**Ni de aquí, ni de alla:**

Chicana Language and Identity in a Primarily White Institution

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**Abstract**

Past research has shown that prejudice persists towards speakers of English with an accent (Lippi-Green 2011), non-standard English dialects (Mendoza-Denton 1999), and even borrowed words pronounced in their language of origin (Carr 2014). These findings beg the question: what effect does language discrimination have on day-to-day speech? Furthermore, very little research has been conducted to understand the speech patterns of individuals in environments where they are not a part of the majority racial or ethnic population. When these two factors are combined, the threat to speakers increases as their languages lose value in certain communities. In this study, I analyze the effect of both of these elements, language prejudice and social environment, on Chicana speech.

This study explores the language use of a group of four female Mexican-American students within different spaces at Swarthmore College, an elite, private, small liberal arts college in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. As an academic setting where non-standard dialects are not always welcome, the menace of language discrimination is present and an issue that marginalized students often encounter. Despite the obstacles, this group of speakers formed their own speech community, where they freely employed mixed codes and varieties of Spanglish, in order to navigate the complexities of their identities through their language.

Building upon previous work, this study specifically analyzes the language use of one Mexican-American/Chicana speech community, including codeswitching amongst speakers in regards to borrowed Spanish words, and the effects of different environments on phonetic realizations in Chicano/Mexican-American speech. Additionally, this work connects to some of the deeper issues that their language use reveals – including identity, heritage, and belonging.
1 Introduction

As a bilingual Chicana student at Swarthmore who has witnessed some of the effects of language prescriptivism in higher education, this research is heavily influenced by my own experiences, and my own need to explore some of the issues that surround young women like me. In my final year as a student at Swarthmore College, I am only now beginning to understand the intricacies of Chicano speech and the slew of other issues surrounding Latinidad at a primarily white institution. For this reason, I felt particularly compelled to embark on this project, not only to understand the issue of Chicana language more myself, but to educate others on this complex topic.

In and around Swarthmore there are no street vendors that sell tacos or Mexican candy, there are no flea markets with Mexican women offering samples of all of the products at their stand, no billboards, or street signs, or radio stations in Spanish, no bright Mexican flags hanging from windows, no matriarchs calling you *mijita*, there is no Mexican-ness or Chicano-ness ripe for the taking. This is essential to understanding the greater context of this environment, since every participant previously lived in a city with a high Latino, Mexican, or Spanish-speaking population. Swarthmore upon first arriving, and even after some years, is unfamiliar territory that spurs heart-wrenching longing, which is reflected in some of the discourse with participants provided in later sections.

Chicano speech communities around the United States each have unique linguistic characteristics that show the depth and variety of their language use, as well as the inventive methods they employ language in fusing the two sides of their identity. Many linguists have explored the lives and language of Chicanos, examining the effects their environments and heritage have on their language use, as well as their relationships with the world around them.
However, little work has explored the language use of individuals when they are the minority in their immediate community. It is also critical to understand the processes in which an individual adapts to spaces other than their own, where they are not the majority, where it is unlikely that everyone or anyone will understand them if they speak in Spanish, or any code that includes it. If racism and judgment against linguistic choices are threats to a speaker, then it is essential to understand how speakers react to and are influenced by the prejudices held against them in spaces that are potentially hostile to their comfortable forms of speech.

Of particular interest is the use of borrowed words, whose phonetic realization can vary and hold the potential to reveal a speaker's identity. Since these words are adopted into one language from another language, phonetic realization of a word, based on its pronunciation in its original language, seems natural only if a speaker has the linguistic capabilities of doing so, such as those that accompany a strong familiarity with the original language. For example, a Chicano speaker fluent in or familiar with Spanish would most likely pronounce *taco*, a borrowed word of Spanish origin, as it would be pronounced in Spanish. However, when simply pronouncing a word as it would be in Spanish can lead listeners to draw negative conclusions about the speaker (Carr 2014), a simple speech act is rendered much more complex than it appears on the surface and becomes an expression that can define an individual.

To examine this phenomenon, I conduct a study which focuses on a small body of speakers in an academic setting where one of their languages falls into places them into the language minority. As such, they must carve out their own spaces for unencumbered expression, and where occasionally, their individual identities are taken for granted. A speech community such as this one is much more than a group of speakers who use language in a certain way. It is an entity comprised of powerful bonds, long-held traditions, and other essential elements to their
existence. For this reason, not only is it useful, but it is critical to understand individuals of a language minority community and the elements which affect, and have affected, their language and their lives.

In the proceeding sections I first give background information and definitions on some of the relevant terms to this study. Topics such as labels of identity and different dialects of language are greatly debated in the field. Thus, section 2 is dedicated to parsing out the nuances between them and clarifying what specific terms such as *Chicano English*, *Spanglish*, and *Chicano* mean in the context of this study. Next, in a review of the literature I describe relevant sources to the present study and other related works, which form the larger body of work on the topic. Then, in section 4 I describe the methodology for this study, and the reasoning for specific choices. In section 5 I include transcriptions of data recorded and discuss the results of the study. Finally, in section 6 I conclude and explore the significance of my findings.

2 **Background**

For clarity and accuracy, it is necessary to define the various types of Chicano speech this work will reference, in addition to various racial and ethnic identity labels. It is worth mentioning that the definitions of speech vary widely, and even within the various dialects of these speech communities, there exist hierarchies that are put in place by other speakers of the same dialects and can trigger strenuous codeswitching in some cases (Sánchez 1994). Nevertheless, identifying the characteristics of each of these hybrid languages highlights some of the reasons for their specific usage and illustrates the importance of Spanglish, Chicano English, and Chicano Spanish.

Chicano is a highly debated, even controversial, term to many. As with any racially or ethnically identifying term, its definition can vary from individual to individual, as it holds a number of different and distinct connotations. Chicano was formerly a derogatory term, reclaimed in the time leading up to the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960’s (Sanchez-Muñoz 2013). For this reason, the term can hold a particular political potency for some, which others may not even be aware of. For the purposes of this study, Chicano will be defined as “a term reserved for those of Mexican origin who were born and raised in the U.S., but who do not identify themselves in the first line as Americans.” Put precisely, “a Chicano is a Mexican-American with a non-Anglo image of himself” (Lippi-Green 2011:256).

The term Mexican-American is just as complex, however in most cases it is defined almost identically to the definition this paper uses for the term Chicano. This term implies an obvious connection to Mexico, and is generally used when referring to someone of Mexican descent born in the United States. Thus, these two terms will be used interchangeably. I do not use the terms Latino and Hispanic, because both are broad, since they encompass numerous nationalities without any room for distinction. The latter can be seen as implicating an existing relationship to Spain, which can be insensitive to some, who associate the term Hispanic with the upsetting nature and history of colonization. Additionally, Hispanic refers to Spanish speaking individuals and communities, thus excluding Brazilians and other citizens of Latin America and the Caribbean, who do not consider Spanish their national language.

2.2 Spanglish

“There is no better metaphor for what a mixed-race culture means than a hybrid language, an informal code... Spanglish is what we speak, but it is also who we Latinos are, and how we act, and how we perceive the world” (Morales 2002: 3).
Spanglish is generally regarded as a “hybrid of mainly Spanish syntax and English lexicon,” while opponents of the mixed code often see Spanglish as “an invasion of Spanish by English” (Ribes-Gil 1998:13). On one hand, some even believe that a speaker’s use of Spanglish reveals some type of deficiency, or lack of education, and consider Spanglish evidence that an individual is fluent in neither English nor Spanish, and thus must supplement this gap with Spanglish, (Betti 2001:46). On the other hand, some scholars go as far as to say that Spanglish is the third languages of many individuals that forms a way of life (Betti 2001:23). Despite its differing definitions and connotations, the fact stands that Spanglish and its dialects or variations (including pocho, tex-mex, caló, espanglish, Chicano English/Spanish), is a palpable force and for many an intrinsic part of daily life in Latino communities all over the United States.

The term Spanglish, like Latino or Hispanic, can encompass its use by speakers of many different nationalities, and does not differentiate between regional and national dialects. Since the Spanish of Cuba is much different from that of Colombia or Costa Rica, for example, the Spanglish of speakers from either country will likewise vary greatly from one another. This is why terms such as Cubonics and Puerto Rican English exist and each have their own fields of research. Because of its broad nature, the term is not ideal for discussing the specific intricacies of other dialects of Spanish-based, or Spanish-influenced speech. Because of this, other terms and definitions exist that will be used to speak of the types of language frequently seen in Chicano speech communities.

The two most common forms of Spanglish used in Chicano communities are Chicano English and Chicano Spanish. Chicano English is a variety of English obviously influenced by Spanish, though clearly independent from it, of low prestige in most circles, but often the first and only language of many (Peñalosa 1980). Like Chicano English, Chicano Spanish is the use
of one language, with obvious influence of a speaker’s other language. Chicano Spanish is simply Spanish, with the heavy and visible influence of English.

Many have referred to these blended characteristics as “interference” or “pollution,” however this shift can also be interpreted as a transformation. It is a result of a “limiting situation, of an unwillingness to succumb to the English language, and of the need of a population to adapt and survive” (Sanchez 1994:127). In any case, each of the hybrid languages employed by Chicanos in different contexts forms part of their reality, language, and identity, and the importance of the distinctions of each cannot be discounted.

2.3 Language as Identity

M: “When I was little I didn’t notice it as much, but when I go back Mexico, they always see me as American.”

J: “Del otro lado and all this stuff.”

Z: “Yeah, I feel like the minute I open my mouth people are like, ‘Oh you’re from el otro lado.’”

Language and communication, verbal or non-verbal, form an intrinsic part of every individual’s daily lives, which is why it so often acts as an expression of identity. Mexican-American and Chicano identifying individuals occupy the precarious space in between two identities. Even the title Mexican-American indicates a duality that often translates into an individual’s image of themselves and their language use. A mixed language serves as a fitting parallel for this mixed identity, as it reflects the particularity of this unique experience, straddling the border between two nations, two histories, two cultures, two languages, and two identities.

For Chicano speakers, their various forms of speech can be ways of dealing with “complex linguistic and ethnic identity issues in a creative manner,” negotiating the “hybridity of the Chicana/o experiences,” and “construct[ing] and reconstruct[ing] a third space of Chicana/o

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1 M, J, and Z are participants in the study, whose stories will be shared in the proceeding pages. The dialogue quoted was taken directly from an interview conducted for this study.
identity.” (Sanchez-Munoz 2013:440). Chicanos speak in a “border tongue,” capable of capturing the contradictions within their worlds. It “convey[s] the ‘mestizo’ sense of rootlessness and reflects the hybrid, bicultural nature of identity,” (Soler 1999:276). It is important to keep the broader context of an individual’s language choices in mind, when exploring specific aspects of their speech.

For many Chicanos, their mixed language affords them the type of belonging and “citizenship” that both Mexico and the United States have denied them (Betti 2001:47). This tongue gives them agency over their own identity and the ability to sample both cultures in a fusion that represents the complexity of their existence. In this way, Spanglish and its variations are not only ways of communication, or forms of speech; they are ways of life, a mark of hybridity, multiculturalism and a representation of the individuals who exist within two realities, and navigate this space however they can (Betti 2001:41).

3 Literature Review

There have been a great number of works dedicated to the topic of Spanglish, and even a significant amount on specific dialects, such as the various forms of Chicano speech (Cardenas 1970, Fought 2003, Gonzalez 1988, Ornstein-Garcia 1988, Peñalosa 1980, Sanchez 1994). Some of these books, articles, and other publications focus on providing general descriptions of Spanglish, or of a dialect or different variety of Spanglish (Cubonics, Puerto Rican English, Chicano English, etc.) (Lipski 2008, Ribes-Gil 1988, Stavans 2003). They are dedicated to cataloging the numerous linguistic elements of Spanglish and its varieties. A number of works have compiled graphs, charts, and lists that illustrate almost every aspect of Spanglish from phonetic variations to syntactic phenomenon (Fought 2003, Gonzales 1988). Another category of works, which in part build off of more quantitative works, reach further and provide in-depth
analysis of specific speech communities, illustrating a greater context and the relevance of
inguage and mixed-codes in the lives of individuals and discuss the social and identity issues
(Gonzales 1999, Mendoza-Denton 2008, Phillips 1982). As a whole, these works provide a base
knowledge of the issues and realities surrounding various forms of Chicano speech.

3.1 **Stigmatization and Stereotyping of Chicano Speech**

Works such as Fairclough (2003) and Lipski (2008) compare and contrast the opposing views on
the development of Spanglish and its variations. Fairclough presents the arguments and evidence
for both supporters and critics of the hybrid tongue and provides a critical analysis of the work
done over the years. Lipski explores the related connotations of the linguistic hybrid and its
‘illegitimate birth,’ and similar views, which denigrate the abilities of Spanglish speaker. He then
compares these observations to studies done on the linguistic qualities of Spanglish in various
locations, ultimately showing variations of Spanish. Lipski includes various definitions of
‘Spanglish’ from dictionaries and scholars that regard the mix as a ‘contamination,’ ‘invasion,’
and a danger. He concludes with an injunction against the aforementioned views and their
effective marginalization of speakers.

Furthermore, Lippi-Green (2011) goes into further detail on the topics of language
profiling. Lippi-Green (2011) describes the language’s subordination process and the myth of
‘standard English’ and goes on to give clear examples of discrimination of speakers of non-
standard English. In a section of her book dedicated specifically to Spanish and its variations,
Lippi-Green provides a brief introduction to some forms of Latino speech and issues surrounding
it. This particular chapter of a larger work zeroes in on the inequalities of language use, Lippi-
Green specifically explores variations of Spanish in the United States, with special sections on
Mexico, and topics ranging from colonization, to white privilege, to language discrimination.
Lippi-Green provides a broad survey of the issues language use can cause in Spanish-speaking communities, even indigenous language speech communities in Mexico. She gives examples of discriminatory actions taken against Latinos. These examples range from derogatory remarks in public, to individuals facing claims of plagiarism and child abuse (Lippi-Green 287-288).

Carr (2014) specifically analyzes the attitudes of listeners towards one bilingual speaker. Carr acknowledges and seeks to partially fill a gap in the literature on borrowed Spanish words, spoken with the phonetic pronunciation of their language of origin, and attitudes towards the speaker and their speech. She investigates whether or not it is stigmatized to articulate a word with the phonetic pronunciation of the language of origin, specifically Spanish. A diverse range of informants, including Mexican-identifying individuals, other Latinos, whites and ‘others,’ heard the recording of a native English/Spanish bilingual speaker reading from a script and gave their opinions on her speech in a survey. The survey asked direct questions about the speaker’s abilities as well as less direct questions about income, education levels, etc.

A majority of the informants agreed that the speaker had a bachelor’s degree, most believed she was not a native English speaker, and some even said she spoke English poorly. Some informants indicated that they thought she spoke English very well, but she did not appear to be a native speaker. Many second generation immigrants (G2) correctly identified that the speaker was also a G2, others did not know. A majority of the white informants believed she was a first generation immigrant. In regards to income, most assumed she was either middle or low. In reality, the speaker was an immigrant of second generation with a bachelor’s degree. Carr’s study illustrates that even pronouncing borrowed words the way they would be pronounced in their language of origin is cause for stigmatization and negative judgments from English-speaking whites and Latinos alike.
The preceding works are all united by their critical analysis of language prescriptivism and discrimination. Lipski (2008) and Fairclough (2003) provide definitions and viewpoints which reflect the negative attitudes that affect speakers of non-standard English, while Lippi-Green (2011) gives specific cases and evidence of these effects. Carr (2014) takes a unique angle on the issue, and shows that these issues are still present today. These works show the necessity for further research in non-standard speech communities and provide a basis for one of the most important research questions for this study: How do speakers adjust their speech in order to cope with the prejudice they face based on their use of language?

3.2 Speech Communities

A number of extensive and influential works have been published that trace the specific characteristics of various speech communities of Mexican-Americans and Chicanos within the United States (Barker 1971, Mendoza-Denton 2008, Sanchez-Munoz 2013, Silva-Corvala 1982, Phillips 1982, Valdes 1982). These works illustrate the uniqueness of individual pockets of speakers and the variety of ways in which individuals use language and how their choices affect different aspects of their lives.

One of the most noteworthy authors in the field has based her work on a small community of gang-affiliated Chicana girls in Los Angeles. Norma Mendoza-Denton’s works span a number of years and serve as a compilation and incredibly detailed description of a speech community of high school-aged girls. Mendoza-Denton (1997) examines the sociolinguistics of gang-affiliated Latina high school students. She explores the role of societal pressure in language attitudes towards Spanish and English and the opposing worlds of Sureñas and Norteñas, in particular the ethnic and language ideologies that distinguish them. She conducted this study over two years and her ethnographic fieldwork included socio-linguistic interviews with
students, audio recording of naturally occurring interactions, and extensive participant observation.

Mendoza-Denton’s recent work *Homegirls: Language and Cultural Practice among Latina Youth Gangs* (2008) provides a follow up and extension of Mendoza-Denton’s previous work with Latina, gang-affiliated youth. She once again explores the identities that these young girls carve through their language, with the addition of in-depth phonetic analysis. Her conclusions analyze how “semiotic elements of speech, bodily practices, and symbolic exchanges are employed to signal social affiliation, (Mendoza-Denton 2008). These inferences are relevant to the present study, as I seek to examine how a different group of speakers carves out their own social identities through elements of speech.

One of the largest-scale studies is that of Maria Dolores Gonzales, who in *Crossing Social and Cultural Borders: The Road to Language Hybridity* explores three generations of women from Cordova, New Mexico and how they use the language to extend their social networks by crossing social, cultural and linguistic borders. Gonzales focuses on language choice in various speech communities all grounded in “border culture.” She includes a brief historical background in which she describes the colonization of New Mexico and the push to “Americanize” the native population, which is essential in understanding the language prejudice and colonization that past generations of these speakers have had to overcome.

Over the span of ten weeks she collected data in intragroup and intergroup situations, focusing on same-sex linguistic interactions. She describes the family sizes, education levels, and employment of her participants in order to set the frame for their interactions among other community members and non-community members in and away from Cordova. She concludes that based on their codeswitching, Cordovan women have “devised linguistic strategies that
allow them to participate effectively in the border communities” (Gonzales 1999:35). Additionally, she praises their success as ‘cultural brokers’ in their ability to navigate between separate realities. This implicates that this particular group of speakers has managed to overcome linguistic adversity and navigate their language use throughout the different spaces they occupy.

A slightly smaller scale example mapping Chicano speech varieties is that of Guadalupe Valdes (1982), who investigates codeswitching patterns through numerous tape recordings of a single speaker. Valdes describes the speaker as having a “careful” dialect of standard Mexican Spanish, because of her exposure to prejudices. The recordings are set in various environments in the speaker’s life (her friend’s apartment, her apartment, with family, etc.) and examine the nuances in her speech in each situation. Valdes concludes that the switching patterns are based on the fluency of the other speaker, and that they vary based on the proficiency of the speaker’s interlocutor in both languages (English and Spanish). This would suggest that other speakers are also influenced by their interlocutors and based on the variety of results Valdes recorder, could result in a wide range of codeswitching methods used by speakers.

The preceding studies analyze unique speakers and speech communities, but the implications of each also shed light on the results of the present study. While the language use varies in each of these works, they all demonstrate a manipulation of language by speakers according to their environments and as symbols of social affiliations, and an ability to adapt to various situations, even language colonization.

3.4 Language as Identity (2)

Soler (1999) catalogs a series of U.S. Latina autobiographies as collective “testimonials of survival” and codeswitching as an expression of identity conflict. She describes language mixing and other codes as “decolonization strategies [that] address in structural and linguistic terms the
question of the politics of multiple identities, of dispossession, objectification, marginalization, and survival,” (Soler 1999: 269). She describes Latina identity as “at once self-centered on personhood and decentered because it is splintered between several cultures” (Soler 1999: 270). “Chicanas or Mexican-American women live in the borderlands, at the crossroads of different and often contradictory cultures.” They fit in nowhere and are “very definitely not ‘real’ Americans, (Soler 1999: 271).”

She traces the struggle between identities that leads to alienation and self-estrangement and the pressure to choose one identity. Soler even takes stock of the damage done to Chicanas by models in their own culture, (Soler 1999: 273). She describes the use of mixed language as a refusal by Spanish-speaking communities “to assimilate to standard English forms of speech, which, they feel, cannot express the cultural reality of their experience;” they speak in a “border tongue,” (Soler 1999: 276) capable of capturing the contradictions within their worlds. It “convey[s] the ‘mestizo’ sense of rootlessness and reflect the hybrid, bicultural nature of identity,” (Soler 1999: 276). “Code-alteration enriches the linguistic repertoire, makes the phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic possibilities of the language astonishingly flexible, and brings to the foreground the contrast between cultures and ideologies,” (Soler 1999: 282). This community of speakers refuse to fit any certain mold and use their language to create their new, mixed, and unique identities.

Soler (1999) demonstrates the intricacies between language and identity and the ways in which speakers navigate this balance. In conjunction with works that explore this complex issue, (Barker 1974, Betti 2001, Meadows 2009, Rosa 2010) Soler (1999) reveals the social context which also affects the participants of the present study. These pieces also provide a background
for the issues regarding identity that influence aspects of language use, such as the pronunciation of borrowed words, and the symbolism of such choices.

4 Methodology

As mentioned, there are many dialects of English spoken in the United States which are affected by speakers’ use of Spanish. These can vary by a speaker’s nationality, heritage, or geographic location in addition to many other factors. In this study, choices were made in order to eliminate as many variables as possible. For this reason, this research project has chosen to focus on Chicano speech, that is, the speech of a speaker of Mexican heritage. Additionally, because of the machismo that prevails in many Latino societies, only women were invited to participate, in order to create a comfortable and open space, where they wouldn’t feel exposed, or threatened by a male presence. All participants identified as Chicana, or Mexican-American, and are Spanish-English bilinguals.

After submitting an IRB proposal and gaining approval, I began recruitment based on my knowledge of the Chicana or Mexican-American identifying women on campus. I emailed about a dozen women, who weren’t personal friends of mine, a small paragraph explaining the project and asking if they would like to participate. After receiving responses from four of the people I reached out to, I then sent them a page-long description of the project and asked them to complete an online poll to decide on meeting times that would work for everyone. During our first meeting I walked them through Informed Consent Forms and ensured that all of the participants understood that their involvement would entail attending and participating in three meetings, two in groups and one personal interview with me.

I decided to record with both a video camera and an audio recorder in order to capture high quality sound from the audio recorder, while being able to review participant gestures,
facial expression, and any visual reactions or cues from the recorded video. I also chose to use two forms recording in case one of the devices malfunctioned during a session – which did occur. Finally, to analyze the collected data I reviewed the videos and transcribed the conversations, highlighting the particularly interesting sections, and taking care to identify speech patterns, including the phonetic realization of borrowed words.

The same group of speakers was invited to participate in a group interview in two different settings. Speakers were selected who were not necessarily close friends or part of the same social groups, but have met or spent time together occasionally. This was so that the recorded conversations will not be overly affected by unique linguistic characteristics that form within close-knit speech communities. However, since the intended speakers for recruitment were all of Mexican heritage, bilingual, and relatively far from home, it was hoped that these commonalities would unite them and create a comfortable speaking environment. The two settings in which the research took place were one with a high population of non-Spanish speakers, Essie Mae’s Snack Bar, one of the restaurant/cafes located in the heart of Swarthmore’s campus, and one with a high Spanish speaking population, the ENLACE room in the Intercultural Center, the meeting space of Swarthmore’s Latino affiliation group.

For many students, the ENLACE room is one reprieve on campus. It is a space that connects individuals to their heritage, whether through the flags of every Latin American country on the wall, or the Latin American art and books that litter the shelves and walls, or because of the use on non-standard English and Spanish that can often be heard there. The ENLACE room serves as a home away from home, and was thus an appropriate space for the group’s first meeting.
This research project is modeled after and inspired primarily by a few previously conducted studies mentioned in the Literature Review section: Carr (2014), Mendoza-Denton (2008), and Valdes (1982). Some of the methods for this study have been adopted from these studies and modified slightly to fit different conditions. As stated previously, this study’s main objective is to address a portion of the gaps in the literature that have been highlighted by Carr (2014). While work has been done on language attitudes, and Spanglish in the United States, this paper narrows in on a specific sub-community of Chicanas. We have seen through Lippi-Green (1997) and Mendoza-Denton (1999) that prejudice persists towards speakers of English spoken with an accent and speakers of Chicano English, and other English dialects and Carr (2014) has illustrated that even borrowed words pronounced as they would be in their language of origin can also evoke negative attitudes towards the speaker.

4.1 Participants

4.1.1 Z

Z is a senior at Swarthmore College, born and raised in Ontario, California. Her parents both emigrated from Mexico shortly before her birth. Her first language was Spanish, which she learned at home, while she picked up English later in school and with the help of children’s literacy shows. Her father speaks ‘heavily-accented’ English, while her mother does not speak any English. She feels her English is stronger than her Spanish because of the academic training she has received in it. She can read and understand formal Spanish easily, but producing it causes more trouble.

She feels that in the classroom, she is comfortable using the language a particular class is taught in. She especially feels more comfortable using Spanish with other Spanish speakers,

2 All names have been excluded.
especially when *chismeando* (gossiping). She feels that in the ENLACE room, or in an ENLACE space, she is able to connect with her heritage, and thus Spanish comes more naturally, though she feels English is her default at school, and Spanish is her default at home.

4.1.2 J

J is in her second year at Swarthmore College. She was born in South Central, Los Angeles. During her life she has moved around in the Los Angeles area, so she attended many different schools as a child. She would also spend the weekends in Tijuana throughout her childhood. Her schools and neighborhoods have always had a predominantly ‘Mexican’ population. Her dad was born in Mexico, and came to the United States on a student visa and stayed in the Los Angeles area, then met her mom, who was born in Los Angeles and has lived there her entire life.

She learned English and Spanish simultaneously, but lost her fluency in Spanish during middle school, when she stopped using the language. She has since regained fluency and feels that she can complete tasks equally in either language, though she feels Spanish takes her a bit more time to process. She also uses it when she wants to say something “in a secretive way, like if [she’s] *chismeando*.” Here at Swarthmore, she uses mostly English, except in ENLACE spaces, which she feels remind her to use her Spanish.

4.1.3 M

M was born and raised in the Logan’s Square area of Chicago, a very ‘Hispanic’ area. She moved around in the Chicago area, after her parents divorced during her late childhood. She lived in a gated, though not protected, community, under the watch of a very protective mother. Her mother was born in Morelos, Mexico, and her father is Ecuadorian. Her father emigrated from Ecuador when he was 16, crossing the borders of every country from Ecuador to the United States. He was able to file for residency when he arrived in Chicago and became a citizen
decades later. Her mother arrived to the United States on a worker's visa, and also emigrated to Chicago because she had a sister there.

M grew up speaking only Spanish, since her parents spoke no English. She attended Catholic school and had a disastrous time communicating, because she only had white, non-Spanish speaking teachers. She feels she developed her English in the classroom and through the help of her classmates. She feels that her English is stronger than her Spanish when it comes to grammar: she understands the nuances of English better, but she can perform the same tasks in both languages, from ordering pizza to writing formal academic papers.

4.1.4 A

A was born and raised in Tucson, Arizona and describes growing up in a ‘not-so-great’ part of town, and moving into a ‘whiter’ neighborhood as a child. She attended a bilingual magnet school and although the Spanish taught in her program was not intensive, she was able to learn both English and Spanish. Her father is white and from New York, who studied abroad in Mexico and is fluent in Spanish; her mother is from Colima, Mexico.

A learned Spanish first as a child, but later in preschool, she wasn’t able to communicate with other students, so she decided she didn’t want to speak it anymore, and in order to fit in, focused on learning English. So now, while Spanish is her first language, she is now more comfortable in English. She feels more comfortable speaking with her Mom in Spanish, though her Dad refuses to communicate with her in Spanish. If she initiates a conversation in Spanish, he will switch back to English. She decided to take Spanish in high school, and had a lot of trouble with grammar and compositions. She feels her English is definitely superior to her Spanish, even after taking Spanish classes at Swarthmore.

4.2 Environment
“I think it’s important to keep in mind that we have come into this sort of privileged setting. We’re gaining this vocabulary and all these new perspectives to think about these structures within society and where the problems are, where our stories come in, and how to talk about our stories in a new way. It’s important to remember where we come from too. I don’t really know how to navigate through that, but I think acknowledging it is a good start.”

All participants are concurrently enrolled students at Swarthmore College, a small liberal arts college located in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The school has 1,534 matriculated students, 14% of which self-identify as “Hispanic” and 43% “White.” Swarthmore College offers need-based aid for its $57,870 price tag, though only 50% of students receive any amount of financial aid. Swarthmore is predominantly English-speaking and English is used in most academic contexts, except foreign language classes, of course.

4.3 Research Questions

This study focuses primarily on identifying if and how the speech of native bilingual Spanish-English speakers changes around other Chicana speakers and around non-Spanish speakers.

The primary research questions for this study are:

- Do speakers prefer one type of speech (English, Spanish, Spanglish, etc.) depending on their environment and their non-intended audience?

- Do native bilingual Spanish-English speakers phonetically realize borrowed Spanish words, as they would be realized in Spanish, around other Chicano speakers and/or around non-Spanish speakers? If so, to what extent are they realized (some words, all words, etc.)?

- In which environments are non-standard dialects favored? In which environment are borrowed words more likely to be pronounced as they would be in Spanish?

5 Results
I began this study with a very narrow outlook; I had a goal: to prove or disprove a hypothesis and make inferences about a speech community. What I discovered was that by pulling together these incredibly similar, but diverse set of individuals I set loose a Pandora’s Box of emotion. In their first meeting Z, J, A, and M touched on topics that even the most intimate of friends avoid. Listening to the stories of each of these individuals and witnessing their reactions to each other was like the forced exhale and first deep inhale after holding your breath for a long time — long awaited and necessary. In the proceeding sections I delve into the intricacies of the speech these participants used during our sessions and their interviews. In the final section, following the data description, I answer the questions I have posed previously, but in doing so, I also reveal new questions that the results of this research pose.

5.1  *El Chisme*\(^3\)

5.1.1 The ENLACE Room

During our first meeting in the ENLACE room, J, A, M, and Z delved right into conversation without any prompting. They first introduced themselves:

- **J:** Hi, my name is J, you can call me J…
- **Z:** I’m Z.
- **A:** My name is A.
- **M:** I’m M or M.

Then J asked A where her parents were from:

- **A:** Yeah, so, my mom is from *Colima*, um, my dad is actually not-not Mexican. How ‘bout you?
- **J:** Both sides of my family are actually from *Sinaloa, Culiacan* — the capital.
- **Z:** My mom is from *Nayarit* and my dad is from *Michoacán*.

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\(^3\) In the proceeding sections, words pronounced in Spanish are typed in *italics*, while words pronounced in English are in regular print. Translations for borrowed words that are less familiar, or in Spanish, in addition to cultural information are given in parenthesis.
M: My mom is from Tetecala, it’s a town in Morelos. And my dad is from Ecuador.

Shortly after, they began a discussion on immigration and the way their families settled in the US, then about the infidelity of their fathers, the fact that three out of four of their fathers had multiple, or unknown, children and different families across the border. “I feel like that’s not uncommon with Mexican men,” J said. “We have this family joke that’s like, if you ever meet a Noriega, which is, like, my mom’s apellido (last name), be careful, because it might be your cousin!” Later, she added, “I feel like it’s so uncommon in white families though. Like you can’t really talk about this with, like, a traditional white family. Cuz they’re most likely still together and they have, like, three kids, and they’re, like, equally spaced out.” This transformed into a discussion of the nature of “machismo.”

One of the most surprising topics they explored within ten minutes of meeting each other was white privilege, racism, and the discrimination they have faced. A shared her viewpoint as half-Mexican, half-white: “People assume I’m white, so they’ll, like, say shit. They’ll think, oh you’re white, so it’s ok to say things.” She went on to describe her perceptions of prejudice towards white people: “A lot of times minorities will, like, pit themselves against white people… There’s a lot of [white] people who don’t know better.”

J responded quickly:

Speaking as a Latina… we’d feel more likely to be attacked by a white person, than, say like a black person, or someone from another minority. Does that-like, does that kind of make sense? Like, we kind of feel, like, more comfortable with, like, other minorities, and we just kind of, like, assume, that if there’s a white person and a minority that, like, most like it’s going to be the white person that has something racist to say, or something. Even sometimes in ENLACE, we, like, kind of make fun of white people sometimes. You know? I wouldn’t call it, like, reverse racism or anything, because it’s not like institutionalized, on, like, a political level, but like, sometimes we do have these
white people stereotypes and it’s like, is that really OK for us to do? Like, they’re funny, I laugh at them. Sometimes we make fun of the way white people, like regañan a sus (get mad at/discipline their) kids, like, and we’ll even say some super white name like ‘Chad, don’t do that.’ Whereas like, you know, a Mexican mom would be like, taking out the chancla (sandall/flip-flop, commonly used for spanking children), or something. And it’s funny, but like, I don’t know, I wouldn’t say that around white people. Like I’m sure white people say all this stuff, like you said, but they wouldn’t say it around Latinas or Latinos.

Z then added: “There’s a difference between white people making fun of people of color or minorities, because we’re the people who are oppressed in this overall system. So us speaking out about white people’s privilege and advantages over us, and like stereotypes of us, is us like speaking out, like criticizing the system.”

To which A finally conceded: “Yeah I think that’s an important distinction, and I think maybe the vocab like, ‘pitting against’ is a little strong. Yeah, so I do agree that it’s like a difference, but also, like, if we do it amongst ourselves, like – but, like, it-it’s good also to, like – I think when you don’t talk with other minorities, like we see the flaws in the system more clearly, so it’s good to get those, like, hear about other people’s opinions and like form ideas about it. But then, like, if you don’t actually voice those, like outside of the minority, then white people don’t know.”

They continued to discuss this topic a bit further, until A brought up the perception of Latinas by the international community. “It’s like, fiery. It always has something to do with, like, chile. Like, it’s so weird,” J said. The conversation shifted after Z said, “Latino people… Latinx people, sorry, I’m still trying to train myself to say that.” J consoled her, assuring her that the gender-neutral Latinx, was not necessarily the best option. “I don’t know, I just don’t like how you, like, can’t say it in Spanish, like it really isolates the Spanish speakers, cuz they’re like,
“Latin-eks? Que es eso?” You know? I mean, yeah you’re being inclusive to like on group, you know people who don’t abide by, like, the gender binary, but then you’re like excluding ano—like the Spanish speakers. And this a Spanish word.” Z agreed, “Latin-eks, yeah. That’s how I say it, too.”

Then they turned to the exclusivity of a term like Latinx: “Sometimes I think when I go home people perceive me as, like, oh she goes to a really good school, she thinks she’s, like, the shit. You know talking about all these, like, elitist things like oh you know Latinx, If I was still back at Chafey and people would talk about this, I’d be like, ‘shut up’ you know? But now that I’m here I understand it more and when I go back home my friends are like, ‘you’re just surrounded by rich white kids all the time, you know, you’re like turning in to them.’ And I have such a hard time relating to my friends back home now, you know, even my best friends,” J said. “Oh man, I feel that!” Z added, snapping her fingers.

Branching off of this topic, they then explored color: “I’m a light-skinned Latina so it’s not super obvious, like ‘Oh she’s Mexican!’ You know? But I feel like, people have told me that you can kind of tell that I’m not white,” J said. To which A responded: “I mean, I look white, I don’t know if you can tell that I’m not white.” Z remarked: “I feel like people are better at identifying people like them.” “I’m also like drawn to them, I mean, look at all my friends,” J agreed. After I shared that I’ve had a similar experience, J nodded and said to me, “you don’t talk like a white girl. Whatever it means to talk like a ‘white girl.’”

5.1.2 Essie Mae’s

At the end of a Sunday, we all met up once again, this time in an open space on campus, in the presence of many others. This particular day happened to be just after Dia de los Muertos. After I asked if anyone celebrated the holiday, Z brought up her religious father, and not-so-religious
grandfather: “My grandpa’s a brujo (witch),” she said, describing the ceremony which he performed in order to gain his supernatural powers. This transformed into a discussion of religion and the various degrees to which each person identified with it. I then remarked that the Virgen de Guadalupe is an important figure to me, and I only know her prayer. I mentioned that I vaguely remembered another prayer about daily bread, which prompted A and M to recite Padre Nuestro (the Catholic prayer “Our Father”) word for word in Spanish. After which they all shared some sentiments:

A: I say prayers when I’m really scared. I would say prayers to myself every night the first time I was away from my parents for a long time.

J: I just feel really conflicted over religion. I even have problems saying bless you. I honestly don’t know what I believe in.

A: It’s really hard that you’re so conflicted.

M: I just kind of lost that connection, I’m just not that Catholic anymore. I still believe in God, but I don’t keep up with the practices.

Afterwards, the conversation turned to the peculiar situation of a “Mexican-American.”

“Just being Mexican-American I such a weird situation because you’re never Mexican enough for the Mexicans, you’re never American enough for the Americans. Even growing up, I felt like I wasn’t Mexican enough for the Mexican-Americans,” J said. Then they each offered their thoughts on this predicament:

A: I feel what you were saying, especially about not finding you’re place.

M: Yeah, especially when I visited Mexico and I hanged out with my cousins. When I was little I didn’t notice it as much, but when I go back now, they always see me as American.

J: Del otro lado (from the other side) and all this stuff.

A: I feel like the minute I open my mouth people are like, ‘Oh you’re from el otro lado.’
J: Most of my friends back home they’re a little bit darker than I am so I was always too white, for that Mexican community but here I’m not white compared to these people. I feel like it’s made me more in touch with my Mexican-ness though. Like I notice every time I put tapatio (Mexican hot sauce) on stuff, or like crave the food so badly... Back home it’s like...
Z: It’s just the normal background of your life.

J then talked about her experience sharing her package of goodies from Tijuana, with all the ‘white boys’ who she shared a dorm with over the summer. They loved the duvalines (Mexican frosting-type candy) she gave them and would ask her, “Jen do you have any doo-vah-lee-neh’s?” They then discussed eating mazapanes, and tamarindo:

Z: I gave some [tamarindo] to my freshman year roommate she was French, when she got to the middle- I had never thought of it as spicy and she was like, ‘Oh my god! My mouth is on fire!’
J: Yeah they thought all the tamarindo stuff was spicy. I didn’t know how to say tamarindo in English.
Z, A, M: Tamarind!
J: Yeah I didn’t know how to say that they were like, ‘what flavor is that?’ I was like ‘tamarindo’ and they were like ‘what?’ ‘Tamarindo!’ And then I realized that I never said it in English... they said it looked nasty, they said it looked like bird poop.
Z: You’re just used to your bland food, whatever.

A then shared an experience with another “Mexican” on campus: “We made guacamole and she made tacos and fajitas and she made horchata! And handmade tortillas, she had maseca (flour used for tortillas).” Z responded, “I just don’t think people understand how good Mexican food is, they like write it off, like ‘Oh I had a burrito.’”

They then discussed some other experiences they’ve had sharing their culture with non-Mexicans. J spoke of a Latinx Heritage Month event where she made guacamole, it ran out in
eleven minutes after she spent hours making it and she felt unappreciated. Z then responded with her own experience: “Events at Swat where you’re trying to share some of your culture and people not really appreciating it and walking away with the same perception of that culture – that’s a problem at Swat… I feel like a lot of times mariachi is used as a token of diversity.” She explained they used to have performances where “drunk people would show up and shout ‘We speak American here. Go back to Mexico, go speak Mexican there!’” A concluded, “Swat seems to give off this image that its super open and everybody is super understanding of other people’s cultures. But I don’t know, lately I’ve been doubting that Swat produced image versus the reality.

5.2 Trending Topics

In the next couple of subsections I will discuss some of the topics the participants hovered on at length, since they serve as more profound insight into their worlds. J, A, M, and Z discussed machismo, inequity in the system, racism, colorism, colorism, whiteness, religiosity, and identity at some length, but the following sections include some of the issues which seemed to affect them most.

5.2.1 Language as Identity (3) – “But, like, what are you? Like, where are you from?”

Z: “I definitely identify more as Chicana or Latina. Mexican-American sometimes, depending on who I’m talking to.”

“What do you mean by that?”

Z: “Because when you say Latina or Chicana it just sounds more Spanish to me. Like, Chee-cah-nah? How would you even say that in English? I would say Latina to somebody who also speaks Spanish, I would say. But Mexican-American to somebody else.”

After our two group meetings, I conducted individual interviews with each participant. They answered a variety of biographical and linguistic questions, but the question they all took almost
half of the interview discussing was regarding how they identified. Though I gave background on many terms used to classify individuals of Mexican descent, I thought it necessary to ask each participant to give their own opinions on these terms and asked them to tell me which one(s) resonated with them. In order to do this, I prepared a list of ethnically and racially identifying terms and asked each participant what they thought of the terms, which one(s) they identified with, and their general ideas of the definitions of these words. I decided to include their responses almost in their entirety in this section, because they reflect the complex nature of these terms, and the uniqueness of each of their reflections highlights some of the intricacies of their identities. These were their responses:

Z: I think I’m starting to have weird feelings about Hispanic. There was probably a time where I was more comfortable with it, because it’s what you’ve always been checking off on the little boxes when you’re taking tests. But as I’ve been learning more about how “Hispanic” is this term that’s been imposed on all people who speak Spanish I feel weird about it now… I don’t think I would say Mexicana. My parents, yeah. They’re Mexican. But I’m Mexican-American and I feel that that experience is substantially different. Different enough for me to feel uncomfortable saying I’m Mexican. Especially going to Mexico and being singled out as ‘Oh, you’re not Mexican.’ I feel like I’m still grappling with my identity and my place in this whole Latinx community and I’m still in the process of being educated. There’s this disparity between being Mexican or being American or being Mexican-American. And I kind of feel that just within being Mexican-American, some people identify more strongly with being Mexican or American. And I feel like I’m somewhere, like, this weird place in the middle, where I’m still not one or the other. Some people are more Mexican than me.

J: I identify as Chicana. I just think ‘Mexican female.’ Or it could be, like, Mexican-American female. If you had asked me this before Swarthmore I wouldn’t have been like, ‘Oh I’m Chicana,’ but coming to Swarthmore I kind of have more pride in my culture, so now I would say that… I think I say I’m Latina much more than I say Chicana. I think
more people know what a *Latina* is. They don’t know *Chicana* is specifically for Mexicans... I think Hispanic is like a more specific – it’s like not as broad as being *Latino* or *Latina*. Sorry, I’m just gonna use *Latino* – I don’t like that Latinx stuff. So like, being *Latino* sort of includes Brazilians, or people who don’t speak Spanish... Even though I am Mexican- American I find myself not using that term as much. Like if somebody asks ‘What’s your ethnicity?’ or whatever, I’d be like, “I’m Mexican” I wouldn’t say ‘Mexican-American’ but when I really think about it, I am Mexican- American. Whether I like it or not I was born here, and as much as I love my Mexican culture, I don’t know, sometimes I can sound like a white girl... I guess I like identifying as Mexican more... That’s one thing I wouldn’t say, ‘I’m American...’ I don’t identify with being white. Even though I look white – I think you feel me.... I feel like it’s kind of bland, like boring. Like, ‘I’m white.’ OK, what does that mean?

M: I don’t identify myself as *Chicana*. I identify as *Latina*. I do identify myself as American, but just because I was born here, but it’s so complicated. I always think of myself as *Mecuadoriana*. You know, Mexican-Ecuadorian! Even though I do fall under the category of *Chicana*, it’s not that I don’t like it, I just don’t use it. But I am one... Like how I don’t say I’m American, even though I was born here, it’s just not the first thing I say. I like *Latina*. I love saying that! I guess it’s better than *Mecuadoriana*.

A: I identify as biracial Mexican-American, because I am Mexican in terms of blood, in terms of citizenship, I’m also American, which, like, I guess I have to accept. But like, I really like the Mexican part of me, but like, it’s not that I haven’t identified with it my whole life, because I always have... but then I never had a lot of Mexican friends growing up. At school, whenever there were groups of Mexican kids, because I don’t look Mexican, they were always like, ‘Oh, you don’t belong here.’ So, I don’t know, I guess I was always nervous to claim that side of me. Like when people are like, ‘Oh, you’re a gringa (a white person, usually from the United States).’ I’m both a gringa and a Mexican! It’s possible to have multiple identities. Mexican! That’s me! That’s my mom! I don’t like American, but, like, also me. I guess it resonates sort of negatively with me. I generally don’t want to associate myself with that. White? I guess, the color of my skin. The first thing that popped into my mind was ‘bad,’ but I didn’t want to say that.”
5.2.2 What’s in a name?

Z: “At some point I decided that I don’t want to give an anglicized version of my name. I don’t know, Z just doesn’t sound right to me. Z sounds so right and musical in my ears.”

A: “I feel like you shouldn’t have to compromise for your name though, because it’s such an important word.”

Towards the end of our first meeting, I asked about a topic that has plagued me, Guadalupe Del Rosario Barrientos Estrada, my entire life: “How do y’all feel about your names?” J clicked her tongue, Z rolled her eyes, and A immediately let out a deep sigh. J then quickly answered: “My mom has five kids, and I am the only one with a white name. All of my siblings, you can say their names in Spanish and they don’t sound stupid. I don’t know what she was thinking. Like when my abuelita (grandma) says – I remember when I was little she would yell at me from across the hall, like ‘J, ven pa’ca! (J, come here!’) And it sounds so dumb to me… It’s such a common white girl name. I don’t like my name, basically.”

I then mentioned my problem with getting people to pronounce my name correctly. Z responded, “If people can’t say Lupita then there’s like no hope for me. Especially because of the spelling, I feel like I lose people. Yeah, and my name is so obviously, like, not an English name. Like, I’m brown. I just look so Mexican. And people are always telling me, ‘Um can you say your name three times slowly’ and they still can’t say it.’ So at some point in my childhood I just gave up on teaching people my name or trying to get them to say it correctly, so I was like, you know what, just do whatever you can. Whatever you can is good enough.”

M added, “I really love my name, personally, I’ll be the only M you’ll ever meet.” In regards to pronunciation: “I don’t really have a preference, M or M. Growing up it was definitely
hard being like, ‘Oh, hi! I’m M.’ So it just slowly became M. And it was so subconscious of a change and it stuck with. That’s why I don’t really mind either or.”

Z and I then shared our fake names for certain situations, “Like in Starbucks I’m not going to say Z and wait five minutes for them to be able to spell it on my cup. I just say Lily. So I have that quick fix in situations where I’m never going to see that person again,” M added, “I also just say M to Latinx looking people.” To which A responded, “I think A sounds OK, and that’s how I usually introduce myself. But A sounds so much better, but people can’t say that!”

6 Conclusions
Based on these results it is clear that around other individuals with similar language backgrounds, the participants were comfortable discussing a variety of topics in a variety of different dialects. They spoke in Spanglish, English, and even would start an idea in English, and complete it in Spanish – they switched between their different codes seamlessly. In the end, participants used whatever language or mix that made the most sense for them to communicate their message. Despite their differences, the opportunity to speak freely with peers, without fear of being misunderstood or judged, elicited some amazing responses from each of the participants and provides deeper insight into the complexities of the Chicana self-image.

6.1 Borrowed Words and Mixed Codes
The participants employed a number of different forms of speech in their conversations. For the most part, J, A, M, and Z spoke in what Peñalosa (1980) and Gonzáles (1988) have defined as Chicano English, because of the clear influence of Spanish pronunciation and lexicon on their speech. However, sometimes they switched into Spanish entirely or even precise, academic English when speaking about more complex topics, such as white privilege and racism. Overall, they did not adhere to solely one form of speech or seem to feel pressured to adjust based on
their environment. On the contrary, since their interlocutors were all familiar with both English and Spanish, this facilitated switching between codes. There was not a single instance where a speaker used a non-standard code and was asked to clarify what they meant, illustrating the freedom this allowed the participants in discussing a wide range of topics, in a variety of ways.

In regards to borrowed words, despite their environment, each speaker pronounced almost all borrowed terms as they would be pronounced in Spanish, such as when A when she described making *horchata, fajitas, tortillas,* and *tres leches* with a friend, and J when discussing the occasions when she shared *guacamole* and *tacos.* Additionally, both J and Z noted their discomfort with English pronunciations of certain words and their names, respectively. As Myers-Scotton (2006) has explained, the phonetics of a language a speaker chooses to employ when saying a borrowed word depends on the value or connotations attached to sounding like a native speaker of either language. The dominance of a language in a certain location influences this “value” greatly, and can cause speakers to adjust accordingly. For J, A, M, Z, and other speakers like them, in some cases, sounding more “American” in a primarily white setting by using English pronunciations may benefit them by helping them avoid discrimination or integrate themselves better into their elite academic environment. Similarly, sounding more “Mexican” could benefit them in a primarily Mexican setting by allowing them to communicate more effectively and be treated as “Mexican” enough.

However, despite the fact that Spanish is not the language of power or prestige at Swarthmore College, except in Spanish classes or with other Spanish speaker, the speakers associate this language with their heritage, families, and homes. For this reason they felt comfortable employing it with others of the same background. In these group conversations, they attached theirs cultures, sentiments, and reminiscence to Spanish, Spanglish, and its varieties,
which made these “non-standard” forms of speech the most “valuable” in this environment, the most effective at conveying their messages, and the most powerful ties to their identity.

Because of their discussion of similar topics such as race, racism, religion, and discrimination in both the ENLACE room and Essie Mae’s, it is evident that the environment in which they speak, or potential non-intended listeners of a discourse does not seem to matter as much as the interlocutors. The participants felt safe in this group to discuss private topics in-depth, even in open and public spaces. While some mentioned that they wouldn’t say certain things in front of white people, they still discussed similar stereotypes (such as how white people fail to discipline their children or season their food) in both environments. This acknowledgement suggests that a significant change in speech would be required in front of an intended audience made up mostly of white people or a white interlocutor, as opposed to the environments in which we spoke. It also indicates an awareness of their speech, and the conscious decisions they make in order to navigate different environments, which are more than just changes in register, but changes of self.

6.2 Prejudice, Exclusion, and Belonging

Similar to Carr (2014)’s findings, our speakers shared various instances of discrimination because of their speech, by other Latinos and white people alike. However, despite these experiences (such as being told to “Go back to Mexico!” or being singled out as being del otro lado) they did not see these occurrences as rationale for attempting to disguise any part of their heritage. They proudly switched in and out of both of their languages, shared cultural anecdotes, while discussing the trials they have had to overcome during their time at Swarthmore and elsewhere. The biases they have faced in the past, and no doubt will face in the future, did not
make them think less of or try to hide their culture, but rather made them long to be understood and find their places in the *in-between*.

On many occasions participants expressed their relief at being able to discuss certain topics related to their culture. They discussed topics as simple as candy emphatically and were elated to have the others understand exactly what they meant. This was particularly evident during the portion of our discussion in Essie Mae’s, where they discussed Mexican food and sharing pieces of their culture with people who were not Mexican, and these acts not always being appreciated. Furthermore, J mentioned during our one-on-one interview that she had never deeply thought about the differences between terms like *Chicana* or *Mexicana*, and that parsing out the nuances of each term was difficult, but enlightening for her. She felt relieved to be able to share her opinion on something so complex in a relaxed manner.

These examples illustrate the power of commonalities between individuals and the capacities of language to act as a unifier and allow for the unrestricted flow of opinions. As they discussed the ignorance and impoliteness of others, J, A, M, and Z discovered understanding and acceptance amongst themselves. In different communities they are either not “Mexican” enough or not “American” enough, but in the parallels they saw of themselves that existed in one another, they felt freer to resist these restrictions, and explore together what it means to be either, both, somewhere in between, or more than just a label.

6.3 **Language as Identity and Community**

The spaces and interlocutors for the kind of free and open communication recorded in the preceding conversations at Swarthmore are far and few in between. Even when students of similar heritages come together, it is often the case that at least one is not fluent in both English and Spanish, which automatically limits the language individuals can use in order to be
understood by everyone. Or when a group of Latino students join together, cultural references mentioned may not always be relate to every individual in the group. In this case, J, A, M, and Z formed their own speech community of diverse and unique young women, whose similar backgrounds united them and allowed them to explore different facets of their life and reflect these connections through their language.

Like the Cordoveñas of New Mexico (Gonzales 1999) and the Sureñas and Norteñas of Los Angeles (Mendoza-Denton 2008), J, A, M, and Z formed their own niche, where they shared their culture and languages, using them to relate and align themselves to one another. By doing so, they created an atmosphere of solidarity, in which every opinion was valid and welcome, where their shared thoughts were met with enthusiastic nods and nostalgic commentary. In the different facets of their lives, they adapt their language in order to navigate the various tiers of their identity, and during these meetings, they exhibited these ties fearlessly, empowered by the encouragement that the group provided. The sentimentality attached to their words, their tacos, tamarindo, and horchata, were comforting and liberating. Their language directly reflected their culture, and as an extension, their identity. Just as Betti (2001), Soler (1999), and Sanchez-Muñoz (2013) have explained, Chicanos and other Latinos speak in a border tongue, the only language capable of reflecting the complexities surrounding their experiences. For J, Z, A, and M as a well, their speech serves as a reflection of this rootlessness, biculturalism, and life in the in-between.

6.4 Next Steps

Based on the topics that J, A, M and Z discussed together as almost complete strangers, it is clear that open spaces for communication are lacking for them on campus. Programming should be offered through different channels at Swarthmore and other PWIs (Primarily White Institutions)
in order to facilitate these conversations. Affiliation groups like ENLACE could hold meetings centered around the topic of Spanish, language identities, and speech communities, or work in conjunction with professors and other departments to organize panels, where students can hear from their peers or even professors on the issues they have faced regarding these topics. Furthermore, academic departments, such as Spanish, Latin American and Latino Studies, and even Linguistics, could work to be more inclusive in their programming and cater to the needs of students like J, A, M, and Z. This could include offering Spanish for heritage speakers, courses for speakers of English as a second language, or even half credit conversation courses that explore the topics of identity and language, specifically for speakers who face the issues head-on every day.

6.5 Personal Reflection

As I have mentioned, my decision for choosing to explore Chicana language and identity lies heavily on my own personal experiences and the feeling of belonging neither here nor there that has followed me since I was a child. By bringing J, A, M, and Z together, I was not only able to create a space for them to communicate freely, but also an environment where I could reflect on some of the issues that I had considered, but never delved into at length. Many times during our sessions, hearing their sentiments was like hearing my own thoughts out loud. After reading a mountain of texts by experts making various claims on *where, why, how*, during this study, I was finally able to see the *who*. J, A, M, and Z showed me how universal the feelings I have dealt with my entire life are, and that being *in-between* isn’t an issue that one easily conquers. It was eye-opening and heart-warming to see this group of women come together, open up to each other, and comfort one another on such a deep emotional level. It is through them that I was able
to understand that Chicana does not mean either/or, in-between, or not enough, it means both – it means me.

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