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Making Latinidad Audible The Changing Linguistic Representation of Bilingualism on Latinx-Themed Television Shows

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and reviews. Santeiro wrote a total of 33 episodes, including the pilot, and donated all his documents to the CHC in 2003.

All episodes whose script was available (28 out of 33) were digitized for the study, comprising six from the first season, nine from the second, nine from the third, and four from the fourth. Each episode had an approximate duration of 30 minutes. Supplementary materials pertaining to the production of the show were also digitized and incorporated into the analysis. These included memoranda from Bahamonde with instructions to the scriptwriters, the writers' manual outlining the show's intended objectives and character descriptions, audience reactions and comments on storylines, as well as language suggestions.

The 28 scripts were subsequently analyzed in terms of language usage and each instance of code-switching was tabulated and labeled based on the season, the episode, and the character. When additional context was necessary to clarify a specific scene, the 5 DVD collection of the show was consulted to review the precise clip. The scripts yielded a total of 1,304 code-switches, with an average of 46.5 switches per episode.

Subsequently, every switch was categorized according to the communicative and socio-pragmatic functions that it fulfilled using the sociolinguistic framework already established for natural bilingual production. Hence, I referred to the categories previously identified in studies on conversational code-switching (among others, Valdés-Fallis, 1976; McClure, 1981; Gumperz, 1982; and Zentella, 1997) such as quotations, emphasis (with or without repetition), clarification or elaboration (including parenthetical comments), lexical gaps, tags, crutches and linguistic routines, or idiomatic expressions.

Discussion of Results

Code-Switching and Intergenerational Language Shift

As Piñón and Rojas (2011) remark, “difficulties with Spanish-language retention and Spanglish use among second, third or later generations of Latina/os have not been properly addressed in Spanish- nor English-language media” (pp. 140–41). This assertion is consistent with Melgarejo and Bucholtz's (2020) analysis of the show *Jane the Virgin* where they noted that “communication across generations and languages is almost always portrayed as effortless and unproblematic” (p. 505).

This might partially explain why one of the main reasons behind *¿Qué Pasa, USA?*'s great success was the depiction of universal issues common to all immigrant groups in the US “The generational differences and conflicts it portrays, the longing for old ways and places, is the continuing American story of displacement and adaptation” (Delgado and Veraldi,

2007, p. 51). One type of such displacement is linguistic, an established pattern that can ultimately lead to an eventual loss of the native language (see, for instance, Hoffman, 1991). As Krashen (2000) aptly phrased it, “shift happens”. Typically observed in immigrant communities, the first generation tends to be monolingual in the minority language, the second generation becomes bilingual in both the minority and majority languages, and the third generation gradually transitions to being monolingual in the majority language.

The show’s writers’ manual describes the Peñas as a multi-generational family originally from Guanabacoa (Cuba) living in Miami’s Little Havana. They reside in a modest three-bedroom, one-bathroom house with simple furniture and household items. The first generation (the grandparents) are Adela and Antonio, both in their mid-sixties. They barely speak English since they view the move to Miami as “temporary”, believing they will eventually return to Cuba, and perceive no need to learn the language. They keep traditional Cuban culture and values intact. The second generation (the parents) are Juana and Pepe. They learned English after immigrating to the US and speak with an accent, straddling both languages and cultures. The third generation is comprised by their adolescent children Joe (born in Cuba but raised in Miami) and Carmen (born and raised in Miami). Their dominant language is English, although they understand and speak Spanish. They have assimilated into American culture. The manual stipulates that

the language switches back and forth from Spanish to English, as it normally does in bilingual situations. The children prefer to speak English, the parents are more comfortable in their native Spanish, and the grandparents simply don’t understand a word of English.

(Writers’ Manual, 1977)

A quantitative analysis of code-switching in the Peña family reveals that, in alignment with Dozier’s (2016) results, the highest percentage of switches in the show is produced by the second—mostly bilingual—generation: Juana (28%) and Pepe (31%). The third generation engages in a considerable amount of code-switching albeit at a lower frequency compared to their parents (Carmen produces 19% of the switches and Joe 14%). In contrast, the grandparents, being virtually monolingual, use minimal code-switching in their speech although Adela (6%) displays a much higher rate than Antonio (2%). Therefore, the linguistic practices represented in the sitcom accurately mirror the prototypical intergenerational shift from Spanish to English ordinarily attested in Latino communities in the US Figure 1 shows the total number of switches for each of the six main characters in all the episodes analyzed.

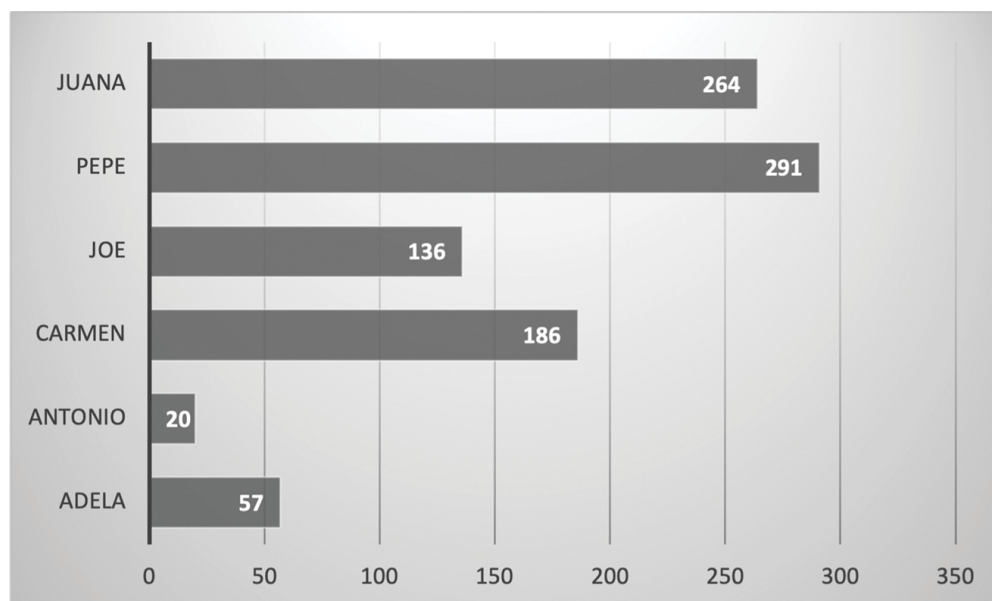


Figure 4.2 Total Number of Switches by Character.

Types of Code-Switching

From a structural point of view, scholars (Poplack, 1980; Lipski, 1982, and many others) have traditionally classified code-switching in natural production according to three different categories: at the word level (isolated or tag switches), between sentences (inter-sentential) or inside the sentence (intra-sentential). The analysis of the show's scripts revealed that the two predominant types in the sitcom are isolated lexical items (as in example 1) and inter-sentential switches (example 2):

1. *¿Trabajaste overtime otra vez?* [Did you work overtime again?] (Juana, S1, E3)⁵
2. What was that? *Enciende las luces!* [Turn on the lights!] (Carmen, S3, E2)

On the other hand, intra-sentential code-switching (as illustrated in example 3) was rarely obtained:

3. *Violeta, de verdad que te felicito* but now I better get back to my paper. [Violeta, I truly congratulate you] (Carmen, S1, E3)

These findings are in line with Dozier's (2016) study of ¿*Qué Pasa, USA?* but contradict Pye's (2023) analysis of *Modern Family*, where he observed that Gloria's character predominantly produces intra-sentential switches, especially in the form of interjections. A possible explanation is that the ¿*Qué Pasa, USA?* scriptwriters were explicitly instructed to alternate lines in each language. In his 1976 memorandum to the writers of the show, Bahamonde, as Project Director, recommended balancing the language of the scenes by alternating lines of dialogue (maximum 3 or 4) in Spanish and English (*Luis Santeiro Papers*). Therefore, in this regard, the sitcom does not precisely replicate natural bilingual behavior, where intra-sentential code-switches are commonly observed.

Language Choice

Another traditional distinction made in the literature of code-switching pertains to the social and communicative strategies that it can accomplish. Situational code-switching (also known as language choice) depends on variables such as context, topic, setting, and participants. An example of this kind of switching occurs when one of the speakers does not understand a language prompting a need to change to another. Undoubtedly, this type of linguistic accommodation stands as one of the primary motivations to switch languages in spontaneous oral production.

Correspondingly, in ¿*Qué Pasa, USA?* situational code-switching is frequently used to indicate a change of interlocutor, as shown in example (4). Here, the character Felipito speaks to three different people. He uses Spanish to address either the mother or the grandmother since that is their dominant language but switches to English when he talks to Carmen, who is more comfortable speaking in English:

4. (To Juana): *No se disculpe, señora, yo comprendo perfectamente...* [Don't apologize, Madam, I completely understand]
 (To Carmen): It was nice to have met you, Carmen. I hope you feel better...
 (To Adela): ¡*Adiós, señora! Tiene usted una nieta encantadora.*
 [Goodbye, Madam! You have a lovely granddaughter] (Felipito, S1, E3)

This pattern is not only reflective of a natural linguistic practice in bilingual communities but also consistent with previous research carried out on bilingual television shows. In Quinonez's (2018) study, the main reason for characters to switch languages in all four bilingual shows was

to specify the addressee. Melgarejo and Bucholtz (2020) reported similar findings in their analysis of *Jane the Virgin*, where linguistic accommodation was one of the top three motivations to use Spanish. Additionally, Pye (2023) observed that Gloria's character frequently switches languages in order to accommodate English- or Spanish-speaking characters in *Modern Family*.

Socio-pragmatic and Communicative Functions

On the other hand, conversational (or metaphorical) code-switching occurs without a change of interlocutors. Instead, this type of switching has proven to serve specific socio-pragmatic and communicative functions. Speakers may switch languages to convey a message more effectively, depending on the linguistic resources available in each language for expressing a particular concept or idea. The use of conversational code-switching is also widespread in *¿Qué Pasa, USA?* as illustrated in the following example:

5. *Lo que quiero decir es que no tengo ningún apuro.* I'll first get an education, then I'll worry about getting married. [What I mean is that I am in no rush] (Carmen, S1, E3)

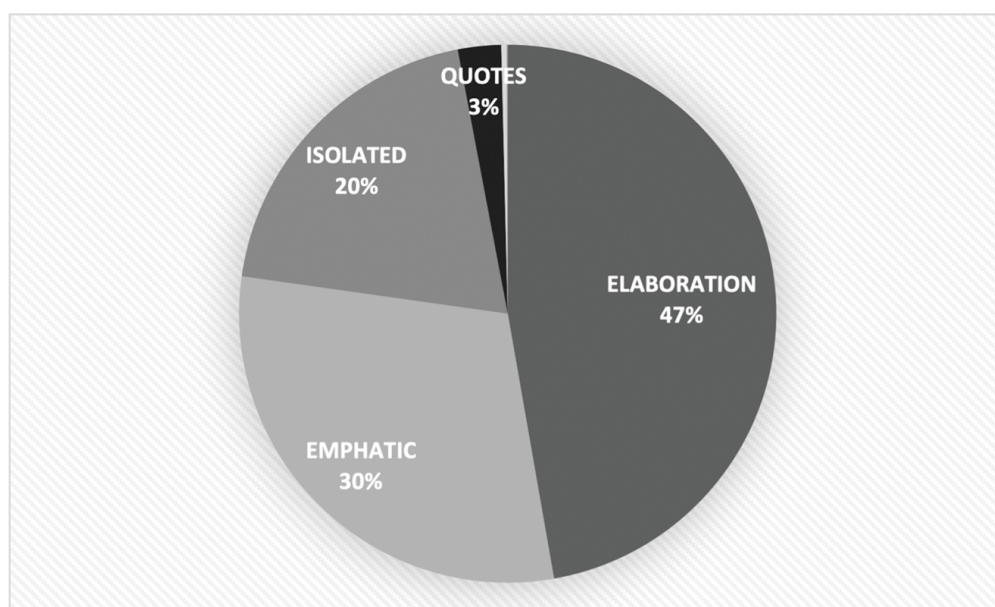


Figure 4.3 Percentage of Switches by Socio-pragmatic and Communicative Function.

Many of the functions typically attested in natural bilingual production are manifest in the analyzed scripts, as illustrated by Figure 4.2. I will proceed to discuss each category separately, providing examples from the scripts.

Clarification or Elaboration

Code-switching in natural bilingual discourse may be used to further explain, clarify, or elaborate on what was previously said. In ¿*Qué Pasa, USA?*, nearly half (N=616 or 47%) of the switches served this purpose. Some examples follow:

6. *Tú diviértete pero no te pongas serio...* Play around all you want but don't let a girl catch you. [You have fun but don't get serious] (Pepe, S1, E3)
7. *Mami, Johnny is an independent guy, okay? Es un tipo maduro.* [He is a mature guy] (Joe, S2, E1)
8. *Yo creo que una mujer cura me comprendería.* A woman might understand how I feel when Alex gets close to me. [I think a woman priest would understand me] (Carmen, S4, E1)

Emphasis

By virtue of code-switching, a speaker can highlight a word or an idea, sometimes repeating it in both languages. In the show, emphasis was the second most commonly observed function, accounting for a third of the switches (N=391). This mirrors Attig and Derrick's (2021) results of the analysis of *One Day at a Time*, where emphatic switches were also the second most frequent function. It must be noted that the writers' manual's instructions required that "dialogue should never be repeated verbatim in both languages" (Writers' Manual, 1977). Still, we can find several examples such as (11) where emphasis is achieved by repeating virtually the same words in Spanish and English. In other cases (9 and 10), the mere act of switching languages contributes to underscore the idea.

9. *¿Aquí? De eso nada, monada.* He can stay in the park! [Here? No way, honey] (Juana, S2, E1)
10. *Sí, ya sé. Calmate!* Take it easy! [Yes, I know. Calm down!] (Violeta, S3, E2)
11. *¡No, qué va! Te queda perfecto.* Perfect! [No way! It fits perfectly] (Pepe, S1, E3)

Isolated Lexical Switches and Biculturalism

The phenomenon commonly known as a lexical gap is frequently cited as a key factor in understanding natural code-switching, particularly at the word level. However, the issue of a lexical need has stirred controversy, often leading to misinterpretations that incorrectly link such gaps with a perceived lack of language proficiency or, even worse, ascribe it to the speaker's laziness. It is crucial to recognize that, technically, every switch—whether involving a noun, tag, or idiomatic expression—fulfills a specific communicative need. Yet, this should not be misread as a deficiency. Code-switching in natural production may occur due to the absence of an exact equivalent in the other language, a momentary lapse in the individual's lexicon, or simply a higher frequency of exposure to a particular item in a specific language or culture.

The analysis of the scripts revealed that 20% (N=258) of the switches occurred for isolated words, mostly nouns, making it the third most frequent category. Moreover, the vast majority of these lexical items refer to cultural concepts unique to the Cuban or US lifestyles. Hence, I describe these types of switches as culturally bound, since they are closely linked to the bicultural environment that the sitcom portrays. This finding is consistent with Attig and Derrick's (2021) analysis of *One Day at a Time*, where cultural switches are the most prevalent function, as well as DuBord's (2023) results for *Gentefied*, where the characters code-switch for markers of Latino culture and kinship terms. The following examples illustrate concepts that are specific to the Latino or Cuban culture such as "*fiesta de quince*" (12), "*Santería*" (13) or "*arroz con pollo*" (14):

12. My parents will never go for the idea of a *fiesta de quince*. I just know it. [sweet fifteen party] (Jenny, S1, E1)
13. Besides, the Catholic saints can be a little slow sometimes, but with *Santería* you get immediate action. [Afro-Cuban religion] (Violeta, S3, E2)
14. I adore Cuban food. Especially *arroz con pollo*! [rice with chicken] (Mrs. Allen, S2, E8)

Similarly, numerous instances of endearment terms or vocatives to address family members (such as "abuela/o" or "mami/papi") appear in Spanish within an otherwise English discourse throughout the sitcom, as seen in:

15. *Ay, papi*. Thank you! [Aw, daddy] (Carmen, S1, E7)
16. I don't care if you changed my diapers *abuela*! *Ya soy un hombre*! [Grandma! I am already a man!] (Joe, S1, E6)

Conversely, and also in line with DuBord's (2023) findings, cultural concepts that are associated with mainstream US lifestyle, including food ("peanut butter" in example 17), traditions ("prom" in example 20), work- or school-related items ("college" in example 19), frequently prompt code-switching from Spanish to English, as illustrated below. This was particularly palpable in the speech of the grandparents, who (with very few exceptions) switched to English exclusively in order to refer to American concepts they had not previously encountered in their native Cuba.

17. *El peanut butter está en la despensa.* [The peanut butter is in the pantry] (Juana, S2, E3)
18. *Mañana mismo vamos al nursery.* [Tomorrow we are going to the nursery] (Pepe, S1, E2)
19. *El premio es un trust fund para college.* [The award is a trust fund for college] (Carmen, S1, E3)
20. *Te ha invitado a ir al prom y te ha invitado a salir esta noche.* [He invited you to go to prom and he invited you to go out tonight] (Juana, S1, E7)
21. *Pues pónmelo en lay-away que voy a buscar mi dinero.* [Then put it on lay-away for me while I go to get my money] (Marta, S3, E7)

Therefore, code-switching in the sitcom is used to depict the characters' bicultural identity, in line with Attig and Derrick's (forthcoming) conclusions about the shows *Vida* and *Gentefied*. In fact, the language objectives of *¿Qué pasa USA?* spelled out the need to portray the Cuban-American adolescent's cross-cultural conflict and "to demonstrate to the viewer the importance of bilingualism in breaking down cultural isolation" (Writers' Manual, 1977). The manual cites the case of Raimundo Sacre, a real-life 16-year-old Cuban-American, as "being half and half; having two sets of values and living with them in different worlds. Like at school we live the American life and at home we try to live a Cuban life with our parents" (Writers' Manual, 1977). It is likely that this teenager served as a model to create the younger characters, as can be reflected in Joe's answer when asked about his culture: "Well, like you said, I've been here most of my life, so I feel pretty American... but then I also feel very Cuban", further elaborating: "my identity suffers a lot of conflict. I mean, living between my American friends and my Cuban grandparents is a real culture shock!" (Season 2, Episode 2, "The T.V. Interview").

Quotes

Using the original language to reference someone else's words, whether in the form of a direct quotation or paraphrasing, has proved to be a primary function attested in natural bilingual discourse. Although the recurrence rate of this category was much lower than the previous ones (2%), there are several instances (N=34) of switching to the original language (English in examples 22 and 23, Spanish in 24) to directly or indirectly cite what someone previously said:

22. *¿Cómo que* "if you get married"? [What do you mean?] *¿Tú no piensas casarte?* [Don't you think you will get married?] (Juana, S1, E3)
23. *Quiero que sepa que ya yo hablé con mi abogado.* [I want you to know I already talked to my lawyer] And my lawyer said that I can sue you for deformation of character. (Pepe, S2, E2)
24. "*Puerta abierta*"--Ha! Like a minimum security prison. ["Open door"] (Sharon, S3, E6)

Additional Findings

An intriguing psycholinguistic (rather than sociolinguistic) phenomenon, frequently observed in natural bilingual production, occurs when the utterance of a particular word in one language unconsciously triggers a switch in the subsequent words. In fact, it is not uncommon for a proper name, a tag, or an isolated lexical item to serve as a catalyst for a subsequent switch. While this process was not overtly recurrent in the scripts of the show, four instances were found. In the examples provided, the triggering items that induce the switch are in bold. Sometimes the triggers are in English (examples 25, 26, and 27) while in example (28) the trigger is in Spanish.

25. *Es buenísimo para relax, you know?* It would help you to get rid of your tension. [It's great to relax] (Carmen, S2, E5)
26. *Paul es un community counselor.* [Paul is a] He gave me some information for the article I'm writing. (Joe, S3, E3)
27. *Bueno, mejor aprovecho y voy al market* around the corner *a recoger las cosas que encargamos.* [Well, I'd better take advantage and go to the market to pick up the things we ordered] (Antonio, S4, E3)
28. Forget *los abuelos!* *¡Yo me iba!* [Forget the grandparents! I was already leaving!] (Antonio, S3, E5)

The final example illustrates the only case of mock Spanish found in the scripts. It is uttered by the character Mrs. Allen, the English teacher at Joe's high school.

29. *El mad-o your amigo drove el junk-o over my plant-o!* (Mrs. Allen, S3, E4)

The fact that mock Spanish is virtually absent from the show speaks to the writers' conscientious efforts to represent Spanish language and bilingualism in a respectful manner. As Ana Margo, the actress who portrayed the Peñas' daughter Carmen, explained:

My Cuban and Latin friends felt honored by the way we portrayed them on the screen [...] Never did the series humiliate Latins, or insult our race. I believe that is why *Qué Pasa* has been so successful. We laughed at ourselves in a way that no one felt insulted or misrepresented. We were doing real life, as it was at the time in Miami. We respected our culture even though we poked fun at it.

(as cited in Delgado and Veraldi 2007, p. 52)

The use of bilingualism and code-switching in the show, therefore, functioned as a credibility tool and "mirrored the linguistic quotidianity many American families experience, even if this everyday reality was rarely portrayed on commercial or public television" (Rivero 2012, p. 104). Even today, "young US Latinx viewers, Cuban and non-Cuban alike, tend to find the dialogues sociolinguistically authentic" (Lynch, 2022, p. 115).

Conclusion

The preceding discussion provides further insight into how code-switching may intersect with broader questions of bilingualism, biculturalism, and identity in US mainstream television, particularly in the groundbreaking show *¿Qué pasa USA?* Through its deliberate linguistic choices, the sitcom shattered monolingual norms and challenged stereotypical portrayals of Latinos and Spanish language on public television serving as a benchmark for bilingual and bicultural programming, both in its era and in contemporary television.

This carefully scripted show convincingly depicted the linguistic reality of many US Latino families, portraying Spanish not as a mere target for humor but as an authentic mode of communication. By normalizing common linguistic behaviors like intergenerational language shift, linguistic accommodation and code-switching, the sitcom provided a genuine

reflection of Spanish-English bilingual communities across the nation while tactfully avoiding offensive practices such as the use of mock Spanish.

Bilingualism and biculturalism are essential aspects of the Peña family. The characters code-switch to express their hybridity and to highlight the complexities of their bicultural identity. Moreover, code-switching in *¿Qué pasa USA?* fulfills at least four of the primary socio-pragmatic and communicative functions traditionally observed in spontaneous production, especially for elaborating or emphasizing ideas, to express specific cultural concepts and, to a lesser extent, to quote somebody else's words in the original language. By mirroring natural bilingual speech patterns, code-switching (both situational and conversational) functions as a credibility tool and enhances the show's realism.

This trailblazing sitcom not only anticipated the growing recognition of the societal and economic value of bilingualism in the US, but its authenticity continues to resonate with young US Latino viewers, underscoring its timeless relevance. More than forty years since it ended, *¿Qué pasa USA?* remains an exceptional model for delivering humor accessible to monolingual audiences in public television without relying on stereotypes. Its legacy serves as a paradigm for respectful and authentic representation of Cuban-Americans and Latino communities across the country. As we look to the future, we can only hope for more shows to follow their example.

Notes

- 1 www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2023/10/bad-bunny-saturday-night-live-snl/675731/
- 2 www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/music-news/grammys-bad-bunny-cbs-speaking-non-english-closed-captions-1235322715/
- 3 In fact, the show *Dora* has just been revamped in 2024 and will now include more Spanish language, more Latin music, and a more specific ethnic background for her character (a mix of Mexican, Cuban and Peruvian): www.nytimes.com/2024/04/10/arts/television/dora-nickelodeon.html
- 4 For example, code-switching in the show appears to deviate from community-based practices, adhering more closely to the one-language-per-speaker strategy.
- 5 In all examples, I use italics for Spanish and regular font for English. In parenthesis, I indicate the name of the character, as well the season (S) and the episode (E) number. All translations in brackets are my own.

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5 Making Latinidad Audible

The Changing Linguistic Representation of Bilingualism on Latinx-Themed Television Shows

Victoria Melgarejo and Mary Bucholtz

Introduction

The representation of Latinx linguistic practices in US television has been subject to critique by a number of Latinx studies scholars, due to the often negative impact of media representations on the material and symbolic treatment of racialized populations (Castañeda 2018). On the one hand, numerous television portrayals position Latinx characters as racialized linguistic Others whose roles are limited to criminals, manual laborers, or exotic “sexy Latinas” (Beltrán 2016; Casillas, Ferrada, and Hinojos 2018); on the other hand, representations of Latinx characters as largely linguistically and culturally indistinguishable from their non-Latinx counterparts function as post-racial whitewashing (Molina-Guzmán 2018). Both kinds of representation are problematic in failing to acknowledge the broad diversity within the Latinx category as well as the specificity of the US Latinx experience, as distinct from that of either US non-Latinxs or non-US Latinxs (Dávila 2023). As Molina-Guzmán puts it, “Latina/os are the largest ethnic and racial minority group in the United States, but Latina/o characters are almost invisible, and when they are visible it is in mostly stereotyped ways” (2018: 17).

The historical pattern of Latinx invisibility and stereotyping on US television is now beginning to shift to some extent, due both to the television industry’s growing interest in attracting the large Latinx viewing audience and to advocacy for equitable Latinx media representation and creative production, which challenges limited framings of Latinx audiences as passive consumers of media valued only for their buying power (Báez 2020). These changing representations also reflect the growing number of Latinx-themed shows starring Latinx actors and involving Latinx showrunners, producers, directors, and/or writers (e.g., Higuera-Ruiz et al. 2021). Such shows deliberately challenge the stereotypes of earlier representations, portraying US-born Latinxs living ordinary, relatable

lives. However, even in these shows, the full scope of Latinx linguistic practices generally remains inaudible or muted.

In this chapter, we focus on a roughly two-decade span of linguistic representations of bilingualism in Latinx-themed television comedies and comedy-dramas. Bilingualism in these shows ranges from the sporadic use of familiar and culturally specific Spanish terms, often for the benefit of an English-speaking audience, to Spanish discourse markers, to more extensive bilingual discourse and relatively realistic portrayals of bilingual practices such as codeswitching and translanguaging. We argue that these more recent representations amplify previously inaudible Latinx linguistic practices in the “white public space” (Hill 1999) of US English-language television while continuing to oversimplify these practices in ways that perpetuate problematic raciolinguistic ideologies of Latinx language use (Rosa and Flores 2017) in the hegemonically white, English-medium US television landscape.

Spanish in English-language Television

The expansion of Spanish into U.S. English-language television has prompted a small but growing body of scholarship on the representation of Latinx bilingualism in this domain, with much of this work focused on specific television shows. Some researchers have considered the types of codeswitching practices that are represented in Latinx-themed shows and how these are translated into other languages for transnational audiences (e.g., Attig and Derrick 2021; Beseghi 2019). Meanwhile, other scholars have assessed the extent to which representations of bilingualism on these shows correspond to real-world Latinx linguistic practices as well as the effect of such representations on viewers; much of the work in this area finds that recent portrayals of bilingualism on Latinx-themed shows are relatively realistic (e.g., DuBord 2022; Giménez-Eguíbar and de los Heros 2016). We have argued elsewhere that such portrayals, by approximating everyday Latinx linguistic practices, produce an “authenticity effect” on the viewer despite their oversimplified nature (Melgarejo and Bucholtz 2020).

As DuBord notes, the most authentic representations of bilingualism are typically found not on traditional television networks but rather on streaming services, which “offer a venue for resisting the hegemony of English popular media and centering linguistically diverse stories” (2022: 126). At the same time, even when Latinx language practices are represented in a more or less realistic fashion, the language ideologies that surround and inform these representations may undermine the liberatory potential of such shows for Latinx viewers. Given changes in the US television industry that have made more space for the Spanish language, as well as longstanding raciolinguistic ideologies that have shaped and continue

to shape media representations of Latinx language use, an investigation of bilingualism in Latinx-themed television shows over time offers the opportunity to identify larger trends in these representations.

We focus on original broadcast and basic cable shows over the past twenty years, which until recently have typically reached wider audiences within the US than more niche and expensive premium cable and streaming programming. The following analysis demonstrates that such shows navigate various language ideologies through their creators' choices about which aspects of Latinxs' linguistic practices to include or exclude. As we argue, the resulting portrayals in some ways resist and in other ways reproduce raciolinguistic ideologies that position Latinx language as deficient. In the next section, we describe our data and methods before turning to a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the patterns of bilingualism in these shows.

Data and Methods

Our analysis focuses on six Latinx-themed television series: *George Lopez* (2002–2007, ABC), *Ugly Betty* (2006–2010, ABC), *Cristela* (2014–2015, ABC), *Jane the Virgin* (2014–2019, CW), *Telenovela* (2015–2016, NBC), and *One Day at a Time* (2017–2019, Netflix; 2019–2020, Pop). We selected these series based on the following criteria: (1) They do not focus on stereotypical Latinx characters; (2) they are comedies or comedy-dramas and are therefore comparable based on genre, given the genre-specific conventions for representing bilingualism (Ribke 2022); (3) they were produced for broadcast or basic cable television or for a non-premium streaming service and targeted a broad audience encompassing both Latinx and non-Latinx viewers; (4) they feature Latinx characters from different immigrant generations, facilitating comparison across characters within the same show; and (5) they represent a range of time periods from the early 2000s to 2020, thus enabling us to identify trends and changes over time. We excluded shows that are generally viewed as reproducing stereotypes (e.g., *Devious Maids*, 2013–2016, Lifetime); shows classified as dramas (e.g., *American Family*, 2002–2004, PBS; *East Los High*, 2013–2017, Hulu; *Party of Five*, 2020, Freeform; *Promised Land*, 2022, ABC/Hulu); and shows that originated with a premium cable or streaming service (e.g., *Vida*, 2018–2020, Starz [this show is also classified as a drama]; *Los Espookys*, 2019–2022, HBO). (Although we focus on network or basic-cable productions, as of this writing all six series are currently available via streaming services.) Due to time constraints, we excluded *Gentefied* (2020–2021, Netflix), which DuBord (2022) has analyzed in depth; based on her research and our own viewing, we have the impressionistic sense that it conforms to the longitudinal pattern we report below, in which

more recent shows contain more numerous and more frequent “authentic” representations of bilingualism. Below, we provide background information about each of the shows in our data set and then describe our methods of data collection and analysis.

George Lopez is a sitcom starring second-generation Mexican American comedian George Lopez. It aired on ABC from 2002 to 2007 for six seasons and 120 episodes. In the show, which aimed to avoid stereotypical characters such as gangsters and drug dealers, Lopez plays a fictionalized version of himself, portraying his family life as well as his work experiences as a manager at an aviation factory in Los Angeles. *George Lopez* was an immediate success for ABC, drawing millions of viewers as a mid-season replacement and swiftly greenlit for a full 22-episode second season. The series, aiming at US-born Latinx viewers as well as a non-Latinx audience, deliberately downplayed the Spanish language while creating a number of characters whose “accents” were played for laughs (Calvo 2002).

Ugly Betty is a critically acclaimed comedy-drama which aired on ABC from 2006 to 2010 for four seasons and 85 episodes. The show, based on the global hit Colombian telenovela *Yo soy Betty, la fea*, stars America Ferrera, the daughter of Honduran immigrants. The show follows Mexican American 22-year-old Betty Suarez, an unglamorous but determined and resourceful character, as she juggles her personal and family life alongside her job at a New York high-fashion magazine. *Ugly Betty* was widely praised for its positive representations of Latinx characters and its social commentary regarding body image. Thanks to Ferrera’s performance, in 2007 she became the first Latina in a leading role to win an Emmy.

Cristela, a sitcom starring first-generation Mexican American comedian Cristela Alonzo, aired on ABC from 2014 to 2015 for one season (22 episodes). Alonzo plays Cristela Hernandez, a law school graduate who lives with her family in Dallas while studying for the bar exam and earning work experience at an unpaid internship in a law firm. The series, a semi-autobiographical take on Alonzo’s own life, made history, as she was the first Latina to create, write, produce, and star in her own TV show.

Telenovela is a sitcom set in Miami starring Eva Longoria as Ana Sofia Calderon, a telenovela star who does not speak Spanish. The series aired on NBC for one 11-episode season from 2015 to 2016. Star, director, and producer Eva Longoria drew from her own experience as a ninth-generation Mexican American growing up in Texas. The soap-opera spoof aimed to connect with and represent Latinxs who do not speak Spanish, an experience shared by Longoria, who learned the language as an adult as she became more engaged in Latinx activism (Wallace 2014). *Telenovela* is the only show in our data set that does not focus on family life.

Jane the Virgin is a comedy-drama series based on the Venezuelan telenovela *Juana la virgen*; it aired on the CW from 2014 to 2019 for five

seasons, a total of 100 episodes. The show, which has received numerous awards, portrays a multilingual, multigenerational Venezuelan American family living in Miami. The title character, Jane Villanueva, is played by Gina Rodriguez, the child of Puerto Rican parents.

One Day at a Time is an adaptation of the original 1975 CBS sitcom of the same name; both series were produced by Norman Lear. The series originally aired on Netflix from 2017 to 2019 and was picked up by Pop for a final fourth season in 2020, for a total of 46 episodes. The show features a multigenerational Cuban American family living in Los Angeles; the lead actor, Justina Machado, who is of Puerto Rican heritage, plays a single mother who is also an Army veteran with PTSD. The sitcom received a number of awards for its focus on real-life issues and its authentic representation of a Latinx family.

We analyzed every episode of the first season of each of the shows, which allowed for comparability across the data set, given that some series aired for multiple seasons and others for only one or two. We transcribed each turn containing Spanish in each episode; some turns contained multiple sentences in Spanish and others only a single word. Given this variation, turn-based instances provided a systematic way of identifying each Spanish occurrence. For each turn containing Spanish, we noted the character who produced it and the turn length (number of words). We carried out multiple quantitative and qualitative analyses of the resulting data set, as discussed in more detail in Section 4 below.

Analysis

Our analysis examines television representations of bilingualism through two different analytic lenses: codeswitching and translanguaging. Codeswitching, which until recently was the overwhelming focus of linguistic analyses of bilingualism, attends to the structural alternation between linguistic systems understood as distinct from one another. By contrast, translanguaging views multilingualism as involving not multiple separate systems but a unified linguistic repertoire, in which a wide variety of resources may be enlisted for communicative goals (García and Li 2014). In the following analysis, we focus primarily on codeswitching because the shows in our data set display an ideological orientation to bilingualism as the use of discrete, named languages (Otheguy, García, and Reid 2015). We also look critically at the role of “accent” both in establishing the Latinidad of each series and in treating certain Latinx ways of speaking as semiotically marked in a particular scene or stretch of dialogue. (Following Hinojos 2019, we use scare quotes to emphasize the ideological nature of the concept of “accent.”) A particular focus of our analysis throughout is how the social construct of “accent” mobilizes raciolinguistic ideologies about Latinx language use as a basis for humor.

We consider the data from multiple angles within and across shows to shed light on bilingual representation in the six shows in this study. First, to identify larger patterns in the data, we compare the amount of Spanish use across series as well as across individual episodes of each series. We then examine in detail the semiotic representation and functions of Latinx linguistic practices within each show and their relationship to raciolinguistic ideologies. Overall, the analysis offers a broad picture of representations of bilingualism in Latinx-themed comedies and comedy-dramas over the past two decades and reveals how these representations both challenge and perpetuate hegemonic raciolinguistic ideologies.

Amount of Spanish Use

In order to systematically examine the overall quantity of Spanish language use across the six series, we transcribed and counted all turns that included Spanish in every episode of the first season of each series. We included in this overall count any use of Spanish in dialogue, song lyrics, or show-within-the-show dialogue (exaggeratedly melodramatic telenovela dialogue is featured in *Telenovela*, *Jane the Virgin*, and *Ugly Betty*). Spanish-language music occurs in the first season of all shows except *George Lopez* and *Cristela*; the lyrics are often from real-life popular songs in Spanish. In *Telenovela*, the characters create and sing their own songs, which include lyrics in both English and Spanish.

The quantitative analysis enabled us to identify trends in the amount of Spanish that occurs in these television series over time. Figure 5.1 provides a visualization of the use of Spanish across the six shows. The graph illustrates an incremental uptick in Spanish use, particularly in the pilot episodes, across the series over the years.

As Figure 5.1 indicates, there is considerable variability both within and across the shows with respect to the amount of Spanish used. In the earliest show, *George Lopez*, very little Spanish is used, and in two of the four episodes of the series included in our data set, no Spanish is used at all. (Of the remaining series, only one episode of *Telenovela*, Episode 9, contains no Spanish.) In most of the other five shows, the use of Spanish is highly variable from episode to episode. In *Ugly Betty*, the use of Spanish is generally modest until the penultimate episode of the season, Episode 22, which takes place in Mexico and contains extensive Spanish use, the fourth-highest amount of any episode in our data set. The early episodes of *Cristela* resemble those of *Ugly Betty* in their rates of Spanish use, but by mid-season the show increases its use of Spanish, with three episodes using Spanish at much higher rates. Conversely, the pilot episode of *Telenovela* contains the most Spanish of the entire season. As noted above, the use of Spanish tapers off to zero in Episode 9, although Spanish use rebounds to a

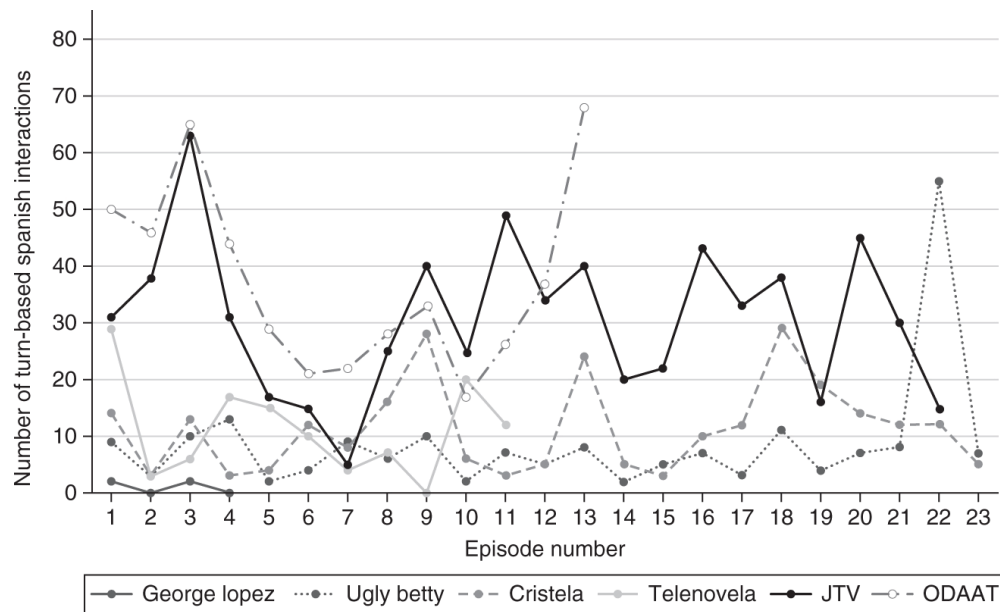


Figure 5.1 Number of turns including Spanish in Season 1, by show and episode.

relatively high level in the subsequent episode. This variability is due to the plots of different episodes, with more Spanish occurring in plots that focus on the telenovela setting and the lead character's multiple predicaments related to not understanding Spanish.

By contrast, *Jane the Virgin* and *One Day at a Time* have much higher levels of Spanish throughout Season 1, with both shows having a coincidental peak in Spanish use in Episode 3, followed by a steep decline and then a more oscillating pattern. Notably, the Season 1 finale of *One Day at a Time* contains the highest rate of Spanish use of any episode in our data set; this episode focuses on a quinceañera, a Latinx cultural practice.

Table 5.1 summarizes the total and mean number of turns containing Spanish in each show, as well as the number of Spanish turns per minute (a measure that normalizes episode length). The shows are listed in the table in rough chronological order, which makes clear the substantial increase in rates of Spanish use over time in these series. In its short first season, *George Lopez* averaged only 1 turn containing Spanish per episode, a trend that did not change greatly in later seasons. As Markert (2004–2007: 155) observes of this series, “Spanish is rarely spoken on the show and none of the family members, with the exception of the father-in-law, Vic, the Cuban immigrant, has a pronounced accent. This defies the facts since the majority of Hispanics, while bilingual, tend to prefer speaking

Table 5.1 Total and mean turns including Spanish, by show

<i>Show and years aired</i>	<i>Number of episodes in Season 1</i>	<i>Episode length</i>	<i>Total turns containing Spanish</i>	<i>Mean Spanish turns per episode</i>	<i>Spanish turns per minute</i>
<i>George Lopez</i> (2002–2007)	4	22 minutes	4	1	.05
<i>Ugly Betty</i> (2006–2010)	23	42 minutes	197	8.5	.20
<i>Cristela</i> (2014–2015)	23	22 minutes	260	11.3	.51
<i>Telenovela</i> (2015–2016)	11	22 minutes	123	11.2	.51
<i>Jane the Virgin</i> (2014–2019)	22	42 minutes	675	30.7	.73
<i>One Day at a Time</i> (2017–2020)	13	30 minutes	486	37.4	1.25

their native language [i.e., Spanish] in the home.” Markert attributes this downplaying of Spanish to the show’s efforts to undermine stereotypes of Latinxs, which is also evident in its relative absence of Latinx themes and cultural signifiers.

The next three series have somewhat higher rates of Spanish, although *Ugly Betty*’s overall mean is substantially influenced by a single episode, as discussed above. The two most recent shows have a dramatic increase in Spanish use, with means at least three times as high as the other shows in our data set. Remarkably, the mean number of turns containing Spanish on *One Day at a Time* is more than 37 per episode, a rate of more than 1 per minute—this is a radical representational change compared to the paucity of Spanish on *George Lopez*.

These findings reveal a gradual increase in the representation of Spanish-English bilingualism in the portrayal of Latinx characters in comedies and comedy-dramas. The following qualitative and quantitative analyses demonstrate that this trend toward an overall increase in Spanish use is accompanied by an expansion of the semiotic and interactional functions of Spanish in these shows.

Semiotic and Interactional Functions of Spanish

In order to determine the social and interactional functions of Spanish on the six television shows, in this section we present three different kinds of analysis. First, we examine how the first five minutes of the first episode of

each show establishes the bilingualism of the fictional setting and linguistically positions its central characters. Next, we analyze the functions of the most frequent type of codeswitches in the first season of the series to ascertain whether these are largely emblematic and oriented to a monolingual English-speaking audience or communicative and oriented to a bilingual Latinx audience. Finally, we identify the longest turn in Spanish in the first season of each of the six shows and its interactional function in order to establish how Spanish is semiotically framed for viewers in these moments. The analyses collectively demonstrate that over time, Latinx-themed television shows have become more “authentic” in their representations of bilingualism yet portray bilingual practices in an idealized way that at times continues to conform to dominant raciolinguistic ideologies.

The First Five Minutes

The first five minutes of the pilot episode of each series proved to be a significant site for establishing the language use of the main characters and the degree of Latinidad each show projects. In this section, we provide a detailed analysis of these crucial opening scenes.

In the first five minutes of *George Lopez*, the family is introduced: George, the third-generation Mexican American father; Angie, the second-generation Cuban American mother; their teen daughter Carmen and their son Max, who has his tenth birthday during the season; and Benny, George’s mother. This opening scene also establishes the English-dominant language practices of all family members, including the grandmother. In the first five minutes, viewers learn that George has been promoted to manager of an airplane assembly factory in Los Angeles after working the line for fifteen years. The next scene (which also occurs in the first five minutes) takes place at the factory: An employee with an “accent,” Danny Boy (voiced by George Lopez), calls out sick. By speakerphone the receptionist tells him that she will inform George, who overhears and joins the conversation.

<i>George:</i>	Danny Boy, this is George. Why aren’t you at work?
<i>Danny Boy:</i>	I’m sick, man. I’m bedriddle.
<i>George:</i>	Uh huh.
<i>Danny Boy:</i>	I got depression también. But I’ma get my life together.

Danny Boy’s brief translanguaging establishes the show as a bilingual space, despite the limited Spanish in this episode and those that follow; this example is one of only four Spanish-language occurrences in the entire (abbreviated) season. Notably, Danny Boy’s use of Spanish co-occurs with an African American English form (*I’ma*) and a malapropism (*bedriddle*