultures in Latin America are different than those in the US, even though they might have surface level similarities; “*macha* feels good but I’m not comfortable calling myself *butch*.” They narrow this idea within Latin America and point to the dialect specific *camiona* used by masculine lesbians in Chile, and how each word “is not interchangeable [but] nuanced and localized.” R also discussed the importance of having a queer slang, given that they see it as intrinsically different from:

The letters of the acronym, which are more sanitized words that don’t fully communicate the nuance behind identifying as these words, the margins...queer slang affirms that idea that they are political and politicized identities, not assimilated into society as respectable.

R illustrates this difference in meaning by referring to the idea of “defanged words.” They see the words in LGBTQI+ as defanged and in many ways commodified by dominant homonationalist propaganda. Therefore, queer slang is a kind of “re-fanging.” They observe that most of queer slang is reclaimed from a meaning that was initially fanged, by people looking to oppress and alienate, the identities were then defanged by the commodified mainstream discourse, replaced by sanitized words

backed up in respectability politics. Now new words can be weaponized by those who are still targeted, in order to confront commodified, “rainbow” ideas.

When it comes to questioning each interviewee’s perception of inclusive language and queer slang’s decolonial nature, everyone at least shared the opinion that they were disruptive of the binary and heteronormativity in society and had potential for helping change colonial structures. In response to the thirteenth question (do you consider inclusive language and/or queer slang to be decolonial in nature, why or why not?), Y said:

Making the space for people to define themselves, I would say is the ultimate anti-colonial act, because it means that you want people to step into themselves and come into their own and that does not work in a colonial system...to empower people to define their own realities is as decolonial as you can get.

M said that they could be decolonial since it is anti-sexist. M.T. holds a similar opinion, that both help destabilize the binary and therefore can have a decolonial nature. A argued for their decolonial nature, bringing up their reactive potential:

So much of what we call life is built on these ideals of gender and sexuality and race and justice and are predicated on things that were brought over by invaders, that ended up becoming the norm of our respective societies, and all of these words contribute to some kind of disruption of these ideals.

He did recognize that different elements of inclusive language and queer slang vary in this potency, but at least have the potential to get people thinking about “what it means to be a man, woman, gay, lesbian, trans person versus *travesti*.” E answered at first with a criticism of Latinx, but argued that inclusive language and queer slang challenge a lot of norms, of language and gender, and that they are “very against the system and power structures,” such as the Real Academia Española. O thinks that it will take a long time for these linguistic changes to have any decolonial consequences, but that it’s possible, if inclusive language can become a common modality for Spanish speakers. E.L. similarly, “[doesn’t] know if they are decolonial per se, but they have a potential,” they can help put the dismantling of colonial systems into motion given that the masculine as the norm is a European and

white norm, colonial in nature these linguistic tools are “disruption of a norm that harms, redefinition of how things can work, redefining of reality, reality as has been described by many for many years is not truly like this.”

Lastly, in response to question thirteen, R says, “yes, [it is decolonial in nature] because Spanish is already a colonial imposition, so speaking ‘wrong Spanish’ or at the very least not standard spanish sort of rejects the colonial imposition.” They also mention the fact that since dominant queer rhetoric words are from abroad (loan words, LGBTI+, etc.), “developing [their] own language that ties to [their] own subcultures [this] is also decolonial.”

Conclusion: A Call to Action

The biggest drive behind this thesis is a desire for greater queer representation in linguistic academic space. Undoubtedly, this intellectual interest stems from my own experience with queerness, my *mestize* history and *Latine* identity, and the Spanish language. As a first-generation, genderqueer *Latine* who grew up in a Guatemalan, Spanish-speaking household in the U.S., my ties to the Spanish language, indigeneity, colonialism and the *Latine* culture have been complicated and changing. For most of my life, the cognitive framework that ruled within my mind was that my queerness and my parent culture were incompatible. This negative framework was reinforced by the homophobic rhetoric I saw as commonplace in the language of my family in Guatemala, and even in that of my parents before I began to correct them as a teenager. This caused me to recoil from my *Latine*-ness, ignorantly believing that the U.S. and anglophone culture were the only parts of my experience that could offer me space and tools for exploring my evolving, non-conforming identity. For all of my childhood and adolescence, I bought into the imperial, colonized thinking that *Latine*-ness could only offer me binary-gendered Spanish, machismo, and heteronormativity. I ignored the richness and the diversity of experience encapsulated within Latin American indigeneity, both historical and contemporary. Once I began to deconstruct my colonized conception of *Latine*-ness and *mestize* identity, I became aware of how backwards my thinking was; my identities were not incompatible, my queerness and my Guatemalan ethnicity were in fact complementary and could affirm each other through ideological reframing and linguistic restoration.

While slang of any kind has always been present, its contemporary, developing iterations introduce new ways to subvert hegemonic conceptions of gender and identity along with increasing opportunities to forge a global queer discourse through language making. Inclusive language is exciting and presents challenges to colonially installed ideas of our languages and their speaker cultures. The growing social movement towards the implementation of inclusive grammar and language across speaker cultures with varying linguistic gender will help provoke important reassessments of language ideology, prescriptivism, and representation. The questions and conflicts

that arise from these reassessments will have vital implications for the future of our languages, languages that have never been static and never will be.

Challenge the frameworks you have been fed—linguistic, social, and political—criticize the hegemonic structures we have accepted and find ways to promote affirmation of long-repressed and silenced realities in our world. Question the ideologies behind your language usage, are they as representative of their speakers as you've been told they are? Significant language change is bottom-up and prescriptivist institutions cannot realistically police your language unless you let them. Be a part of individual and collective initiative, reframe your linguistic realities, and work towards global, representative, and healing linguistic systems.

Appendix

Interview Questions for IRB-FY2021-5229:

1. How do you identify, as Hispanic/Latino/Latinx/Latine/Afrolatine/Mestize/other?
2. Where is your dialect of Spanish from?
3. Did you learn Spanish from your caregivers or in a classroom/formal language learning setting?
4. When you learned Spanish, were you taught any other pronouns or suffixes other than el/ella/ellas/ellos, la/lo/los/las, and -o/-a?
5. How did you learn about inclusive language and/or queer slang? Has the internet played any part in this learning/exposure?
6. What do you consider queer slang? Which of it do you use?
7. Do you use inclusive language and/or queer slang whenever you speak Spanish, or only in certain settings?
8. Do you use them in your written Spanish?
9. Why do you use inclusive language and/or queer slang?
10. What do you think is important about using inclusive language and/or queer slang?
11. How does using inclusive language and/or queer slang affect your sense of self?
12. What assumptions do you make about someone who uses inclusive language and/or queer slang?
13. Do you consider inclusive language and/or queer slang to be decolonial in nature, why or why not?
14. Do you speak any other languages, if so do you also use inclusive language and/or queer slang in that/those language(s)?

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