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Words, meanings, and discourse in Argentina: an ethnopragmatic study of Porteño Spanish.

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Abstract

This thesis captures the meanings of a selection of words that are widely used in *Porteño* Spanish (spoken in Buenos Aires, the capital city of Argentina) and which lack precise equivalents in other languages and cultures. It also captures the meanings of culture-specific discourses that *Porteños* (people from Buenos Aires) recurrently perform when they use these words. The argument is that the selected targets (i.e. words and discourses) are culturally significant to all Argentines, because their meanings have historically functioned as guides in Argentines' interpretation of the world. Most specifically, the thesis argues that these targets are the "offspring" of a nation building project, advanced by the elites in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which aimed to "civilize" Argentina with European values and people.

To analyze the meanings of these targets, the study uses *ethnopragmatics*, also known as the *Natural Semantic Metalanguage* (NSM) approach. This approach enables fine-grained meaning analysis which can accurately reflect local perspectives encoded in words and discourses. Importantly, with ethnopragmatics, these local perspectives are also made available to cultural outsiders and speakers of other languages. This is because the approach describes meaning via a mini-language of simple, cross-translatable terms.

All meaning hypotheses in this study are grounded in evidence from natural language usage. This evidence was obtained from various sources, including newspaper articles, radio and TV programs, stand-up comedy performances, short stories, *tango* lyrics, and the corpora CORDE, CREA, and CORPES XXI produced by Real Academia Española. The meaning hypotheses were also trialed with native speakers and discussed with cultural consultants.

Briefly, the major findings are summarized as follows. Ch. 3 analyses two expressions: *Buenos Aires es la París de Sudamérica* ('Buenos Aires is the Paris of South America') and *Los argentinos descienden de los barcos* ('Argentines descend from the ships'). It is shown that their meanings involve high compression of culture-specific knowledges and narratives which serve a powerful role in the erasure of un-European places and people.

Ch. 4 analyses the word *lunfardo* (roughly, 'Buenos Aires' slang'). It is shown that its meaning compresses a historical narrative that invites people to think of Argentine words as being largely migrated from Europe. It is also argued that the word *lunfardo* encodes (a) metapragmatic attitudes which are reflective of historical discourses organized around that word, and (b) a link to *tango* music.

Ch. 5 analyses the cultural value *viveza criolla* (roughly, ‘artful cheating’), and its associated social category words *vivo* (roughly, ‘cunning person’) and *boludo* (roughly, ‘moron’). It is shown that, by labelling an action or way of thinking as *viveza criolla*, speakers view it as an expression of local culture, and as a widely celebrated but antisocial form of relating with others. *Vivo* and *boludo*, it is argued, are culture-specific frames for categorizing and evaluating someone as one of two kinds of people with radically opposite ways of thinking and acting.

Ch. 6 analyses the emotion word *bronca* (roughly, ‘anger’), identifying three distinct meanings. The analysis suggests that one of these meanings, *bronca*₁, offers Porteños a fatalistic interpretation of reality. It places people in the position of passive “onlookers” of inevitable scenarios that unfold in front of their eyes in a compelling way. It is shown that *bronca*₁ plays an important role in the emotional processing of deep-seated problems in Argentine society, with discursive saliency in themes such as political corruption, economic crisis, poverty, and lack of moral standards, all of which are typically framed under the discursive logics of *viveza criolla*.

Ch. 7 captures various discourses around which Argentines organize the words studied in Ch. 3 to 6. By performing these discourses, or “Argentineity scripts”, as they are here called, locals can celebrate and also condemn all that which they view as distinctively Argentine, and, in doing so, they perpetuate historical discourses of nationhood.

Altogether, the various analyses offer original, culturally sensitive insights into locals’ construal of Argentine places, people, language, and emotions. In clear, non-ethnocentric terms, the analyses articulate the local logics encapsulated in Porteño words and discourses, revealing how speakers visualize the country’s past, imagine the country’s future, but also navigate their everyday lives. The thesis is a postcolonial-linguistic contribution to ethnopragmatics, to NSM-based studies, to the study of Porteño and Argentine language and culture, and to the study of World Spanishes.

Statement of originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Jan Hein

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Abbreviations and symbols

AAL	Academia Argentina de Letras ('Argentine Academy of Letters')
aka	also known as
ANU	Australian National University
ASALE	Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española ('Association of Academies of the Spanish Language')
CABA	Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires ('Autonomous City of Buenos Aires')
Ch.	Chapter
CORDE	Corpus Diacrónico del Español ('Diachronic Corpus of Spanish')
CORPES XXI	Corpus del Español del Siglo XXI ('Corpus of 21 st Century Spanish')
CREA	Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual ('Reference Corpus of Current Spanish')
DiAm	Diccionario de americanismos ('Dictionary of Latin American Spanish')
DiFHA	Diccionario fraseológico del habla argentina ('Phraseological dictionary of Argentine speech')
DiLA	Diccionario de la lengua de la Argentina ('Dictionary of the language of Argentina')
DLE	Diccionario de la lengua española ('Dictionary of the Spanish language')
fem.	feminine
GBA	Gran Buenos Aires ('Greater Buenos Aires')
IGN	Instituto Geográfico Nacional ('National Geographic Institute')
INDEC	Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos ('National Institute of Statistics and Censuses')
lit.	literally
lunf.	lunfardo
NDL	Novísimo diccionario lunfardo ('Newest lunfardo dictionary')
NSM	Natural Semantic Metalanguage
n/a	not available
RAE	Real Academia Española ('Royal Spanish Academy')
stand.	standard language
~	allolex
*	exemplar
m ₁ (2, 3, etc.)	first (second, third, etc.) meaning of a word
?	grammatically or semantically anomalous
§	section
[m]	semantic molecule
[]	used in direct quotations to contain further context or clarification

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Papers adapted for this thesis

ALL PAPERS INCLUDED ARE SOLE-AUTHORED BY THE STUDENT (and have been adapted for this thesis)

Acknowledgement of Published and Unpublished Papers included in this Thesis

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- Acknowledge all those who have contributed to the research, facilities or materials but who do not qualify as authors, such as research assistants, technical staff, and advisors on cultural or community knowledge. Obtain written consent to name individuals.

Included in this thesis are papers in *Chapters 3 and 5* for which I am the sole author. Appropriate acknowledgements of those who contributed to the research but did not qualify as authors are included in each - paper.

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Chapter 3:

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Chapter 1. Introduction to Argentine words, meanings, and discourse

1.1 Motivation and aims

Four years ago, I was strolling along one of the main thoroughfares in Buenos Aires, the capital city of Argentina, when I came upon *El Ateneo Grand Splendid*. Declared the most beautiful bookstore in the world by National Geographic (Howard, 2019), *El Ateneo* is housed in the former *Grand Splendid*, a stunning theater built 100 years ago by European architects to host performances by Buenos Aires' most iconic *tango* singers. With its frescoed ceilings, elegant rounded balconies, and ornate theater boxes, the opulent bookstore's interior preserves the splendor of the original *Grand Splendid* theater, and, to many locals, it evokes memories of a glorious, bygone Argentine era. I decided to go in.

In every corner of *El Ateneo* I saw tourists taking photos. As I browsed the bookshelves (which stand where the theater's audience once sat), a book caught my eye. It was a dictionary entitled *Persico's lexical companion to Argentine Spanish: Diccionario bilingüe de regionalismos porteños* (Persico, 2016). I learned that Joseph Persico, its author, is a lexicographer from the USA. His book cover promised "the most exhaustive bilingual dictionary of regionalisms ever compiled for a single dialect of Spanish". "¡Qué interesante!" I thought.

I sat with *Persico's* dictionary in the café, located on the old theater stage, behind the plush red stage curtains, exactly where *tango* legend Carlos Gardel had once sung for his Porteño audiences of *tango* aficionados (Padro, n.d.). Being a *Porteño* myself (that is, being originally from Buenos Aires, where *Porteño* Spanish is spoken), I searched for quintessentially *Porteño* words: *bronca*, *viveza criolla*, *boludo*, and *lunfardo*. I read their respective English glosses: 'anger', 'native wit and cunning', 'moron', and 'slang' (Persico, 2016). "This is good," I thought, aware of the English-speaking tourists that surrounded me. "If they buy this dictionary, they can get a sense of *Porteño* word-meanings".

Then, I read the dictionary's prologue (Persico, 2016, p. 1):

It is my hope the readers of this dictionary will come to share a fundamental belief that I have about the world: namely, that Spanish-speaking, English-speaking, and other Western societies, more often than not, think about and interpret the world in identical ways. A linguistic analysis of Spanish and English reveals that the two languages are mirror images of one another in important ways. Upon consulting this dictionary, readers may be surprised to find that the overwhelming majority of words used in Spanish have an exact translation in English. What's more, dialectal variation, language use, and language change also provide evidence that the people who speak these two modern languages have almost everything in common, from our past times and public institutions, the way we view birth, death, and most major events in between. Realizing the extent of our affinities is a question of breaking the age-old habit of focusing on our differences, and then re-directing our collective attention to the sweeping similarities that exist among Anglo and Hispanic cultures (...).

As a speaker of both Spanish and English, but also of Danish and German, and as someone who, by that time, had lived in four different countries, Persico's "fundamental belief about the world" did not ring true for me. "Western societies," I thought (I thought this in Spanish, though) do not "think about and interpret the world in identical ways". "Spanish and English," or any languages for that matter, can't be "mirror images of one another".

In a way, this thesis is born out of that intuition that I had four years ago in *El Ateneo* bookstore. In the social sciences and humanities, the view that different languages and cultures afford different interpretations of the world is, of course, fairly widespread, especially in disciplines such as cultural anthropology, cultural history, and translation studies (Goddard, 2006a, 2018a; Goddard & Wierzbicka 2014). Interestingly, however, in mainstream linguistics, the dominant view on language has been, for a long time, closer to that one suggested by Perisco, i.e. "that the overwhelming majority of words used in Spanish", or in whatever language being considered, "have an exact translation in English". In the subfields of semantics and pragmatics, which are concerned with the study of meaning in language, the "age-old habit of focusing on our differences" has been, sadly, conspicuously absent. Instead, a strongly Anglocentric paradigm has been dominant, with Anglo words and norms adopted as templates for interpreting other cultures and languages (Goddard, 2018a; Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014; Goddard, 2006a; Levisen & Waters, 2017).

The main task that I propose for this thesis, then, is to capture the exact meanings of a selection of words that are quintessentially Porteño, such as *bronca*, *viveza criolla*, *boludo*, and *lunfardo* mentioned above, among others. These words, contrary to what Anglocentric linguistics would have us believe, do not have *exact* equivalents in other cultures and languages. If their precise meanings are captured, that is, if I can explain what Porteños themselves mean when they say these words, then, I believe, we can also learn something about the Porteño worldview that is encoded in them. That is the ultimate goal of this thesis.

Importantly, I will argue throughout the following chapters that the selected words are culturally significant not only to Porteños but to all Argentines, because their meanings have historically functioned as an interpretative grid for people across the whole country. They are words that emerged in Buenos Aires to make sense of the world as envisioned and experienced in that city, but they have since crossed the city boundaries and penetrated in the country's provinces, where they have also become widely used. Argentines across Argentina now "live by" the meanings encapsulated in these words.

Another task that I propose for this thesis is to capture the meanings of *discourses* that Porteños (and Argentines across the country) perform together with these words. I will expand on the concept of discourse in the coming chapters; for now, I will note simply that, with that term, I wish to designate certain "themes" that Porteños recurrently bring up when they speak, typically in conjunction with culturally important words, such as the ones I will be studying. For example, when Porteños say the abovementioned word *lunfardo* (roughly, 'Buenos Aires' slang'), they may often also talk about immigration to Argentina. When they hear about the latest corruption scandal in the country, they may want to express their feelings with the abovementioned word *bronca* (roughly, 'anger').

Porteño words and discourses are thus my two targets of analysis. Like the words, the discourses I will be exploring are culture-specific, in that they also encode a way of viewing the world that is unique to Argentine culture. If I can also capture these discourses in a way that stays close to the Porteño perspective embedded in them, then our understanding of the Porteño worldview will be enhanced.

The "problem" my two tasks face is that, as argued, the meanings of Porteño words and discourses cannot be accurately described using terms from other languages, because this may lead to representations that don't reflect the cultural insider's perspective encoded in Argentine words and discourses. This is where the approach that

I will use, called *ethnopragmatics*, also known as *Natural Semantic Metalanguage* (NSM) approach, comes in (Goddard, 2006b, 2018a; Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014; Levisen & Waters, 2017; Peeters, 2006; Peeters, Mullan, & Sadow, 2020). To describe the meanings of complex, culture-specific words and discourses, this approach uses a mini-language that is made of words which are simpler and easier to understand, and whose exact meanings appear to exist not only in English and Spanish, but also in all other natural languages in the world. As I will further explain in the next chapter, a mini-language with these qualities constitutes an optimal medium for achieving my tasks: it allows meaning descriptions that are accurate and fine-grained, and, crucially, it allows meaning descriptions that can articulate the perspective of cultural insiders while making it available to cultural outsiders.

As said in the opening lines, *El Ateneo* bookstore evokes memories of a glorious, bygone period in Argentine history. In a way, many of the word- and discourse-meanings I will be studying in this thesis are like the modern bookstore. Argentines “visit” these words and discourses today, but, as they do, they are also invited to navigate the “theater” which is Argentina’s imagined past, and to revisit the contexts in which these words and discourses emerged and evolved. To achieve a thorough analysis of my targets, then, the reader should expect that I often direct the attention to these historical contexts. Metaphorically, my task is to describe the modern bookstore, but, to accomplish it, I will also examine the historical theater in which the modern bookstore is housed.

1.2 Presenting Buenos Aires, presenting Argentina

In this section, I will present some facts and historical events about Argentina and its capital city, with the purpose of “setting the scene” for the chapters that follow. A good point of departure is to look at a short presentation of Argentina made by Argentines themselves, and then expand on that presentation. It is a paragraph that can be found in the Argentine government’s official website (Argentina.gob.ar, n.d.):

Somos Argentina, país extremo del sudeste de América del Sur. Desde mediados del Siglo XIX somos un país **republicano y federal**, hoy conformado por 23 provincias y una capital: la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires. Son nuestros vecinos: Bolivia, Paraguay, Brasil, Uruguay y Chile. Tenemos un extenso territorio donde abundan valiosos recursos naturales. Nuestra lengua oficial es el español y nuestro nombre recuerda un pasado colonial asociado

a la riqueza del suelo (del latín *argentum*: plata). Somos una nación de puertas abiertas que ha acogido -y acoge todavía- a importantes contingentes migratorios.¹

‘We are Argentina, the furthest country in the southeast of South America. Since the mid 19th century, we are a **republican and federal** country, today composed of 23 provinces and one capital: the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires. Our neighbours are: Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil, Uruguay and Chile. We have an extensive territory where valuable natural resources abound. Our official language is Spanish, and our name is reminiscent of a colonial past associated to the richness of the soil (from Latin *argentum*: silver). We are a nation with open doors that has received -and still receives- important migration contingents.’²

Now I will expand on some phrases extracted from that presentation. As I do this, I may also mention in passing some of the targets of analysis. I will mention the full set of targets in §1.5 at the end of this chapter, in an overview of chapter contents.

Argentina’s “*extensive territory*”, “*valuable natural resources*”, “*rich soil*”, and “*silver*”

Indeed, as the world’s eighth largest country, Argentina has an extensive territory and an abundance of valuable natural resources. At the time of writing, however, the Argentine abundance presents a huge paradox: 18 million Argentines, that is, 40 % of the country’s 45 million inhabitants, live in poverty (Bonfiglio, 2020).

Originally, the “richness” after which the country was named did not exist other than as a dream. It began in the early 1500s, when Spanish explorers discovered a river which, they believed, contained silver, or led to the silver-rich areas in what today is Bolivia (Shumway, 1991, p. 7). They named this river *Río de la Plata* (lit. ‘River of Silver’; usually rendered *River Plate* in English). These Spanish explorers, however, were killed and devoured by indigenous peoples—most probably, *Guaraní* people (James, Alisky, Vanger, & Weinstein, 2019, para. 6).

¹ In this thesis, all **bold**, *italics*, and CAPITALS found in direct quotations are as per the originals, unless otherwise stated.

² Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this thesis are mine.

Some years later, a new crew managed to settle on the western shore of *Río de la Plata*. They named their settlement *Santa María del Buen Ayre* ('Our Lady of the Good Air'), after a patron saint who they believed had guided them in their voyage. In 1541, however, they had to abandon their settlement, escaping from the hostility of indigenous *Querandí* people. In 1580, a new Spanish expedition refounded the village, and called it *Ciudad de la Santísima Trinidad y Puerto de Nuestra Señora la Virgen María de los Buenos Aires* ('City of the Most Holy Trinity and Port of Saint Mary of the Good Airs').

The truth is that, unlike other areas of the continent, the Buenos Aires area contained neither gold nor silver (Shumway, 1991, p. 8). Nevertheless, the river kept its name of *Río de la Plata*, and the adjective *rioplatense* became widely used to designate things from this region. There may be no precious metals beneath the river's brown, muddy waters, but today's Argentines can console themselves by repeating, as they often do, that *Río de la Plata* is "*el río más ancho del mundo*" ('the widest river in the world'). As for the word *Argentina*, it was first used in a poem in 1602, as a poetic substitute of *rioplatense*. It continued to be used in poetry and music and only much later, in the 1800s, it was adopted as the country's official name (Shumway, 1991, p. 7).

"23 provinces and one capital"

Historically, Buenos Aires has received a special treatment compared to other Argentine places. Perhaps the presented paragraph reflects this, as it includes the city's long official name—*Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires* ('Autonomous city of Buenos Aires')—but not the name of any of the other 23 districts.

As a political unit, Buenos Aires has a unique status: it is not part of any province, nor a province in itself. Rather, as its full name suggests, it is an autonomous district. With the highest per capita income in Argentina (INDEC, 2020a), Buenos Aires is the country's cultural and economic center. It is also the country's most populated city, with an estimate of 3 million inhabitants, distributed in an area of 200 km² (IGN, 2020; INDEC, 2020b), and is the most visited city in South America (Buenos Aires Ciudad, n.d.). Famously, Buenos Aires is (together with Montevideo, Uruguay) the birthplace of *tango*, and has been home of personalities like football legend Diego Armando Maradona, Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio (now "Pope Francis"), and writers Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar.

It is worth pointing out that, while the term *Buenos Aires* is commonly used, as it is here, to refer specifically to the geographic area of *Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires* (hereafter CABA³), it can also be used to refer to a larger area known as *Gran Buenos Aires* (‘Greater Buenos Aires’), or GBA. GBA is the megacity of Buenos Aires, where approximately 14 million people reside (i.e. approx. 32 % of the country’s population) (INDEC, 2020b). It comprises the city itself (CABA), but also its conurbation which spreads south, west, and north of CABA (to the east is the *Río de la Plata*) (INDEC, 2003).

It is also worth pointing out that the term *Buenos Aires* can be used to refer to *Provincia de Buenos Aires* (‘Province of Buenos Aires’). With an estimated population of 17 million, that is, nearly 40% of the country’s population, *Provincia de Buenos Aires* is the largest and most populated of the country’s 23 provinces (INDEC, 2020b). Importantly, since CABA gained its autonomy, CABA is in fact not part of the *Provincia de Buenos Aires*. From the CABA-dweller perspective—i.e. the Porteño perspective—, *Provincia de Buenos Aires* “begins” just on the other side of *Avenida General Paz*, a beltway that surrounds CABA. The beltway is seen to symbolize “the edge of the European city” (Grimson & Segura, 2016, p. 28). The province represents alterity, difference, and poverty (Grimson & Segura, 2016), except for some areas where *countries* (‘gated communities’) and middle- and upper-class residential neighborhoods have thrived.

“*Colonial past*”

In contrast to the culturally and economically prominent city described above, Buenos Aires was a small and poor settlement for most of the colonial period (Luna, 1994). An important reason for this was that Spain prohibited direct trade in Buenos Aires’ port. All goods were required to go through the very distant port of Lima, the political and economic centre of the *Vierreinato del Perú* (‘Viceroyalty of Peru’), to which Buenos Aires belonged. As a result, trading with Buenos Aires involved many intermediaries, long routes, and inflated prices, and essential goods would often not reach the city.

³ In Argentina, the acronym CABA is commonly used in both speech and writing.

Therefore, from an early period, the *Porteños* (lit. ‘people from the [Buenos Aires’] port’), as they became known, began to trade illegally with British and Portuguese merchants (Luna, 1994; Shumway, 1991). For centuries, smuggling was one of *Porteños*’ major economic activity. It has been argued (Hedges, 2011, p. 3) that this illegal activity gave shape to the peculiarly *Porteño* trait of getting around rules—a trait which is today reflected in many *Porteño* words, such as *vivo* (roughly, ‘cunning person’) and *viveza criolla* (roughly, ‘creole cunning/artful cheating’), which I will analyze in Ch. 5.

In 1776, the *Virreinato del Río de la Plata* (‘Viceroyalty of the River Plate’) was created, and Buenos Aires was nominated its capital. This *Virreinato* comprised, roughly, the territories of present-day Argentina and neighbouring countries, except Brazil. Direct trade with Spain was thereafter allowed, so Buenos Aires began its journey to becoming an economic and cultural centre in the region.

“A nation with open doors that has received important migration contingents”

Argentines declared independence from Spain in 1816. But this was followed by decades of political conflict, civil war, and interstate wars. To put an end to this chaos, and to make of Argentina a modern, capitalist state with “civilized” values and people, the Argentine state put forward an important nation-building project towards the end of the 19th century. Among other measures, this project involved “opening the doors” to massive European immigration.

In the coming chapters, I will expand on this state-run project, and on the ideology that motivated it, because, as I will argue, these greatly contributed to shaping the word- and discourse-meanings studied in this thesis. For now, I will note that, as millions of immigrants were “welcomed” with “open doors” at the port of Buenos Aires, the state also executed military campaigns to exterminate indigenous peoples, and to then exploit the fertile lands inhabited by them. As the *Porteño* elites became richer, their “Parisification” (Wilson, 2007, p. 24) of Buenos Aires began: streets were paved, trees were planted, thoroughfares expanded, and opulent buildings erected. With its new European facade, Buenos Aires earned its still-famous nickname: *La París de Sudamérica* (‘The Paris of South America’). In Ch. 3, I will analyze this nickname, and also the expression *Los argentinos descienden de los barcos* (‘Argentines descend from

the ships’), which alludes to those millions of immigrants that arrived at the port of Buenos Aires during this period.

“*Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires*”

In addition to CABA, the city of Buenos Aires has many other names. It is also called *Capital Federal* (‘Federal Capital’), or just *Capital*. In writing, the abbreviation *Bs. As.* is common, as are the more recent, informal blends *BA* and *Baires* (the latter is also used in speech).

The city has various “poetic” nicknames too. Internationally, its most famous one is the abovementioned “*La París de Sudamérica*” (‘The Paris of South America’), everywhere to be found in city tours, tourist guides, and travel memoirs. In Argentina, people also use *La Reina del Plata* (‘The Queen of the [River] Plate’), placing Buenos Aires above all other cities around the estuary of that river.

In the last 30 years, the nickname “*La ciudad de la furia*” (‘The city of fury’) has also gained currency. It was given after a popular song of the same name by *Soda Stereo*, a famous rock band in Argentina. The song’s video portrays the *furia* (‘fury’) associated with Porteño urban life. While *furia* is not an uncommon emotion among Porteños, there is another, similar emotion that seems to better represent the Porteño ethnopsychology: *bronca*. My analysis of this emotion in Ch. 6 will perhaps convince the reader that *La ciudad de la bronca* is a more adequate nickname for the city.

“*Our official language is Spanish*”

Most Argentines would believe this statement to be true—after all, it is provided on the country’s official government website. In reality, however, the Argentine Constitution does not state what the official language of the country is (InfoLEG, n.d.). *Español*, also called *castellano* (‘Castilian’) in Argentina (as in many other Spanish-speaking countries), is only a *de facto* official language (Arrosi, 2017). That is to say, it is official not because it is thus stated by the law, but because it is used as the language of everyday communication by, and education of, most Argentines, and because it is the language of all official documents.

There is nevertheless a great linguistic diversity in Argentina, with many people speaking indigenous languages (such as Guaraní, Mapudungun, Quechua, Aymara, Wichi, and Qom). There are also languages brought by intercontinental immigration (such as German, Arabic, Armenian, Chinese, Korean, French, Yiddish, English, Italian, and Japanese); there are mixed languages, such as *portuñol* (portmanteau of *portugués* and *español*) and the Spanish-Guaraní mix, spoken mostly to the north-east of the country. Also, there is the *Lengua de señas argentina* (LSA) (‘Argentine sign language’) (Arrosi, 2017).

Furthermore, throughout Argentina’s extensive territory, there are a number of social and regional varieties of *castellano/español*. Linguists have traditionally focused on the regional variation, recognizing six or seven Spanish varieties in the country (e.g. Fontanella de Weinberg, 2000; Lipski, 1994; Vidal de Battini, 1964). These varieties are “all overshadowed by the prestigious *porteño* speech of Buenos Aires, the prototype for Argentine Spanish in the rest of the Spanish-speaking world” (Lipski, 1994, p. 162). I will now introduce the *Porteño* variety and its distinctive features, and then close the chapter with an overview of the thesis’ contents.

1.3 *Porteño* Spanish

In the abovementioned studies, the Spanish variety of *Porteños* is called *español bonaerense* (‘Buenos Aires Spanish’), *español rioplatense* (‘River Plate area Spanish’), or *español porteño*.

With *español bonaerense*, researchers capture a variety assigned to the city and province of Buenos Aires, and to much of the nearby province of La Pampa (e.g. Fontanella de Weinberg, 1987; 2000).

With *español rioplatense*, the variety is assigned to a wide geographic area encompassing the Argentine and Uruguayan banks of the *Río de la Plata* (e.g. Di Tullio & Kailuweit, 2011). It has been argued that *español rioplatense* may not be an adequate conceptualization, as it blurs differences between the Uruguayan and Argentine Spanishes on either bank of the River (Fløgstad, 2016, p. 42).

The label *porteño* or *español porteño* profiles the influence of the port city—i.e. of CABA—on the make-up of the variety, and it is therefore the term that best represents my targets. Importantly, *español porteño* is a term which *Porteños* themselves would use,

whereas the labels *español rioplatense* and, in particular, *español bonaerense*, are more scholarly denominations.

Under these different conceptualizations, the variety of Buenos Aires is a thoroughly studied one, and known to have morphological, syntactical, phonological, prosodic, and lexical distinctive features. It is important to note that some of the word- and discourse-meanings I will be exploring in this thesis are constituted by speakers' knowledges about and attitudes towards these features.

Two of these features are morphosyntactic: the use of the informal 2nd person singular pronoun *vos* ('you'), instead of *tú* used in most Spanish varieties; this phenomenon is referred to as *voseo*. The use of *vos* also entails a different conjugation of verbs in the Present Indicative, Present Subjunctive, and Imperative.

Two distinctive phonological features are the pronunciation of orthographic 'y' and 'll' as fricatives, a phenomenon known as *yeísmo*, and the aspiration of the preconsontantal /s/.

As for prosody, Porteño differs from other Spanish varieties in that the rising pitch in broad-focus declaratives reaches its peak earlier than in other Spanish varieties (Fløgstad, 2016, p. 53). Researchers generally view this feature as an "Italianization" of Porteño Spanish prosody, that is, as an effect of the intense Spanish-Italian contact that occurred due to the massive Italian immigration to the city (Benet, Gabriel, Kireva, & Pešková, 2012; Colantoni & Gurlekian, 2004; Pešková, Gabriel, & Feldhausen, 2011; Pešková, Feldhausen, Kireva, & Gabriel, 2012).

The Porteño lexicon is considered to have been greatly influenced by the various European—in particular, Italian—languages brought to Buenos Aires during the period of the great immigration (Conde, 2004a, 2011a, 2014; Gobello & Oliveri, 2010). The most researched area of the Porteño lexicon is, by far, what is known as *lunfardo* (roughly, 'Buenos Aires' slang). *Lunfardo* can be described as a vocabulary of approximately 6000 terms that Porteños use in addition to, and often in contrast to, standard or official Spanish (Conde, 2013; Gobello & Oliveri, 2010, 2013). *Lunfardo* has a great number of words taken from languages other than the language to which it pertains (i.e. Spanish), and this, it is argued, makes *lunfardo* unique when compared to popular vocabularies or slangs of other languages (Conde, 2013, 2014; Gobello & Oliveri, 2010, 2013). In Ch. 4, I will examine the semantics of the word *lunfardo*, in an effort to capture the exact meaning and logic that guide local Porteños when they say the word.

There is a vast literature on *lunfardo*. A great part of this literature consists of practical lexicographic work, with a wealth of *lunfardo*-standard Spanish dictionaries (for an exhaustive list and discussion of *lunfardo* dictionaries, see Conde, 2011a, and Iribarren Castilla, 2009). There are, however, no fine-grained semantic analyses of words from the *lunfardo* vocabulary. Definitions in *lunfardo* dictionaries tend to equate *lunfardisms*⁴ to their counterparts in standard Spanish, often blurring subtle semantic differences between them. An important aim in many of these dictionaries, as in much of the other scholarly literature on *lunfardo*, is to note the European etymologies of *lunfardisms* (e.g. Conde, 2004b; Gobello, 2004, 2009 [1953]; Gobello & Oliveri, 2010, 2013)

There is also a number of studies concerning *lunfardo* and the universe of *tango* (e.g. Conde, 2014; Conde & Oliveri, 2002; Gobello, 1999; Teruggi, 1974). As I shall explain in the relevant chapter (Ch. 4), *tango* music co-evolved with *lunfardo*. From an early period, *tango* composers employed *lunfardo* words in their songs, such that *lunfardo* became a central ingredient in the poetics of those songs, and such that *tango* played (and continues to play) a major role in disseminating and preserving *lunfardo* words (Conde, 2014; Teruggi, 1974).

Another, less-studied area of the Porteño lexicon concerns *cocoliche*, a theme which will also take on importance in Ch. 4, given that *cocoliche* and *lunfardo* are two interconnected phenomena. The term *cocoliche* designates the Spanish-Italian hybrid language that was spoken by Italian immigrants in the city of Buenos Aires, and which eventually disappeared as these immigrants acquired Spanish. *Cocoliche* is somewhat preserved in the language of popular theater and literature of that time, but these pieces are regarded as unreliable sources for studying the phenomena (Ennis, 2015). Perhaps this explains why *cocoliche* is a much less-studied area of the Porteño lexicon than *lunfardo* (Conde, 2011a; Ennis, 2015).

To summarize, there are a number of social and regional varieties of *español* in Argentina, and all of these are overshadowed by the prestigious Porteño Spanish of the city of Buenos Aires—the prototype for Argentine Spanish in the Spanish-speaking world (Lipski, 1994). Various linguistic features are idiosyncratic to Porteño Spanish; these

⁴ Words, phrases, or idioms that are peculiar to the *lunfardo* vocabulary are often called *lunfardismos* in the scholarly literature written in Spanish. I will therefore adopt the English word *lunfardisms*, which I will use interchangeably with the terms *lunfardo words* and *words from lunfardo*.

features have been relatively well-studied, with studies tracing back prosodic and lexical features to contact with languages spoken by immigrants in Buenos Aires. The most studied area of the Porteño lexicon is *lunfardo*, a vocabulary used in addition to the lexicon of standard Porteño Spanish. *Lunfardo* is considered unique in that it is largely comprised of terms that originally pertained to other languages.

1.4 Overview of chapter contents

I will now close this introduction with a brief overview of chapter contents. Ch. 2 concerns the methods used in this study. It introduces ethnopragmatics and it describes the research process and data sources.

Ch. 3 to 6 are the chapters of lexical-semantic analysis. Each of these chapters analyzes a (set of) culturally important word(s) or phrase(s) pertaining to a particular semantic domain or theme, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Overview of Chapters 3 to 6

Ch.	Target(s)	Theme
3	<i>Buenos Aires es la París de Sudamérica</i> (‘Buenos Aires is the Paris of South America’)	place-construal
	<i>Los argentinos descienden de los barcos</i> (‘Argentines descend from the ships’)	people-construal
4	<i>lunfardo</i> (‘Buenos Aires’ slang) ⁵	words-construal
5	<i>viveza criolla</i> (‘creole cunning/artful cheating’)	sociality (i.e. “ways of doing things with others”)
	<i>vivo</i> (‘cunning person’)	social categories (i.e. “kinds of people”)
	<i>boludo</i> (‘moron’)	social categories (i.e. “kinds of people”)
6	<i>bronca</i> (‘anger’)	feelings

⁵ In this thesis, the English translations of most Spanish terms are only approximate. For the ease of reading, however, I will sometimes omit the notes “rough translation” and “roughly”.

As I carry out the lexical-semantic analyses in Ch. 3 to 6, I sometimes discuss common discourses associated to the words and phrases under scrutiny, or capture these discourses via ethnopragmatic techniques. However, the discourse-analysis chapter proper is Ch. 7. The targets of this chapter are various culturally important Porteño discourses which are, to a greater or lesser extent, organized around the words and phrases studied in Ch. 3 to 6. Finally, Ch. 8 offers conclusions.

Chapter 2. Methods

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I introduce *ethnopragmatics*,⁶ equipping the reader with everything one needs to know about this approach in order to safely navigate this thesis.⁷ This includes an explanation of two important notions which capture the “what”—i.e. the targets—of ethnopragmatic research: *cultural keywords* and *discourses*. This is followed by an explanation of the “how” of ethnopragmatics: an introduction to the *NSM metalanguage*—i.e. the descriptive medium for ethnopragmatic analysis—, and also to *semantic explications* and *cultural scripts*—i.e. the two ethnopragmatic techniques for analyzing and describing meaning. I also note advantages of ethnopragmatics compared to other methods. Then I describe the steps and attitudes involved in my research process, and the data used to test meaning hypotheses. At the end of the chapter I provide a chapter summary.

2.2 Ethnopragmatics

Ethnopragmatics, also known as the *Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach*, or *NSM approach*, is an approach in linguistics that is concerned with the study of meaning (Goddard, 2006b, 2018a; Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014; Levisen & Waters, 2017; Peeters, 2006; Peeters, Mullan, & Sadow, 2020). Its main goal is to produce accurate, cross-translatable, high-resolution descriptions of complex, culture-specific, culture-rich meanings, preserving the perspective of culture-insiders while making it accessible to culture-outsiders.

⁶ For a complete introduction to ethnopragmatics written in Spanish, see Fernández (2020a).

⁷ There is only one tool related to ethnopragmatics that is not explained in this chapter, namely, *Minimal English* (Goddard, 2018b, to appear/2021; Sadow, Peeters, & Mullan, 2020). Although I will not be using Minimal English in this thesis, my analysis in Ch. 7 will require that I briefly touch on it. I will therefore defer its introduction until that chapter. Also, Ch. 3 integrates NSM tools with those of another approach, namely, *Conceptual Blending Theory* (Coulson & Oakley, 2000; Fauconnier, 1999; Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). Because Conceptual Blending Theory is only used in Ch. 3, I will explain it and justify its use in that chapter.

2.2.1 Cultural keywords and discourse

The notions of *cultural keyword* and *discourse* hold an important place in ethnopragmatics, as they represent the targets of ethnopragmatic research. It is worth summarizing important theoretical developments concerning the nature, behavior, and interdependence of these two.

2.2.1.1 Cultural keywords

Words that are culturally salient in a language or speech community—e.g. the word *happiness* for English speakers, the word *bronca* (‘anger’) for Porteños— are referred to in ethnopragmatics as *cultural keywords* (aka *cultural key words*). Cultural keywords came to the center of NSM analysis with Wierzbicka’s *Understanding Cultures Through Their Key Words* (Wierzbicka, 1997). The author’s oft-quoted analogy of key words as “loose ends” in “a tangled ball of wool” is most instructive:

A key word (...) is like one loose end which we have managed to find in a tangled ball of wool: by pulling it, we may be able to unravel a whole tangled “ball” of attitudes, values, and expectations, embodied not only in words, but also in common collocations, in set phrases, in grammatical constructions, in proverbs, and so on. (p. 17)

In a more literal sense, Goddard and Ye (2014, p. 71) define cultural keywords as “culture-rich and translation-resistant words that occupy focal points in cultural ways of thinking, acting, feeling, and speaking”. The notion suggests that certain words in a language can, if properly studied, function as a guide to the culture of the people that use them, revealing underlying shared values, assumptions, beliefs, narratives, common-sense knowledges, and salient patterns of cognition and feeling in the speech community that uses them.

The concept of cultural keyword is a qualitative one, i.e. there is no strict division between keywords and other culturally-significant words (Goddard, 2018a, p. 166). The goal is not to “prove” that a certain word is a cultural keyword, but rather, to reveal culturally significant aspects about a speech community via close semantic analysis (Waters, 2014, p. 25; Levisen & Waters, 2017, pp. 236-238).

Certain areas of the lexicon are very cultural keyword-productive, that is, they are fertile ground for keywords in different languages and cultures (Goddard, 2018a).

Examples of these fertile areas include words for values, ideals, emotions, psychological constructs, and social categories. Table 2 provides examples of previously studied keywords in three of these areas, and includes also keywords studied in this thesis. Note that the English translations are, of course, approximations only.

Table 2: A selection of cultural keywords

values	English <i>happiness</i> (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014) French <i>s'engager</i> ('being engaged/committed') (Peeters, 2000) Danish <i>hygge</i> ('pleasant togetherness') (Levisen, 2012) Argentine Spanish <i>viveza criolla</i> ('creole cunning/artful cheating') (Hein, 2020a; Ch. 5, this thesis)
emotions	English <i>happiness</i> (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014) German <i>Angst</i> ('fear/anxiety') (Wierzbicka, 1999) Portuguese <i>saudade</i> ('nostalgia') (Bułat Silva, 2012a) Malay <i>malu</i> ('shame/propriety') (Goddard, 1997) Argentine Spanish <i>bronca</i> ('anger') (Ch. 6, this thesis)
social categories	Russian <i>drug</i> ('close friend') (Gladkova, 2013) Korean <i>noin</i> ('respected senior people') (Yoon, 2004) Mandarin <i>shēngrén</i> ('stranger') (Ye, 2004) Australian English <i>bogan</i> ('chav/white trash') (Rowen, 2017, 2020) Argentine Spanish <i>vivo</i> ('cunning person') and <i>boludo</i> ('moron') (Hein, 2020a; Ch. 5, this thesis)

Although some areas of the lexicon tend to be fertile ground for cultural keywords, I should stress that keywords can nevertheless be found practically anywhere in the lexicons of the world's languages, and sometimes in less obvious or unexpected places (Goddard, 2015; 2018a), such as speech-act verbs (see e.g. Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014), terms of address (see e.g. Farese 2017, 2018; Wierzbicka, 2016), prepositions (Levisen, 2020), landscape terms (Bromhead, 2011), to name but a few. In Chapter 4, I will look at *lunfardo* (roughly, 'Buenos Aires' slang'), a keyword which can be said to pertain to the realm of ethnometalanguage—i.e. of speakers' words about language(s)—, a hitherto under-researched keyword area in ethnopragsmatics (but see Goddard, 2011; also Levisen, 2012, pp. 13-16).

2.2.1.2 Cultural keywords *in discourse*

Levisen and Waters's (2017) edited volume *Cultural Keywords in discourse* represents a milestone in NSM-based keyword studies. In addition to providing various keyword case studies from speech communities around the world, it includes a chapter that organizes important theoretical developments concerning the nature and behavior of keywords. In particular, it examines the relation between *keywords* and *discourse*, another key notion in ethnopragmatics.

Levisen and Waters (2017) define cultural keywords as “culturally laden words around which whole discourses are organized” (p. 3). They do not provide a definition for the term “discourses”, though. This may appear as rather troublesome, given the term’s multifaceted nature and often vague use in the humanities. However, it is clear that their understanding of “discourses” alludes to recurrent, widely enacted themes or way of using words within a given speech community. This becomes apparent in the “Keyword Canons” proposed by the authors, a useful guide for researchers looking at the keyword-discourse interface (Levisen & Waters, 2017, pp. 5-8, 239-241). These canons have been an important guide throughout my research, so I summarize them below:

- (1) **“Keywords came from discourse”**. Salient, recurrently enacted discourses are likely to undergo compression into a new semantic unit, either in the form of a new word, or a new meaning attached to an existing word. Keywords are thus products of historical discourse, or, as the authors put it, “[t]oday’s keywords are yesterday’s discourse” (p. 5).
- (2) **“Keywords reflect cultural values”**. That which is considered “good” and “bad” within a speech community is encoded in its keywords, such that these keywords function as “valid yardsticks for evaluation” within that community (p. 6).
- (3) **“Keywords create discursive contexts”**. A keyword has a “context-governing potential” (p. 6). Once introduced into a conversation, it has the capacity to guide people’s interpretations and to direct conversations. Like a magnet, it attracts discourses recurrently associated to it, constraining speakers’ discursive horizons. But just as discourses are “keyword-driven” (p. 7), I would add that keywords are discourse-driven, too: when a discourse is invoked, it is likely that an associated (set

of) keyword(s) will be recruited, too. In their mutual recruitment, keywords and recurrent discourses maintain and legitimize each other.

(4) “Keywords maintain discursive fixities”. The Anglo concept of “change” is much celebrated in contemporary linguistics (in terms such as “semantic change”, “language change”, etc.). However, insistence on this term obscures the fact that languages are also governed by deeply entrenched discursive “fixities”—i.e. firmly established discourses—, and that such fixities are maintained or secured by keywords. When words acquire or lose keyword status, major conceptual and discursive shifts occur in a speech community’s worldview (p. 6).

(5) “Keywords reveal the scripted lives of people”. By close analysis, keywords can offer a window into less obvious discourse practices that are likewise reflective of culture-specific ways of meaning-making (pp. 7-8).

(6) “Keywords are constitutive of a deep emic logic”. The keywords of a speech community capture what is considered to be central and unavoidable for everyday life in that community. The study of these keywords takes the researcher “right to the heart” of the community’s linguistic worldview (p. 8).

2.2.2 The NSM metalanguage

Researchers in ethnopragmatics share the conviction that the optimal medium to analyze cultural keywords and discourses is NSM, the mini-language after which the approach is named. In what follows, I shall introduce three concepts that are key to understanding the structure of the NSM mini-language: *semantic primes*, *NSM grammar*, and *semantic molecules*. Then, in §2.2.3, I will explain how ethnopragmatics uses this NSM mini-language to capture meaning via two techniques: *semantic explications* and *cultural scripts*.

2.2.2.1 Semantic primes: universal, simple, non-decomposable meanings

The NSM mini-language is based on a small core of 65 meanings known as *semantic primes*. Based on approximately 40 years of empirical, cross-linguistic research, semantic primes are considered to be *universal* meanings, that is to say, meanings that can be expressed by words or word-like expressions in all or most languages. Also, semantic

primes are considered to be *simple*, and thus *indefinable*, blocks of meaning: primes cannot be further decomposed into other meanings without falling into circular definitions (that is, a self-referring, self-containing definition). Primes are nevertheless self-explanatory, intuitively intelligible concepts. Table 3 presents the mini-inventory of semantic primes, using English “exponents” (i.e. linguistic realizations of primes). Table 4 presents the same inventory, using Spanish exponents.⁸

Table 3: Semantic primes (English exponents), grouped into related categories (based on Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014)

I~ME, YOU, SOMEONE, SOMETHING~THING, PEOPLE, BODY	substantives
KIND, PART	relational substantives
THIS, THE SAME, OTHER~ELSE	determiners
ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL, MUCH~MANY, LITTLE~FEW	quantifiers
GOOD, BAD	evaluators
BIG, SMALL	descriptors
KNOW, THINK, WANT, DON'T WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR	mental predicates
SAY, WORDS, TRUE	speech
DO, HAPPEN, MOVE	actions, events, movement
BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS, (IS) MINE, BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING)	location, existence, possession, specification
LIVE, DIE	life and death
WHEN~TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME, MOMENT	time
WHERE~PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE, TOUCH	space
NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF	logical concepts
VERY, MORE	intensifier, augmentor
LIKE~AS~WAY	similarity

⁸ Comparable tables are available in more than 20 geographically and typologically diverse languages at the NSM website of Griffith University: <https://intranet.secure.griffith.edu.au/schools-departments/natural-semantic-metalanguage>.

Table 4: Semantic primes (Spanish exponents), grouped into related categories (based on Fernández, 2020a; and Levisen & Waters, 2017)

YO~MÍ, TÚ, ALGUIEN, ALGO~COSA, GENTE, CUERPO	substantives
TIPO, PARTE	relational substantives
ESTO, LO MISMO, OTRO	determiners
UNO, DOS, ALGUNOS, TODO, MUCHO, POCO	quantifiers
BUENO, MALO	evaluators
GRANDE, CHICO	descriptors
SABER, PENSAR, QUERER, NO QUERER, SENTIR, VER, OÍR	mental predicates
DECIR, PALABRAS, VERDAD	speech
HACER, PASAR, MOVERSE	actions, events, movement
ESTAR (EN UN LUGAR), HAY, (ES) MÍO, SER (ALGUIEN/ALGO)	location, existence, possession, specification
VIVIR, MORIR	life and death
CUÁNDO~CUANDO~TIEMPO, AHORA, ANTES, DESPUÉS, MUCHO TIEMPO, POCO TIEMPO, POR UN TIEMPO, MOMENTO	time
DÓNDE~DONDE~LUGAR, AQUÍ, ARRIBA (DE), DEBAJO (DE), LEJOS (DE), CERCA (DE), LADO, DENTRO (DE), TOCAR	space
NO, TAL VEZ, PODER, POR~PORQUE, SI	logical concepts
MUY, MÁS	intensifier, augmentor
COMO	similarity

Some important observations about the exponents of primes are in order. First, note in the above tables that some exponents are located on either side of the symbol “~”. This means that those exponents are *allolexes*, i.e. language-specific variants of the same prime. For example, I and ME⁹ are allolexes: they are English exponents of the same prime, and, as such, there is no semantic difference between them; it only happens that, in English, I typically occurs before verbs, and ME elsewhere. Second, note that exponents

⁹ When discussing semantic primes, it is standard practice to write them in SMALL CAPS.

of primes can be *polysemous*, i.e. they can have other, related meanings. For example, the Spanish exponent QUERER means WANT, but it can also mean, roughly, ‘to love/like (someone)’. However, it’s only the former sense—i.e. the one corresponding to WANT—that is considered a *semantic prime*. Third, exponents may be formally complex forms (e.g. SOMEONE, INSIDE). This doesn't mean, however, that their meanings are the sum of their respective morphological parts. Fourth, exponents of primes may be words, bound morphemes, or phrasemes. For example, the English exponent NOT is a single word, and so is NO in Spanish, whereas the French exponent corresponding to the same prime is the phraseme NE...PAS. Lastly, a combination of two or more primes can sometimes be expressed by a single portmanteau word. For example, in English, “it” may be used instead of THIS SOMETHING; “they” instead of THESE PEOPLE or THIS SOMEONE; “often” instead of AT MANY TIMES. In Spanish, COMO ESTO (LIKE THIS) may be expressed via the portmanteau “así”.

2.2.2.2 NSM grammar

The NSM mini-language also has a universal mini-grammar. This means that semantic primes can be combined to form simple phrases and sentences (aka *canonical sentences*), but only in well-specified ways which are hypothesized to be available in all natural languages. Combinations of primes which are not afforded by all languages are also not allowed in NSM. The combinatorial properties for each prime have been studied in detail across a range of typologically diverse languages (Goddard, 2008; Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2002, 2014; Peeters, 2006).

To illustrate these combinatorial possibilities, consider the canonical sentences in (1a)-(8a), which employ the English exponents DO, SAY, THINK, KNOW, WANT, FEEL, SEE, and HEAR, and in (1b)-(8b), which use their Spanish counterparts HACER, DECIR, PENSAR, SABER, QUERER, SENTIR, VER, and OÍR:

- (1a) someone does something (to someone)
 - someone does something good/bad to someone
 - someone does something to someone/something (with something)
- (1b) alguien hace algo (a alguien)
 - alguien hace algo bueno/malo a alguien

alguien hace algo a alguien/algo (con algo)

(2a) someone says something (good/bad) (to someone)

someone says something (good/bad) about someone/something

(2b) alguien dice algo (bueno/malo) (a alguien)

alguien dice algo (bueno/malo) sobre alguien/algo

(3a) someone thinks something (good/bad) about someone else/something

many people think like this: “—”

(3b) alguien piensa algo (bueno/malo) sobre otro alguien/algo

mucha gente piensa así: “—”

(4a) I know it/I don't know it

someone knows something (about something)

this someone knows this

someone wants to know something

(4b) yo lo sé/yo no lo sé

alguien sabe algo (sobre algo)

este alguien sabe esto

alguien quiere saber algo

(5a) someone wants something

someone wants to do/know/say something

(5b) alguien quiere algo

alguien quiere hacer/saber/decir algo

(6a) someone feels something good/bad (in one part of the body)

(6b) alguien siente algo bueno/malo (en una parte del cuerpo)

(7a) someone sees someone/something (in a place)

(7b) alguien ve alguien/algo (en un lugar)

(8a) someone hears something (in a place)

(8b) alguien oye algo (en un lugar)

2.2.2.3 Semantic molecules

The NSM mini-language also employs certain meaning units called *semantic molecules* (marked with the notation “[m]”). Unlike primes, semantic molecules are complex meanings, i.e. they are decomposable into simpler terms.

Some common molecules are presented in Table 5 (after Goddard, 2018a, pp. 126-158; 2018b, p. 16), grouped into rows according to “type” of molecule. Typically, to be considered a semantic molecule, a concept must be highly “productive”, that is to say, it must participate in the semantic structure of many and varied words across the lexicons of all or many natural languages. Other types of productive concepts which are also considered to be molecules include: non-universal concepts which appear to have approximate equivalents across most languages; culture-specific concepts that have become widespread across many languages; and geographically or historically localized concepts.

Table 5: A selection of semantic molecules

Proposed universal or near-universal molecules	BODY: hand, mouth, eyes, head, ears, nose, face, legs, teeth, fingers, breasts, skin, bones, blood SOCIAL: we, be born, children, men, women, mother, father, wife, husband; know someone, be called PHYSICAL: long, round, flat, hard, soft, sharp, smooth, heavy MATERIAL: wood, stone LOCATION/SPACE: be on something, at the top, at the bottom, in front, around ENVIRONMENTAL/NATURE: sky, the Earth, ground, sun, during the day, at night, water, fire ACTIONS AND ACTIVITIES: play, laugh, sing, make, kill, hold, sit, lie, stand, sleep
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<p>Non-universal molecules with approximate equivalents in all or most languages</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - eat, drink - bird, fish, tree - sea, ice, rain, wind - dog
<p>Widespread yet culture-specific molecules</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - rice - paper, iron, metal, glass - year, month, week - country, city, village - house, school - doctor, nurse - cat, horse, cow - car, boat, plane, computer - read, write, book - money, number, God
<p>Highly localized molecules</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - color, king, sister, brother

In some recent studies, molecules that are necessary in the semantic description of only a very small number of morphologically related words have been called *derivational bases* (marked with the notation “[d]”) (see Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014, p. 209; Goddard, 2017; Farese, 2017, 2018; Waters, 2014). In this thesis, I will not employ this denomination because, as of yet, it is unclear to me what the degree of specialization is of the molecules that were required in my analyses.

Another way in which complex meanings may be employed in the NSM mini-language is via *exemplars* (marked with the notation “[m*]”). Originally proposed for the description of certain English superordinate categories (such as *vegetables*, *furniture*, *herbs*, *jewelry*, and *cosmetics*), exemplars represent salient examples that speakers would naturally draw on to explain what the word in question means (Goddard, 2017). For example, when explaining what *furniture* is, English speakers will often use the terms *tables*, *chairs*, and *beds*. The use of these terms as NSM exemplars intends to mimic this “‘natural’ explanatory strategy” of speakers (Goddard, 2017, p. 255). I will defer the discussion of exemplars until the relevant chapters; for now, I will only highlight that, *in my analyses*, exemplars are not treated as molecules. Rather, I am more inclined to think of them as “word exemplars”. With this, I want to propose that I am using these words not in their status as complex “building blocks” of meaning, but only as signifiers or word

forms. Thus, I have opted to mark them with the symbol “*” (instead of “[m*]” originally proposed by Goddard, 2017).

2.2.3 Semantic explications and cultural scripts

Ethnopragmatics uses the NSM mini-language to capture meaning via two techniques: *semantic explications* and *cultural scripts*.

2.2.3.1 Semantic explications

A semantic explication is a technique for defining the meaning of a complex word, phrase, or lexico-grammatical construction. It can be described as a “reductive paraphrase”: an attempt to say in other, simpler terms (the terms of the NSM mini-language) what speakers say when they utter the expression in question (Goddard & Ye, 2014, pp. 70-71).

The technique enables accurate, high-resolution definitions while it minimizes the risk of three common problems in dictionary definitions and in methods of semantic analysis used in other approaches: (a) *terminological ethnocentrism*, (b) *obscurity*, and (c) *circularity*. I will now present a brief overview of each of these problems.¹⁰

(a) Terminological ethnocentrism occurs when researchers employ terms from one language or culture (typically, the English language or Anglo culture) to describe terms from another language or culture. This is problematic because it projects a distorted or outsider perspective onto that target language or culture. NSM semantic explications are protected from terminological ethnocentrism because the meanings of the terms used for description (the terms of the NSM mini-language) are lexically realized in all languages. Therefore, NSM semantic explications contain only terms whose meanings are known and used by culture-insiders themselves.

(b) Obscurity occurs when the defining terms are not clear. Take, for example, the following definition of English *horse* found in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1964): “a solid-hoofed perissodactyl quadruped (*Equus caballus*)” (as cited in Wierzbicka, 1996, p. 263). Definitions like this one are problematic because, despite the “sciencey” or

¹⁰ For a more detailed critique of other approaches to semantic analysis, see Goddard (2018a, pp. 304-342); Goddard & Wierzbicka (2014, pp. 1-21); Wierzbicka (1996, pp. 258-286).

“technical” appeal of complex terms used in them, the exact meanings of such terms are not always known or easily accessible. Furthermore, these terms may have different senses which are often confused or change over time. By using NSM’s small set of stable, simple meanings, explications aim to be maximally clear and equally accessible for the people that read them, irrespective of their language or cultural background.

(c) Circularity occurs when words are defined in terms of one another. For example, if we search for *happiness* in Cambridge Dictionary, we find it defined as “the feeling of being *happy*”.¹¹ If we then search for *happy*, the offered definition is “feeling, showing, or causing *pleasure* or satisfaction”. Then, if we search for *pleasure*, we find it defined as “enjoyment, *happiness*, or satisfaction, or something that gives this”. Thus, in our mission to understand the meaning of *happiness*, Cambridge Dictionary has taken us on a circular journey, first from *happiness* to *happy*, then from *happy* to *pleasure*, and finally from *pleasure* back to *happiness*. What is worse, all these definitions present us with various other complex terms whose meanings are clearly different from each other’s, such as *satisfaction* and *enjoyment*, revealing a failure to capture a single, invariant meaning for *happiness*. NSM semantic explications are free from the problem of circularity because they are comprised of terms which are always simpler than the word being defined.

2.2.3.2 The look and feel of explications

To illustrate the look and feel of semantic explications, consider [A] below for one of the meanings of *happy* (based on Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014, p. 103).

[A] Someone X was *happy*

- a. this someone thought like this for some time at that time:
- b. "many good things are happening to me now as I want
- c. I can do many things now as I want
- d. this is good"
- e. because of this, this someone felt something good at that time
- f. like people feel at many times when they think like this for some time

¹¹ The italicized emphasis, here and in the next few quoted definitions, is mine. Retrieved from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org>.

The first line (i.e. “[A] Someone X was *happy*”) presents the *definiendum*, that is to say, the exact word or phrase to be accounted for via NSM terms. The lines that follow (‘a’ to ‘f’) contain the semantic explication proper. These lines are usually called *components*. Note that explications tend to be longer than traditional dictionary definitions. In long explications, like some of the ones I will present in this thesis, components appear organized into different *sections*, for the ease of reading.

2.2.3.3 Good explications

The explication for English *happy* presented above is considered valid, or, as NSM scholars put it, sufficiently “good”. Traditionally, to be considered good, an explication must meet three conditions: *well-formedness*, *coherence*, and *substitutability* (Goddard & Ye, 2014, p. 71). A well-formed explication is one which is entirely formulated in semantic primes and molecules, and which conforms to the NSM grammar. Well-formedness guarantees that explications can be translated into other languages without distorting their meanings. A coherent explication is one that makes sense as a whole: the primes and molecules that form it are linked in logical and temporally meaningful or plausible relations. A substitutable explication is one that makes intuitive sense to native speakers when compared against a sufficient, diverse range of naturally occurring examples of the word (phrase, construction, etc.) that is being explicated. A substitutable explication aims for maximal explanatory power, i.e. to account for as many instances as possible of the word in question, if not all instances.

Along with these three conditions, I will propose a fourth one, namely *maximal simplicity*, to capture a quality of explications that, it seems to me, is highly valued by NSM scholars I have worked with, but which, as of yet, hasn’t been formalized (but see Farese, 2017, p. 38; 2018, p. 35). A maximally simple explication is one that can reveal semantic complexity in fine detail, but which has also been kept as simple as possible. It adheres to Ockham’s razor principle: given alternative, competing hypotheses (i.e. explications) which appear to work equally well, one must choose the simplest one. By maximizing the explication’s simplicity, one facilitates its capacity to be falsified. Lévi-Strauss’s famous dictum about scientific explanation may be instructive for NSM scholars aiming at maximally simple explications: “[s]cientific explanation consists not

in moving from the complex to the simple but in the replacement of a less intelligible complexity by one which is more so” (Levi-Strauss, 1966, p. 248).

2.2.3.4 Cultural scripts

While explications are concerned with semantic analysis—i.e. with capturing the meanings of lexicalized units (words, phrases, or lexico-grammatical constructions, etc.), cultural scripts are concerned with pragmatics or discourse analysis. They seek to describe cultural norms, attitudes, assumptions, and themes reflected in common ways of using language within a given speech community.

Based on definitions in the ethnopragmatic literature (Goddard, 2006a; Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2004; Goddard & Ye, 2014; Levisen & Waters, 2017), I will here understand a cultural script as a representation, articulated largely or entirely in the NSM metalanguage, of some particular discourse that is indicative of a widely shared way of speaking, behaving, thinking, and/or feeling in a given speech community.

Importantly, a script does not posit that all or most of the speech community speaks, behaves, thinks, and/or feels in the way described by it, although sometimes this may be the case. Rather, the claim is that most people in that community are familiar with its content, and that, even if they do not enact it “to the letter”, much of their own behavior and expectations about others are guided by this familiarity (Goddard & Ye 2014, p. 72). Goddard and Wierzbicka (2004, p. 157) put it this way:

The claim is that even those who do not personally identify with the content of a script are familiar with it, i.e. that it forms part of the interpretative backdrop to discourse and social behaviour in a particular cultural context. Cultural scripts are intended to capture background norms, templates, guidelines or models for ways of thinking, acting, feeling, and speaking, in a particular cultural context. While they explain a great deal about speech practices, they are not descriptions of behaviour as such.

Cultural scripts present an alternative to the strongly universalist paradigm which has dominated linguistic pragmatics, represented by Gricean and neo-Gricean pragmatics (Grice, 1975; Levinson, 2000; Sperber & Wilson, 1995), the “politeness theory” launched by Brown and Levinson (1978), and the contrastive pragmatics of Blum-Kulka and colleagues (e.g. Blum-Kulka & Kasper, 1993). As noted in Ch. 1, these approaches are

through and through Anglocentric: they adopt Anglo norms as a baseline, and generalize or adjust this baseline to fit other cultures and languages (Goddard, 2006a). Their descriptive tools are quintessentially Anglo words without counterparts in many linguistic communities, such as “politeness”, “directness”, “relevance”, “truth”, “face”, “brevity” “request”, “compliment” and “cooperation” (Goddard, 2006a; Levisen & Waters, 2017).¹²

Because cultural scripts and semantic explications rely on one and the same descriptive tool (the NSM metalanguage), our ability to appreciate links between word meanings and discourse practices—i.e. between the realms of semantics and pragmatics—is enhanced (Goddard, 2006a; Levisen & Waters, 2017).

2.2.3.5 The look and feel of cultural scripts

To illustrate the look and feel of cultural scripts, consider Script [Q] below (proposed in Ch. 7 of this thesis). It captures a deeply entrenched discursive practice (see Grimson, 2012; Jauretche, 1968, p. 229) whereby Argentines criticize Argentina by comparing ‘things’ in this country and ‘things of the same kind’ in other countries:

[Q] A script for comparing Argentina unfavourably against other countries

- a. in Argentina [m], many people often say something like this:
- b. “in this country [m], things of many kinds are bad
- c. in many other countries [m], things of the same kinds are good
- d. this is bad”

Cultural scripts exist at different levels of generality. The more general ones, sometimes referred to as “high-level scripts” or “master scripts”, often begin with components such as ‘(in Argentina) many people think like this: ---’, or ‘many people often say something like this: ---’. Other scripts operate in more specific contexts and scenarios, or involve more specified themes. These scripts are called “lower-level scripts”, and they often involve ‘when’-components and ‘if’-components.

¹² For a detailed criticism of universalist traditions in pragmatics, see Goddard (2006a, pp. 1-30); see also Levisen & Waters (2017, pp. 1-2), and Ye (2019).

2.3 Methods for crafting explications and scripts

A good explication or script is a carefully crafted meaning hypothesis. It has been shaped by disciplined semantic intuition, introspection, and collaborative exploration, and rigorously tested against a sufficient, diverse range of naturally occurring language examples (Goddard, 2018a; Levisen, 2012, 2017, 2019; Wierzbicka, 2010). It is the product of a laborious, time-consuming process. It can take weeks, months, or even years of work before one arrives at what appears to be a “good explication” (see §2.2.3.3), only to come across yet another “black swan” which contradicts it. NSM scholars will agree if I say that, in a way, good explications and scripts are not formulated, but *re-formulated*.

2.3.1 The procedure for good explications

There is no fixed procedure for achieving a good explication. The method I have used consists mainly in trial-and-error, or “successive approximations” (Goddard, 2018a, p. 67; 2014, p. 56), and it can be described as follows. First, I produced a draft explication which made sense when substituting it for the word in question in a few different usage examples that came to mind. In my experience, this draft is best when done “without thinking too much”: it should come out naturally, like a spontaneous gesture. Native speaker knowledge and intuitions, as well as first impressions that one has got from the collected examples, are all automatically recruited for this first draft. Second, I would carry out a first test for substitutability, that is, I would check that the explication made sense when compared against a first batch of my collected examples (the sources of which are discussed first in §2.5, and then in more detail in the relevant chapters). I also checked that the explication met the other criteria, i.e. that it was well-formed, coherent, and maximally simple. Some adjustments were usually necessary, after which, again, I compared the explication against another batch of examples. This iterative process continued until the explication proved to be substitutable against the whole corpus of examples, and provided it also met the other validity criteria. Along this process, the successive versions were trialed with other native speakers, and discussed with NSM scholars, cultural insiders, and other collaborators.

2.3.2 The procedure for good scripts

With the scripts, the procedure was not any different. However, unlike an explication—which is a hypothesized meaning for a specific, relatively fixed and simple form (such a word or multi-word expression)—, a script often concerns a meaning that may realize in various different forms, and these realizations may comprise extended strings of words. It is therefore not always possible to first collect a clear-cut sample of “discourse examples” and then produce the script that predicts it. Rather, the process is one of continuous back and forth between redrafting the script and finding new examples that shed light on how the script ought to be modified.

There are nevertheless certain linguistic phenomena that researchers in ethnopragmatics pay special attention to when tracking down scripts, as these have proved to shelter cultural norms across different languages and cultures. One of these phenomena is, for reasons already discussed (see §2.2.1), cultural keywords. Others include: proverbs and common sayings, common words and expressions, words for speech acts and genres, terms of address (e.g. pronouns, titles, terms of endearment, designations by profession), interactional routines (e.g. greetings), phraseological patterns, conversational management strategies (e.g. patterns of turn-taking), derivational morphology expressive of social meanings (e.g. diminutives), and discourse particles and interjections (Goddard, 2006a, pp. 14-16)

2.4 Multiple epistemologies

As said, I was born in Buenos Aires, and I lived there for nearly three decades—I am 37 at the time of writing. My analyses have therefore gained from careful use of my native speaker intuitions, my knowledge as a cultural-insider, and my life experiences in that city.

Along these years, I also reflected on Argentina from a cultural, linguistic, and geographic distance that was much-needed for this research. When I was 27, I left Argentina, and lived in Dublin and Berlin for half a year, in Aarhus (Denmark) for 6 years, and in Brisbane (Australia) for the last 4 years, where I formally embarked on this thesis. Living with people of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, I was often confronted with assumptions I had about Argentine culture and language, and with the hard task of linguacultural translation. I found myself inhabiting different lingua-cultural

selves, as it were, while also sharing my research in a vibrant, culturally-diverse community of NSM scholars studying the ethnopragmatic universes of Danish, Farsi, Akan, Japanese, and Cantonese, to mention but a few.

During the course of this project, however, I visited Buenos Aires on five separate occasions, during which I re-encountered Porteño words, speech ways, and discursive routines in the most diverse contexts: a morning exchange at a bus stop, a waiter’s rant against politicians in a gloomy Porteño café, a tourist guide’s explanation of the city’s French-style architecture, a chat with an anonymous *tanguero* (‘tango aficionado’) in a late-night *milonga* (‘tango dancing gathering’). In these trips to Buenos Aires, I also shared innumerable Argentine *asados* (‘barbecues’) with friends and family, followed by the usual *sobremesa* (‘after-lunch/dinner table chat’) and *ronda de mate* (‘round of *mate* drinking’; *mate* being Argentines’ national herbal infusion).

In other words, I was re-immersing myself into Porteño words and scenarios on an informal level, fluctuating between being a researcher conducting fieldwork, and a friend, relative, medical patient, local, and tourist. Together with friends, family, and other locals, I found shared spaces in which we could introspect and think aloud on Argentine words and discourses, bringing to light our knowledges as locals. In short, and to use an expression made popular by anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1998)—and revitalized by Carsten Levisen in the NSM community—, I have been practicing local forms of “deep hanging out”.¹³

In short, my research has benefited enormously from various “epistemological positions” from which I reflected on, and immersed into, the words and discourses at the center of this study.

2.5 Sources and data

Digital corpora constitute invaluable tools for semantic and discursive exploration. With large collections of natural language occurrences, one can explore the collocational profile of a word: how, and how (in)frequently, it co-occurs with other words, or with

¹³ Levisen explored the concept of “deep hanging out” in his paper “Postcolonial Semantics: Meaning and Metalanguage in a Multipolar World” (Levisen, 2019), presented at the Workshop on NSM Semantics and Minimal English, ANU, Canberra.

other words of a certain grammatical class or semantic domain, and what themes it has a discursive affinity for. In doing so, one can formulate hypotheses about the meaning of the word under scrutiny. As a famous dictum in linguistics states: “you shall know a word by the company it keeps” (Firth, 1957, p.11).

The explications and scripts proposed in this thesis were tested against data obtained from various sources and collated into different corpora.¹⁴ The types of sources used for each corpus depended on the nature of the word or discourse it was designed for, and they shall be described in more detail throughout the relevant chapters. The sources included newspaper articles, travel literature and guides, radio and TV ads and programs, stand-up comedy performances, popular Argentine theater, short stories, dictionary definitions, tweets, Whatsapp text messages, other scholars’ work, the Argentine constitution, poems, and lyrics from popular music genres such as *rock nacional* (‘Argentine rock’) and *tango*.

2.5.1 *Tango* lyrics

I mentioned in §1.2 that Buenos Aires is the birthplace of *tango*. The importance of *tango* in Argentine culture, and the relevance of *tango* lyrics for the study of Porteño keywords and discourses, will also be explained in detail as the relevant chapters come. For now, I will note that I have used the corpus of *tango* lyrics available at <https://www.todotango.com>, which I estimate consists of 5741 lyrics. All *tango* lyrics quoted in this thesis were retrieved from this site, unless otherwise noted. I have also consulted <https://tango.info>, a worldwide multilingual *tango* information service containing details about 24.415 songs from *tango* and related genres.

2.5.2 RAE’s corpora

For further testing of explications and scripts, I have also consulted three corpora produced by *Real Academia Española* (‘Royal Spanish Academy’), which are publicly available at <https://www.rae.es>. These corpora are CORDE (Corpus Diacrónico del Español), CREA (Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual), and CORPES XXI (Corpus

¹⁴ Ethical clearance was required for the collection and use of examples. It was granted by Griffith University under protocol reference number 2017/750.

del Español del Siglo XXI).

CORDE is a written corpus from all times and places where Spanish has been spoken, from the origins of the language to the year 1974. It contains 237 million words from books and press articles, of which 7 million are from the River Plate region. CREA is an annotated corpus containing 160 million words from texts of various genres produced between 1974 and 2004; 16 million of these words are from the River Plate region. CORPES XXI contains 225 million words from 238.000 oral and written documents from various genres, produced between 2001 and 2015, of which 9 million are from the River Plate region (<https://www.rae.es>).

2.5.3 Caveat regarding my use of corpora

While the use of corpora was crucial for the production and testing of substitutable meaning hypotheses, I should note that my approach to these corpora was not a quantitative one (i.e. there was no statistical computation involved in my analyses). Instead, my approach can be best described as a corpus-assisted analysis that has been informed by disciplined introspection and semantic intuition. The use of introspection and semantic intuition for semantic and discursive analysis was already advocated by NSM originator Anna Wierzbicka in her seminal publication *Semantic Primitives* (Wierzbicka, 1972), and it has been often encouraged by highly experienced NSM practitioners (see e.g. Levisen 2012, p. 37; Wierzbicka, 2010, p. 20). As put by Wierzbicka more recently: “Objective data, such as those that occur in contemporary linguistic corpora, cannot interpret themselves, and to make sense of them, one still needs to consult one’s semantic intuition” (Wierzbicka, 2010, p. 20). Along with the use of corpora, then, I have gained from my own, individually generated intuitions and introspections, as well as from the collaborative, think-aloud, shared introspections that emerged via “deep hanging out” with locals.

2.6 Chapter summary

In this chapter I introduced *ethnopragmatics*, an approach in linguistics that is concerned with producing accurate, cross-translatable descriptions of complex, culture-specific, culture-rich meanings, preserving the perspective of culture-insiders while making it accessible to culture-outsiders.

I explained two important notions which capture the “what” of ethnopragmatic research: *cultural keywords* and *discourses*. *Cultural keywords* were defined as “culture-rich and translation-resistant words that occupy focal points in cultural ways of thinking, acting, feeling, and speaking” (Goddard & Ye, 2014, p. 71). I noted that, properly studied, cultural keywords provide a window into the culture of the people that use them.

I described *discourses* as recurrent, widely enacted themes or way of using words within a given speech community. I examined the relation between *keywords* and *discourses* through Levisen & Waters’s (2017, pp. 5-8) “Keyword Canons” positing that keywords (1) “*came from discourse*”, (2) “*reflect cultural values*”, (3) “*create discursive contexts*”, (4) “*maintain discursive fixities*”, (5) “*reveal the scripted lives of people*”, and (6) “*are constitutive of a deep emic logic*”.

This was followed by an explanation of the “how”—the medium and techniques—of ethnopragmatics. *NSM*, that is to say, the medium for describing keywords and discourses, was said to comprise *semantic primes*, *NSM grammar*, and *semantic molecules*. *Semantic primes* were described as 65 simple, universal, indefinable, self-explanatory meanings that can be expressed by words or word-like expressions in all or most languages. *NSM’s mini-grammar* comprises well-specified combinations of semantic primes that are used to form phrases and *canonical sentences* that are hypothesized to be available in all natural languages. I explained that *NSM* also uses complex meanings known as *semantic molecules*, and described “typical” semantic molecules as being those which are highly productive.

Then, I described *semantic explications* and *cultural scripts*, the two ethnopragmatic techniques for capturing meaning. *Semantic explications* are employed to capture the meaning of complex words, phrases, and lexico-grammatical constructions. They were defined as an attempt to say in other, simpler terms (the terms of the *NSM* mini-language) what speakers say when they utter the expression in question (Goddard & Ye, 2014, pp. 70-71). Explications enable accurate, high-resolution definitions, and they minimize the risk of *terminological ethnocentrism*, *obscurity*, and *circularity*. I explained that a “good” semantic explication is one that meets the conditions of (a) well-formedness, (b) coherence, (c) substitutability, and (d) maximal simplicity. I described *cultural scripts* as a technique for capturing discourses. I defined them as representations, articulated largely or entirely in the *NSM* metalanguage, of particular discourses that are indicative of widely shared ways of speaking, behaving, thinking, and/or feeling in a

given speech community.

In the remainder of the chapter, I described my own approach for conducting research, and I also introduced the various data sources. I described my own approach as a corpus-assisted analysis informed by disciplined introspection, collaborative exploration, and semantic intuition, and I described various “epistemological positions” from which I reflected on, and immersed into, the words and discourses at the center of this study.

Chapter 3. Europeanized places, Europeanized people: the discursive construction of Argentina

3.1 Introduction

Many of Argentina's 19th century political leaders would be pleased to hear today's Argentines say *Buenos Aires es la París de Sudamérica* ('Buenos Aires is the Paris of South America') and *Los argentinos descienden de los barcos* ('Argentines descend from the ships'). At face value, both expressions seem to confirm that the "civilized", European Argentina these leaders imagined has indeed come to fruition. The knowledge that *Los argentinos son italianos que hablan español* ('Argentines are Italians who speak Spanish') would likewise gain their approval, even if this expression implies an absence of the leaders' more preferred German, French, and British components.

Argentine national discourse does not fall short of highly creative, metaphorically-rich multiword expressions that seek to legitimize the Europeanness of Argentine people and places, and which thereby perpetuate nation-building ideologies advanced by the country's late 19th and early 20th century elites. This has often been observed in studies of Argentine postcolonial discourse by sociologists, anthropologists, and historians (see e.g. Garguin, 2007; Gordillo, 2016; Guano, 2002, 2003, 2004; Grimson, 2012; Joseph, 2000; Kaminsky, 2008). From a linguistic perspective, however, the meanings of these expressions and their organizing discourses remain largely unexplored. By unpacking their "conceptual architectures", this chapter aims to model these meanings within an ethnopragmatic framework, offering a new perspective on the construal of 'places' and 'people' in Argentine postcolonial discourse.

To this end, NSM will be combined with a cognitive linguistic approach to meaning construction called Conceptual Blending Theory (Coulson & Oakley, 2000; Fauconnier, 1999; Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). This approach will be further explained in the relevant sections in this chapter (§3.3 and §3.4). For now, it will suffice to say that the central concern of Conceptual Blending Theory is with modelling dynamic aspects of meaning-making, in particular operations that recruit and combine concepts to derive novel or highly creative meanings.

There were two reasons for my decision in this chapter to combine NSM and Conceptual Blending Theory. The first one is that multiword expressions are still an under-researched terrain in NSM semantics (but see Goddard, 2009), but not in Conceptual Blending Theory, which has greatly focused on such expressions (see e.g. Fauconnier & Turner, 2002; Turner, 1991). The second one is a desire to study the meanings of multiword expressions also from a dynamic perspective, i.e. to look at meaning-making or meaning-construction proper. This second reason is further discussed in the concluding chapter of the thesis (Ch. 8).

The chapter is structured as follows. In §3.2, I provide an outline of a political ideology advanced by Argentina's 19th century political elites, and of the "civilizing", nation-building project their ideology eventually translated into. In §3.3, I look at a well-established discourse that invites people to a "Parisian experience" of places in the Argentine capital, and then I model this discourse using the NSM technique of cultural scripts. Next, I combine Conceptual Blending Theory and NSM to explore the semantics of a key expression which draws upon that discourse: *Buenos Aires es la París de Sudamérica*. In §3.4, I propose a cultural script for a master discourse that secures Argentines a strong link to European people. Then, I combine again Conceptual Blending Theory and NSM to explore one key expression in that discourse: *Los argentinos descenden de los barcos*. This is followed by some concluding remarks.

All scripts and explications proposed in this chapter are grounded in evidence coming primarily from newspaper articles, travel literature and guides, the discourse of governmental institutions, and common sayings.

3.2 Europeanizing Argentina

Argentina's first generations of self-proclaimed "liberal" thinkers—among these, prominent figures like Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811-1888), Juan Bautista Alberdi (1810-1884), and Esteban Echeverría (1805-1851)—longed for the Europeanization of Argentina. To them, *Europa* ('Europe') was the epitome of cultural, political, and scientific sophistication—the ideal model of *civilización* ('civilization').¹⁵ By contrast,

¹⁵ Typically, the notion of Europe as the source of civilization included countries such as Britain, Germany, Switzerland, and France, and excluded regions near the Mediterranean Sea. Spain, Argentina's former

Argentina was conceived of as being plagued by *barbarie* ('barbarism'): the country's *interior* ('hinterlands') was inhabited by rebellious, mixed-blood *gauchos* ('rural men'), and ruled by backward, authoritarian *caudillos* ('strongmen'); in the fertile territories beyond the borders of the country—the so-called *desierto* ('desert')—lived the “savage hordes” of “repugnant” *indios* ('Indians') (Sarmiento, 1913; Svampa, 2006).

In the mid- to late 1800s, this way of thinking translated into a concrete state-run “civilizing”, nation-building project. Several military campaigns, among these the much-celebrated *Conquista del desierto* ('Conquest of the desert') (1878–1885), resulted in the expansion of Argentina's geographic borders and the destruction of numerous indigenous political autonomies. Mass graves in the Patagonia, Pampa, and North-West regions were held up as evidence that the Argentine state's attempts to exterminate the *indios* were successful, a persistent myth in the Argentine national imaginary (Delrio, Lenton, Musante, & Nagy, 2010; Gordillo, 2016; Grimson, 2012). With thousands of hectares of now “empty” fertile land, the state opened its doors to massive European immigration, in line with the immigration policy stated in the Argentine Constitution of 1853:

Artículo 25.- El Gobierno federal fomentará la inmigración europea; y no podrá restringir, limitar ni gravar con impuesto alguno la entrada en el territorio argentino de los extranjeros que traigan por objeto labrar la tierra, mejorar las industrias, e introducir y enseñar las ciencias y las artes. (InfoLEG n.d.)

'Section 25.- The Federal Government shall foster European immigration; and may not restrict, limit or burden with any tax whatsoever, the entry into the Argentine territory of foreigners who arrive for the purpose of tilling the soil, improving industries, and introducing and teaching arts and sciences.' (Biblioteca Sede Central n.d.)

Between 1871 and 1914, nearly 6 million European immigrants flooded Argentina, injecting the country with the much-needed workforce. There followed a remarkable economic expansion based largely on the export of beef, hides, and grains to Great Britain (Rock, 1985). For the Porteño oligarchy, however, investing in the development of industries did not seem to be a priority. Instead, they used much of the export profits to

metropolitan state, embodied aspects of both civilization and barbarism, and, as such, it was generally excluded from the notion of civilized Europe (Shumway, 1991; Svampa, 2006).

move north of their colonial-style homes and erect a whole new Buenos Aires. Renown European architects were commissioned to design opulent mansions inspired by French buildings such as the Louvre and the Palace of Versailles, constructed with materials from Europe and filled with European furniture and objets d'art. With its new European facade, Buenos Aires earned its still-famous nickname: *La París de Sudamérica* (Scobie, 1974; Pigna, 2005).

The Argentine elite's project did not go quite as planned, though. The desired immigrants from "civilized" Europe were vastly outnumbered by Southern and Eastern Europeans, mostly Italians and Spanish who had fled from poverty, political turmoil, and wars (Rock, 1985). The majority had come in search of rural work, but limited opportunities in the *interior* led them to settle in Buenos Aires, confined to unsanitary, over-crowded *conventillos* ('tenements') in the city's south. At first, these city-based migrant masses, with their impenetrable dialects and political activism, were seen as a threat to the elite's project of national unity and economic development. However, in the context of the favorable economy, the immigrants and their descendants began to move up the socioeconomic ladder, and, with the introduction of free public education, their children effectively assimilated the national language and culture (Ennis, 2015; Rock, 1985). Before long, this empowered Porteño sector of European descent would become a key agent of Argentine identity, advancing a national discourse that links Argentines and European immigration, famously articulated in the saying *Los argentinos descenden de los barcos* (Adamovsky, 2009; Garguin, 2007; Guano, 2003).

3.3 The construal of European places in Argentina

Crucial to the "civilizing" project of the Argentine elites was the construction of places that would give the country a European feel. Architectural projects to erect European-like cities were implemented in regions like Patagonia, with cities like Bariloche replicating the architecture of the Swiss Alps, and in the Pampa region, with cities like Buenos Aires designed to look and feel like a European metropolis (Gordillo, 2016). But no city can be fully European without an accompanying discursive apparatus that construes it as such. In this section, I will look at a well-established discourse aimed at shaping our aesthetic experience of Buenos Aires to that end, and I will capture this discourse using the NSM technique of cultural scripts. Next, I will combine the tools of NSM and Conceptual

Blending to explore the semantics of a key expression in that discourse: *Buenos Aires es la París de Sudamérica*.

3.3.1 A guide to seeing Buenos Aires

Invitations to admire similarities between Buenos Aires and Paris abound in Argentina. In the country's most visited news website *Clarín* ("Récord," 2018), users are invited to play *Trivia: ¿Es Buenos Aires o París?* ('Trivia: is it Buenos Aires or Paris?'). The instructions to the game are reproduced in (1).

(1) La influencia de la arquitectura francesa puede hacer que confundas algunos rincones porteños. A partir de la segunda mitad del siglo XIX llegaron nuevos aires estilísticos a Buenos Aires: se levantaron maravillosos edificios con clara influencia francesa. Te proponemos mirar las siguientes fotografías y que nos digas si es Buenos Aires o París. ("Trivia," 2017)

'The influence of French architecture can make you confuse some Porteño corners. From the second half of the 19th century, new stylistic airs arrived in Buenos Aires: marvelous buildings with a clearly French influence were erected. We invite you to look at the following photographs and tell us if it is Buenos Aires or Paris.'

The game is quite difficult; despite being a Porteño myself, I scored a mere 5 out of 10. Irrespective of the score, the player is reassured with a photo of two overlapping flags—the Argentine and the French—and the message in (2).

(2) El resultado importa, pero no tanto como lo bellas que son Buenos Aires y París. ("Trivia," 2017)

'The result matters, but not as much as how beautiful Buenos Aires and Paris are.'

Efforts to promote and celebrate a Parisian Buenos Aires are perceptible also in the discourse of governmental institutions. In examples (3) and (4), under the headline *Viajar a París sin salir de Buenos Aires* ('Travelling to Paris without leaving Buenos Aires'), the government of Buenos Aires advertises a guided tour in the city:

- (3) Durante septiembre el programa “Viví Francia” propone visitas guiadas gratuitas a distintos **lugares** de la Ciudad donde quedó marcada la cultura de ese país. (Buenos Aires Ciudad, 2018; bold added for emphasis)

‘In September, the program “Experience France” offers free guided visits to different **places** of the City that bear the imprint of the culture of that country.’

- (4) Entre el 15 y el 22 de septiembre la Ciudad ofrece el programa Viví Francia, una serie de visitas guiadas gratuitas por distintos **barrios, edificios y monumentos** donde quedó registrada la cultura de ese país en Buenos Aires. (Buenos Aires Ciudad, 2018; bold added for emphasis)

‘Between 15 and 22 September, the city offers the program Experience France, a series of free guided tours through different **neighborhoods, buildings and monuments** where the culture of that country left a mark in Buenos Aires.’

Both the trivia and the local city tour carefully select various *lugares* (‘places’) in Buenos Aires, including *rincones* (‘corners’), *barrios* (‘neighborhoods’), *edificios* (‘buildings’), and *monumentos* (‘monuments’). Along with a visual experience of these places, we are offered a lens through which they can, perhaps should, be seen: *like places in Paris*.

For many Argentines, the wide reproduction of this Buenos Aires-Paris analogy by “first-world” media may be something of a confirmation of its truth. Example (5) is from an article entitled *Buenos Aires - A Guide to the Paris of South America*, taken from an Australian online travel magazine:

- (5) Our apartment on the Avenida Rivadavia near the Plaza del Congreso was old-style Parisian: soaring ceilings, parquet floors, shuttered windows. (...) Paris has her Eiffel Tower and Champs-Élysées; BA has the Obelisk and Avenida 9 de Julio, a breathtaking 12-lane avenue that throbs through the city 24 hours a day beneath the vigilant gaze of an enormous image of Evita Perón. (Thurston, 2012)

I propose script [A] to capture the discourse embodied in the above examples.

[A] A script for seeing places in Buenos Aires

a. when people see many places in Buenos Aires [m], they can't not think like this:

“these places are like places in Paris [m]”

b. at the same time, they can feel something good,

like people can feel something good when they see places like this in Paris [m]

The script guides our aesthetic (perceptual and affective) experience of Buenos Aires. First, it dictates that, upon seeing places in this city, people will regard them as having Parisian counterparts. Second, it encourages people to respond to this perceptual experience with a good feeling. Importantly, inherent to the script is the assumption that seeing places in Paris triggers an analogous emotional response.

3.3.2 “The Paris of South America”

The expression *Buenos Aires es la París de Sudamérica* can be conceived of as an evolved form of the discourse captured in script [A]. Speakers draw on that aesthetic analogy to construct a fictive scenario where Buenos Aires, rather than being *like* Paris, *is* Paris. In the remainder of this section, I will provide models of the semantics of the expression and of the meaning-construction process underlying this semantics. To attain this, I will combine the tools of Conceptual Blending Theory and Natural Semantic Metalanguage.

An expression like *Buenos Aires es la París de Sudamérica* is described in Conceptual Blending Theory as an “XYZ construction” (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002; Turner, 1991). This type of construction consists of three elements which are all noun phrases, in this case X *Buenos Aires*, Y *París*, and Z *Sudamérica*. The elements Y and Z form a possessive construction (marked in brackets) connected by the preposition *de* ‘of’:

Buenos Aires es [la París de Sudamérica]

[X]

[Y]

[Z]

In order to make sense of the expression, speakers must first recruit X, Y, Z, and other formally-missing but readily-available concepts into an integration network. This is modelled in Figure 1:

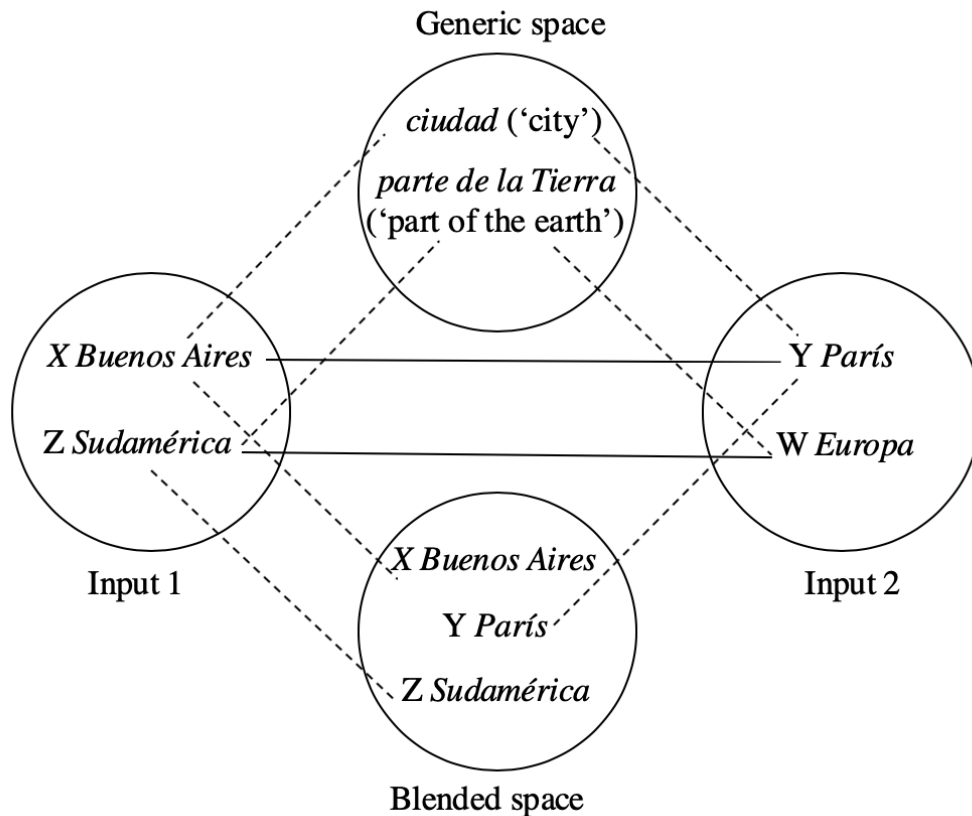


Figure 1. *Integration network for “Buenos Aires es la París de Sudamérica”.*

The four circles represent different “mental spaces” in the network—i.e. different structures into which the conceptual ingredients at play are organized. Underpinning the integration network is the generic space: speakers’ knowledge of the relatively simple concepts *ciudad* (‘city’) and *parte de la Tierra* (‘part of the earth’), and of a basic relationship between them, namely that a *ciudad* is located in a *parte de la Tierra*. This general knowledge prompts speakers to group the elements *X Buenos Aires* with *Z Sudamérica* together (input space 1), and to position *Y París* in a parallel relationship with its counterpart *W Europa* (input space 2). The generic structure common to both input spaces can be modelled in NSM terms as follows:

[B] Generic space in *Buenos Aires es la París de Sudamérica*.

- a. *X/Y [m]* is a city [m],
- b. it is in one part of the earth [m],
- c. this part of the earth [m] is *Z/W*

The common structure of [B] invites speakers to identify counterpart elements across the two input spaces, and to relate them by way of analogies (solid lines in Figure 1). NSM models for these cross-space (aka “outer-space”) operations are provided in [C] and [D]:

[C] Cross-space analogy between X *Buenos Aires* and Y *París*

- a. I think like this about Buenos Aires [m]:
- b. “it is a city [m]”
- c. I think the same about Paris [m]
- d. because of this, I think like this now:
- e. “Buenos Aires [m] is like Paris [m]”

[D] Cross-space analogy between Z *Sudamérica* and W *Europa*

- a. I think like this about South America [m]:
- b. “it is one part of the earth [m]”
- c. I think the same about Europe [m]
- d. because of this, I think like this now:
- e. “South America [m] is like Europe [m]”

Next, speakers project and integrate selected structures from the network into a single “blended” space. These structures include (1) elements from both input spaces—namely X, Y, and Z—and, crucially, (2) the outer-space analogy between X *Buenos Aires* and Y *París*. This analogy is now compressed into an “inner-space” relation of identity, i.e. a relation of identity between elements within a single space. This novel relation between the two cities is captured in [E]:

[E] Inner-space identity between X *Buenos Aires* and Y *París*

- a. I think about Buenos Aires [m] like this now:
- b. “this city [m] is Paris [m]”

Now, the city’s new identity does not conclude with [E]. Buenos Aires could be Paris according to potentially infinite interpretations—like Paris, it could be a city of love and

romance, of revolution, etc.—, but speakers conventionally (and effortlessly) interpret the identity scenario on the basis of script [A], positing an aesthetic analogy between places in Buenos Aires and Paris (see §3.3.1). Lack of knowledge of this culture-specific script and its function here as an interpretative backdrop may lead to an “incorrect” reading of the expression.¹⁶

Additionally, the expression aims at granting Buenos Aires a unique status over other South American cities, analogous to the status commonly attributed to Paris among the cities of Europe. The cue to this is the reference to the city as *la París* (‘the Paris’) rather than *una París* (‘a Paris’), which rules out the possibility of any other competing Parises within South America. A similar construal can be observed in Buenos Aires’ other famous nickname *La Reina del Plata* (‘The Queen of the [River] Plate’), which blends the Argentine capital and royal hierarchy to position this city above all others in the estuary of the *Río de la Plata* (‘River Plate’).

The full meaning of the expression can now be articulated in NSM terms as follows:

[F] Semantic explication for “*Buenos Aires es la París de Sudamérica*”

Blend

- a. I think about Buenos Aires [m] like this now:
- b. “this city [m] is Paris [m]”
- c. at the same time I know that it is not Paris [m]

Structuring frame (Script A)

- d. I want to think like this because of this:
- e. . when people see many places in Buenos Aires [m], they can’t not think like this:
- f. “these places are like places in Paris [m]”
- g. . at the same time, they can feel something good,

¹⁶ Buenos Aires is only one among a large number of cities around the world that have been nicknamed “*Paris*” via an XYZ (or similar) construction. Lists of such cities can be found in the (English) Wikipedia articles for “*Paris of the West*”, “*Paris of the North*”, “*Paris of the East*”, “*Little Paris*”, and in corresponding Wikipedia articles in other languages. What basic meanings and scripts are needed for a culturally sensitive interpretation of these various outwardly similar nicknames? This question is worthy of exploration.

h. like people can feel something good when they see places like this in Paris [m]

Status

i. people often think about Paris [m] like this:

j. “this city [m] is very very good,

k. it is above all other cities [m]

l. in the part of the earth [m] where this city [m] is”

m. people can think the same about Buenos Aires [m]

Now, as indicated with component (c) (‘at the same time I know that it is not Paris’), speakers are aware of the fictive status of the blended city. In a sense, no one is actually “fooled” by the blend, as Fauconnier and Turner have it (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p. 63). This is because the imagined Buenos Aires in the blended space remains connected to the “factual” cities in the input spaces, towards which it can always be projected back to generate contrasts.

In another sense, speakers are indeed “fooled” by the blend and the script which informs it. Buenos Aires is not only a city of grand French style mansions along the elegant thoroughfare Avenida Alvear, and of *petit hôtels* in a minuscule area known as *La Isla* (‘The Island’), located in the well-off neighborhood of Recoleta. It is also a city with a continued neglect of public spaces and infrastructure and a lack of building regulations. Many “notable” buildings have been demolished and replaced by large tower blocks, colossal shopping malls, and other speculative real estate, resulting in an odd mashup of eclectic styles that is characteristic of the city today (Guano, 2002). Importantly, within walking distance of the Parisian-style facades, Buenos Aires is also a city of *villas* (‘urban slums’) and other informal settlements with poor or no sanitation system (TECHO, 2016). In short, there is a Buenos Aires (and certainly a Paris also) that is in sharp contrast with the idealized European metropolis of the blend, and which is also very different from the selection of places that motivates the analogy in script [A]. Albeit temporarily, the blend and the script give locals and visitors the illusion of a “successful” Europeanization of Buenos Aires, insofar as many “un-European places”—and with places, also many “un-European people”—are successfully backgrounded.

3.4 The construal of European people in Argentina

Argentina's people are discursively construed as European, too. This section looks at a well-established master script that secures Argentines a strong link to European people. Next, I combine the tools of Conceptual Blending Theory and Natural Semantic Metalanguage to explore a key expression in that discourse: *Los argentinos descienden de los barcos*.

3.4.1 The Europeans of South America

Ultimately, the place-informed discourse discussed in §3.3 is in the service of a people-informed discourse. If Buenos Aires is indeed the Paris of South America, then it seems legitimate to ask whether Porteños are also Parisians. An article in Argentina's leading conservative newspaper *La Nación* raises this question; the headline is reproduced in (6):

(6) ¿Son realmente los argentinos de Buenos Aires los parisinos de Sudamérica? (Pérez, 2016)

‘Are the Argentines of Buenos Aires really the Parisians of South America?’

And the article asserts:

(7) No es la ensoñación de un turista que caminando por Buenos Aires sintió un *déja-vù* parisino al contemplar palacetes y esculturas. Tampoco es el efecto de haber escuchado a demasiadas personas comentando su sesión de psicoanálisis en un *petit café* porteño. Fue un propósito histórico deliberado y ha impregnado la identidad de los argentinos desde los albores de su Estado: la decisión de ser los franceses de Latinoamérica. (Pérez, 2016)

‘It is not the daydream of a tourist that, walking in Buenos Aires, felt a Parisian *déja-vù* upon contemplating small palaces and sculptures. Neither is it the effect of having heard many people commenting their psychoanalytic sessions in a Porteño *petit café*. It was a deliberate historical plan and it has pervaded the identity of Argentines since the dawn of their State: the decision to be the French of Latin America.’

Historically, however, the hegemonic Porteño discourse has construed Porteños (and, by extension, *all Argentines*) as Italians rather than French. As the local saying goes, *Los argentinos son italianos que hablan español* (‘Argentines are Italians who speak Spanish’). The purported Italianness of Porteños is often invoked via a meritocratic

discourse stating that the large middle class of European descent emerged in Buenos Aires thanks to the hard-working spirit of its immigrant ancestors, and thanks to the privilege of free, public education granted to these immigrants' children (Guano, 2003). As told by a local in (8):

(8) [T]he *tano* [Italian] immigrants were poor, but they worked hard and wanted their children to succeed, and they sent them to school. And then the children became doctors and teachers. This is the origin of the *clase media porteña* [porteño middle class], and this is why Buenos Aires is so different from other Latin American cities. [Other cities] do not have such a large middle class ... They are not as European. (in Guano, 2003, p. 156; bracketed translations as per original)

Alternatively, Argentines may often construe themselves as Europeans tout court, without explicit reference to specific European nations. One common expression to this end is *Somos un crisol de razas* ('We are a crucible of races'). The expression embodies a selective melting-pot ideology asserting that Argentines are a homogenous European-based "race", and that this race resulted from the merging of other immigrant "races" that came *from all over Europe* (Delrio et al., 2010; Garguin, 2007; Grimson, 2012; Guano, 2003). Another much-celebrated expression is *Los argentinos descienden de los barcos* ('Argentines descend from the ships'); its full version is reproduced in (9):

(9) Los mexicanos descienden de los aztecas,
Los peruanos descienden de los incas,
Los argentinos descienden de los barcos.

'Mexicans descend from the Aztecs,
Peruvians descend from the Incas,
Argentines descend from the ships.'

To the reassurance of many Argentines, the Europeaness (or Italianness) of their people is confirmed also by international media, as in example (10) from the Australian website *Traveller*. Here, the journalist's claim to the Europeaness of Porteños seems to be backed up by her experience of Parisian-like places and Italian-like cuisine in the city:

(10) From El Palacio de Aguas Corrientes water works, which appears to mimic a Parisian palace, to the eccentric whimsy of the Palacio Barolo, the city looks, feels and tastes European, its restaurants filled with that rightly famous beef and plates of pasta, brought to the southern hemisphere by the many thousands of Italian immigrants. (“Buenos Aires: the city,” 2015)

The master discourse embodied in the above excerpts and expressions is captured in the following script:

[G]A high-level script about the Europeanness of Argentines

- a. in Argentina [m], many people can think like this:
- b. “people in Argentina [m] are like people in Europe [m],
- c. many of them are like people in Italy [m]
- d. this is good”

The discourse in [G] is essentially about people, but, as the examples show, it is legitimized and maintained by a “place discourse” (namely Script [A]), by “place expressions” (e.g. *Buenos Aires es la París de Sudamérica*), and by other scripts involving various different Europe-related themes. Among these scripts are those which invoke cultural analogies (“Argentines are cultivated like the French”, “they eat Italian food like Italians”), societal analogies (“Argentines have a large middle-class like many European countries”), linguistic analogies (“they speak like Italians”), and, importantly, a script asserting Argentines’ biological descent from Europeans. Note that the latter stands in sharp contrast with recent genetic research which indicates that 56% of Argentines have at least one Amerindian ancestor (Corach et al., 2010).¹⁷

3.4.2 “Argentines descend from the ships”

The key expression *Los argentinos descienden de los barcos* can be conceived of as an evolved form of the discourse captured in script [G]. Speakers draw on a deeply embedded descent narrative to construct a fictive scenario where Argentines, rather than

¹⁷ In Ch. 7—the last chapter involving analysis proper—I shall spell out some of these “European scripts” whereby Argentines celebrate different aspects of their Europeanness.

being *like* European immigrants, *are* those European immigrants. Following the approach of §3.3.2, I will combine the tools of Conceptual Blending Theory and NSM to provide models of the semantics of the expression and of the meaning-construction process underlying this semantics.

The first observation is that the original expression consists of three lines (see the full version in §3.4.1), but Argentines typically omit the first two, which assert the Aztec and Inca descent of Mexicans and Peruvians, respectively. The gist of these two lines is nevertheless preserved in the semantics of the shortened version: to make a distinction between Argentines and people in other Latin American countries. According to this distinction, only the latter are regarded as descendants from Pre-Columbian civilizations and aboriginal tribes, and as being therefore largely like these ‘people of other kinds’. Under the heading *Otros lugares, otra gente* (‘Other places, other people’), the NSM components in [H] aim to capture this distinction:

[H] Otros lugares, otra gente

- a. people in Argentina [m] are not like people in other countries [m] near it
- b. a very long time ago, people of other kinds lived in many places in these other countries [m]
- c. because of this, now many people in these other countries [m]
are like people of these other kinds

A whole different descent narrative is reserved for Argentines. This narrative is composed of two consecutive sub-narratives, which I shall label “Act 1” and “Act 2”. The expression recruits both of these acts, and each of them is prompted according to a different meaning assigned to the polysemous verb *descender*. Act 1 is prompted by *descender*₁ (‘come down from’). Here, the phrase *descienden de los barcos* (‘come down from the ships’) evokes the widely shared knowledge about millions of Europeans—most prominently, male Italians and Spanish—migrating to the country in the late 19th and early 20th century. For Argentines, the immigrants’ disembarkment in the port of Buenos Aires represents a major event in—and a powerful cue to—the larger narrative, and it is easily visualizable

to most given the wide circulation of historical photos capturing the arrivals.¹⁸ I will call this first act *Inmigrantes descenden₁ de los barcos* (‘Immigrants come down from the ships’) and capture it in NSM terms as follows:

[I] Act 1: Inmigrantes descenden₁ de los barcos

- a. a long time ago, many people in other countries [m] wanted to live in Argentina [m]
 - they lived in countries [m] very far from Argentina [m],
 - some lived in Italy [m], some lived in Spain [m],
 - some lived in other countries [m] very far away
- b. because of this, they did something for some time
- c. during this time, they were in ships [m]
- d. after this time, they did something else
 - because of this, after this, they were not in ships [m] anymore,
 - they were in Argentina [m]

Act 2 is prompted by *descender₂* (‘descend from’). Here, the same phrase *descienden de los barcos* translates as ‘descend from the ships’. In this interpretation, *los barcos* (‘the ships’) stand metonymically for the European immigrants from which Argentines claim descent. I will call this second act *Argentinos descenden₂ de los inmigrantes* (‘Argentines descend from the immigrants’) and capture it in NSM terms as follows:

[J] Act 2: Argentinos descenden₂ de los inmigrantes

- a. after this, many of these people lived in Argentina [m] for a long time,
 - during this time, many children [m] were born [m] here
- b. because of this, people in Argentina [m] now are like these other people
- c. many can think like this:
 - “I am like one of these people
 - because my grandfather [m] was one of these people”

¹⁸ Many of these photos can be viewed online in the National Immigration Museum’s virtual exhibition *Italianos y españoles en la Argentina* (‘Italians and Spanish in Argentina’) (Museo de la Inmigración, 2020).

In Act 2, a long period of time is projected during which the European immigrants settle in Argentina and new generations develop. The consequence of this is that people today are like the European immigrants before them. Note however that the explication does not dictate that all children of the new generations are children of immigrants. Neither does it assert that all Argentines have an immigrant grandfather, although this is often assumed as the typical case. Therefore, although the explication invites us to infer that Argentines are like Europeans due to a biological connection, it leaves open the possibility for other justifications to be recruited. These justifications may involve the linguistic, societal, and cultural analogies mentioned in §3.4.1, and also the place discourse captured in Script A (see §3.3.1).

Now, to achieve a full explication of the expression, it is not sufficient that we combine the explications for the two acts. The expression assumes that ‘Immigrants come down from the ships’ (Act 1) and that ‘Argentines descend from immigrants’ (Act 2), but also, and importantly, it blends these two scenarios to assert a third one where *Los argentinos descenden₁ de los barcos* (‘Argentines come down from the ships’). The integration network that gives rise to this fictive scenario is modelled in Figure 2:

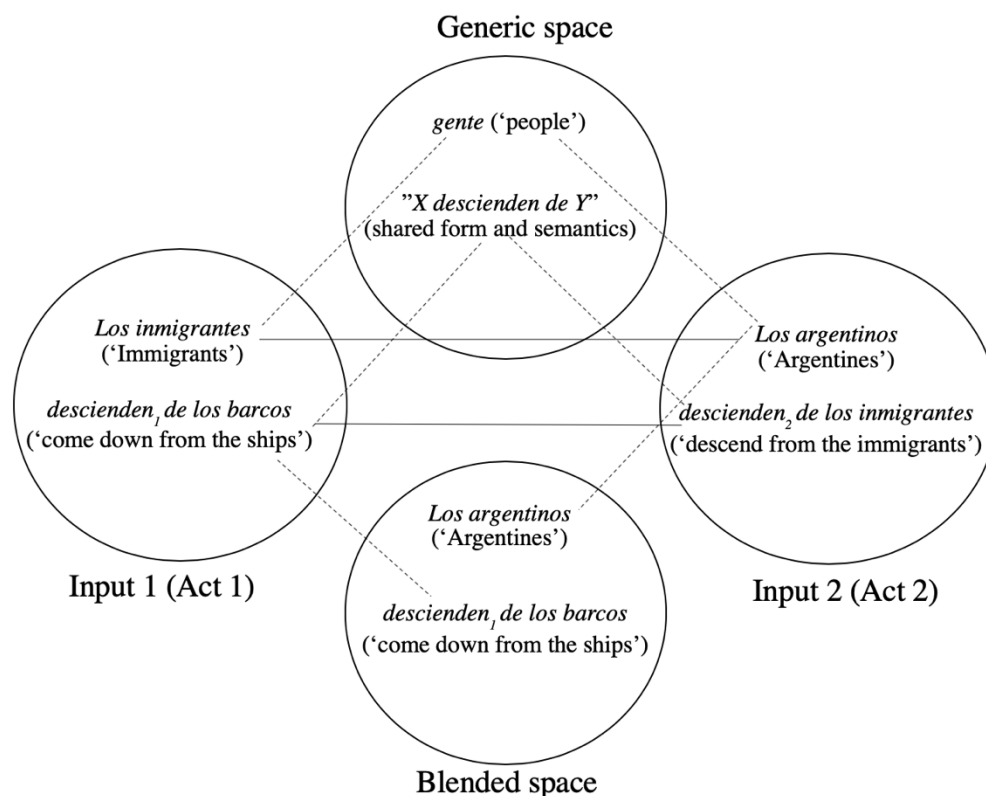


Figure 2. Integration network for “*Los argentinos descenden de los barcos*”.

Speakers are prompted to organize their knowledge of Act 1 and Act 2 into two parallel input spaces: an Input 1, containing the elements *Los inmigrantes* ('Immigrants') and *descienden₁ de los barcos* ('come down from the ships'), and an Input 2, containing the counterpart elements *Los argentinos* ('Argentines') and *descienden₂ de los inmigrantes* ('descend from the immigrants').

The identification of cross-space counterparts (solid lines) is motivated by a generic space that recruits basic structures common to both inputs. Common to *Los inmigrantes* (Input 1) and *Los argentinos* (Input 2) is the knowledge that both of them are *gente* ('people'); also, both can fill the "X" slot in the construction *X descienden₁ de Y* ('X come down from Y'), which structures Input 1, and the "X" and "Y" slots in the construction *X descienden₂ de Y* ('X descend from Y'), which structures Input 2. Importantly, these two constructions are polysemous, which implies they can readily match on the basis of their shared forms and also of their related meanings. It is not the place here to delineate these related meanings via semantic explications for both constructions. It is sufficient to point the following: with *descender₁*, 'X is somewhere below Y after some time'; with *descender₂*, X is not below Y, but, because 'X lives some time after Y lived', one can think of X as being somewhere below Y.

To compose the blend, the elements *Los argentinos* (Input 1) and *descienden₁ de los barcos* (Input 2) are selected and projected into a single space that integrates them, resulting in a fictive scenario where Argentines take the role originally played by European immigrants in Act 1; this role change is captured in [K]:

[K] Blend: Argentinos descienden₁ de los barcos

a. I can think about people in Argentina [m] like this:

"they were in these ships [m] a long time ago"

The full NSM explication for *Los argentinos descienden de los barcos*, rendered in [L] below, results from combining the above sections [H], [I], [J], and [K]. Note that Act 1 has a new component (d) to transition from the descent narrative of other Latin Americans to that of Argentines. Also, there is a new component (m) capturing the speaker's acknowledgement of the fictive status of the blended scenario.

[L] Semantic explication for “*Los argentinos descienden de los barcos*”

Otros lugares, otra gente

- a. people in Argentina [m] are not like people in other countries [m] near it
- b. a very long time ago, people of other kinds lived in many places in these other countries [m]
- c. because of this, now many people in these other countries [m]
are like people of these other kinds

Act 1: Inmigrantes descienden₁ de los barcos

- d. people in Argentina [m] are not like people in other countries [m] near it because it is like this:
- e. a long time ago, many people in other countries [m] wanted to live in Argentina [m]
they lived in countries [m] very far from Argentina [m],
some lived in Italy [m], some lived in Spain [m],
some lived in other countries [m] very far away
- f. because of this, they did something for some time
- g. during this time, they were in ships [m]
- h. after this time, they did something else
because of this, after this, they were not in ships [m] anymore,
they were in Argentina [m]

Act 2: Argentinos descienden₂ de los inmigrantes

- i. after this, many of these people lived in Argentina [m] for a long time,
during this time, many children [m] were born [m] here
- j. because of this, people in Argentina [m] now are like these other people
- k. many can think like this:
“I am like one of these people
because my grandfather [m] was one of these people”

Blend: Argentinos descienden₁ de los barcos

- l. I can think about people in Argentina [m] like this:
“they were in these ships [m] a long time ago”
- m. at the same time I know that it is not like this

Within the logic of the blend, Argentines no longer need to claim lineal descent from Europeans, for Argentines themselves are already Europeans. *Los argentinos descenden de los barcos* is thus a fictional but effective shortcut that secures Argentines an “impeccable” European pedigree, reaffirming the success of Argentina’s “civilizing” project.

3.5 Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have drawn on the tools of the NSM and Conceptual Blending approaches, and explored the conceptual architecture of analogies, narratives, “common-sense” knowledges, and fictive blends that lie at the heart of Argentine people- and place-construal in Argentine postcolonial discourse. Furthermore, by integrating the two approaches, I have offered a new methodological avenue for the study of meaning-making in multiword constructions.

The main findings can be summarized as follows. With *A script for seeing places in Buenos Aires*, I have captured a well-established discourse that invites people to a visually and affectively Parisian experience of places in the Argentine capital. This script serves to background un-European places, and, with these places, also un-European people. Furthermore, I have shown how this “place script” is used in the service of a “people script” that celebrates an analogy between Argentines and Europeans (most prominently, Italians), captured in *A high-level script about the Europeanness of Argentines*. Organized around these two scripts are the expressions *Buenos Aires es la París de Sudamérica* and *Los argentinos descenden de los barcos*. The semantic analysis revealed for these expressions a great compression of culture-specific knowledges and narratives, and for conceptual blending a powerful role in the erasure of un-European places and people.

Chapter 4. Porteño *lunfardo*: a key word about words

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the meaning of a Porteño key word about words: *lunfardo* (roughly, ‘Buenos Aires slang’). There are many Spanish terms that have been used to define *lunfardo*: *dialecto*, *jerga*, *argot*, *caló*, *idioma*, *lengua*, *lenguaje* (roughly, ‘dialect’, ‘jargon’, ‘argot’, ‘underworld jargon’, ‘(a) language’, ‘(a) language’, ‘language/specialized way of speaking’), to name but a few terms¹⁹. However, these terms are complex, slippery, obscure, and, like *lunfardo* itself, they are non-directly translatable to other languages. Importantly, they also fail to capture the exact meaning and logics that guide local Porteños when they say the word *lunfardo*. The question, then, is: what does *lunfardo* mean to Porteños? This chapter is an attempt to answer this question by explicating the modern meaning of the word, using NSM’s maximally clear, simple, cross-translatable words. Since *lunfardo* is a keyword about words—a metalinguistic keyword—I hope that this analysis will reveal something about the way Porteños construe their own linguistic world, but also something about how they construe people and places that they associate with that linguistic world.

In the course of explicating the modern meaning of the word *lunfardo*, this chapter also examines semantic changes this word has undergone since it began to be used in 19th century Buenos Aires. Specifically, I explore historical discourses which, I argue, have contributed to shaping the modern meaning of the word. This will also serve to pave the way for the formulation of various language-related scripts in Ch. 7.

The analysis of *lunfardo* presented here is based on various sources. One key source is a conversation on *lunfardo* that was held between seven Porteño public figures

¹⁹ A note on the Spanish terms *lengua*, *idioma*, and *lenguaje*. *Lengua* designates a verbal system of communication, or a family of such systems, used by a community; e.g. *lengua española/muerta/romance/aborigen* (‘Spanish/dead/Romance/Aboriginal language’). *Idioma* typically implies that such system is used by a community which constitutes a nation or country; *idiomas* are typically standardized or regulated by official institutions, e.g. *idioma español/inglés* (‘Spanish/English language’) (López, n.d.). *Lenguaje* enjoys various senses which roughly correspond to senses identified by Goddard (2011) for English *language*: *language*₂ (‘language in general’), as in e.g. *the origin of language*, *computers language*, *the language faculty*; *language*₃ (‘word usage’), as in e.g. *abusive language*, *the language of hate*; and *language*₄ (‘a specialized way of speaking’), as in e.g. *the language of the law*, *the language of Christian religion*.

of various professions—among these, Oscar Conde, a prominent *lunfardo* scholar—in the TV show *Almorzando con Mirtha Legrand* (‘Lunching with Mirtha Legrand’) (El Trece, 2018). Given the diversity of voices involved in this conversation, and given the show’s unique setting—speakers freely converse over the course of a 2-3 hour lunch—, it constitutes a true gem for ethnopragmatic research on *lunfardo*. The other sources I will use are *tango* lyrics, Porteño poetry, and interviews with and the work of *lunfardo* scholars and literary writers.

The contents of this chapter can be summarized as follows. In §4.2, I offer a brief history of *lunfardo*. The four sections that follow (§§4.3-4.6) present the analysis proper. The structure for each of these sections is the same: first, I analyze conversational segments from the abovementioned TV show, putting these segments in dialogue with the other sources; then, I propose and justify a set of semantic components that captures what has emerged from the analysis. Briefly, §4.3 deals with the “semantic core” of *lunfardo* (i.e. the basic meaning of the word, around which its complex full meaning is organized). In §4.4, I explore a narrative about language contact that is encapsulated in the *lunfardo* concept. In §4.5, I study a semantic link between *lunfardo* and *tango*. In §4.6, I explore shared attitudes related to the use of *lunfardo* words. In §4.7, I present the full semantic explication of *lunfardo*, which results from putting together the four sets of semantic components. In §4.8, I offer some concluding remarks.

4.2 *Lunfardo*’s antecedents

The word *lunfardo* emerged as a result of two growing concerns in the Porteño dominant classes towards the end of the 19th century. The first one, discussed in Ch. 3, was that the much-desired “civilized” (i.e. German, Swiss, British, French) immigrant workers were vastly outnumbered by a “barbaric” contingent of poor, uneducated immigrants from various parts of Southern and Eastern Europe. These immigrants spoke different languages and brought different customs and traditions with them. For the upper classes, therefore, Buenos Aires was turned into an incontrollable babel with a heterogenous and, at times, impenetrable linguistic and cultural landscape (Di Tullio, 2010; Ennis, 2015). The project of a “civilized”, European city in South America seemed to have little prospect.

The other concern in the rapidly growing metropolis was the proliferation of crime. Various publications by crime researchers and journalists began to attend to words which, they believed, were intended to be cryptic and only used by criminals. The first of these publications is an article entitled *El dialecto de los ladrones* ('The thieves' dialect'), published in the Porteño newspaper *La Prensa* in 1878. The anonymous author, concerned about the number of thieves in Buenos Aires, puts Porteños on guard (as cited in Soler Cañas, 1976, pp. 7-8):

Los ladrones constituyen una cofradía (...). Esta cofradía tiene sus signos y su lengua propia, que permite a los cófrades trabar sus planes en público sin ser entendidos. (...) Pero un comisario que se ocupa de hacer la guerra a los ladrones, tiene un vocabulario y de este vocabulario hemos tomado la copia de algunas de las frases más usuales (...). Puede ser que alguno de nuestros lectores saque provecho de retener algunas de las siguientes frases si las oye en la calle y se precave de la gente que de ella se sirve. He aquí las frases traducidas.

'Thieves make up a fraternity (...). This fraternity has its own signs and language, and this allows its members to carry out their plans in public without being understood. (...) But a police officer that wages war against thieves has got a vocabulary, and from this vocabulary we have copied some of the most usual phrases (...). Perhaps our readers will benefit from retaining some of the following phrases if they hear them in the street and are on their guard against the people that use them. Here are the translated phrases.'

What follows in the article is a vocabulary of 29 words and phrases from the purported *dialecto* ('dialect')—or *lengua* ('language'), as the author also calls it. These words and phrases are accompanied by translations into standard Spanish. Some of the words in this vocabulary are common in today's Porteño (e.g. *mina*, translated there as *mujer* 'woman'), but most words have fallen into disuse (e.g. *marroca*, translated as *cadena* 'chain'). Importantly, one of the words in the vocabulary is *lunfardo*, which appears translated as *ladrón* ('thief'). This is the oldest known record of that word²⁰.

Less than a year after this newspaper article was published, the thieves of Buenos Aires came again under media scrutiny. This time, a policeman published two long

²⁰ According to Villanueva (1962), Porteño *lunfardo* may have derived from Romanesco (i.e. Rome's language) *lombardo* ('thief'), following this progression: *lombardo* > *lumbardo* > *lunfardo*.

articles in *La Nación* newspaper, describing the thieves' various stealing methods, and recording no fewer than 154 words belonging to what he calls a *caló* (roughly, 'underworld jargon') (Lugones, 1879; as cited in Gobello, 2009 [1953], pp. 139-166).²¹ In both articles, the word *lunfardo* is extensively employed as a synonym of *ladrón* ('thief'), as in the following sentence:

Si el hombre tiene trazas de *otario*, un *lunfardo* encuentra el medio seguro de hacer relación con él (...). (p. 156)

'If the man has the appearance of a *fool*, a *lunfardo* finds a sure way to relate to him (...).'

However, there is one instance where *lunfardo* appears to designate the thieves' *caló* itself. This is considered to be the oldest record of the word *lunfardo* being used in a metalinguistic sense:²²

Pronúnciese en esta y demás palabras del *lunfardo* la ch como en la lengua francesa. (p. 142)

'In this and the other words of the *lunfardo*, the letter ch must be pronounced as in the French language.'

In 1883, *lunfardo*'s metalinguistic sense appears for the first time in a definition. The definition appears in an article that is not precisely about thieves, or about thieves' vocabularies, but about one Porteño *conventillo*²³. It reads as follows (as cited in Conde, 2011a, p. 87):

El *lunfardo* no es otra cosa que un amasijo de dialectos italianos de inteligencia común y utilizado por los ladrones del país que también le han agregado expresiones pintorescas.

²¹ In Spain, *caló* designates the Romani variety spoken by Spanish gypsies. But, as Conde (2011a, pp. 87-88) points, in those days the word was also used to mean *jerga del hampa* (roughly, 'underworld jargon').

²² This is, for example, Conde's (2011a, p. 87) interpretation. To me, it is not certain that the word *lunfardo* is used in a metalinguistic sense in that sentence. The word can be substituted with *caló* ('underworld jargon'), but still also with *ladrón* ('thief').

²³ Recall from Ch. 3 that the *conventillos* were tenement houses in Buenos Aires inhabited by the newly arrived immigrant families.

‘Lunfardo is nothing else but a shared hotchpotch of Italian dialects, used by the thieves of the country, who have also added some picturesque expressions.’

The definition illustrates that, for the Porteño dominant classes, there was no clear difference between “the thieves of the country” and the lower-class immigrants who spoke a “shared hotchpotch of Italian dialects”. Historically, the Argentine dominant classes—or perhaps I should say dominant classes *tout court*—, have exhibited this tendency to confuse people from lower classes with criminals and undesirables (Conde, 2011a; Teruggi, 1974).

In 1894, the first *Diccionario lunfardo-español* (‘Lunfardo-Spanish Dictionary’) was published, with 428 entries, as an addendum in a criminological study entitled *El idioma del delito* (‘The language of crime’) (Dellepiane, 1967 [1894]). In 1915, another criminological study registered no fewer than 1355 entries (Villamayor, 1915).

In the first decades of the 20th century, it became apparent that the great majority of Porteños were employing these *lunfardo* words in their everyday interactions, and that these expressions could no longer be exclusively attributed to the underworld of *lunfardos/ladrones* (‘thieves’). Accordingly, the ‘thief’ sense of *lunfardo* would gradually fall into disuse during these years (Conde, 2011a; Schijman, 2018).

Tango music was at this point gaining more and more popularity, and its songs had begun to employ *lunfardo* words as a way of achieving more expressivity in the compositions. *Lunfardo* became a central ingredient in the poetics of *tango* lyrics, and, as *tango* surged in popularity, it began to play an important role in the dissemination of *lunfardo* words in the Porteño speech community (Conde, 2014; Teruggi, 1974). Once *tango* was also legitimated in Europe, the Porteño upper classes adopted it as a music and dance too, although they would often disapprove of the vulgarity of the lyrics (Conde, 2014; Romano, 1982).

During the 1930s and most of the 1940s, radio broadcasting was regulated by the Argentine state, and language considered deviant, indecent, or obscene was prohibited. This included many *lunfardo* words and the *tango* songs that contained them. At the same time, schooling policies were implemented with the aim of homogenizing the chaotic linguistic landscape left by decades of massive and diverse migratory influx, in the pursuit of a monoglossic and monocultural nation (Conde, 2011a; Di Tullio, 2010; Ennis, 2015).

By the 1950s, however, the censorship on *lunfardo* was over. By this time, large Porteño sectors of European descent had climbed the rungs from the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. Backed up by the elites, these sectors began to embrace a European *clase media* ('middle class') identity, presenting themselves as the true models of Argentine people (Adamovsky, 2009).

It was in this context that *lunfardo* began to be studied from a linguistic rather than criminological perspective, and openly recognized as something which is culturally valuable (Gobello, 1996). The most influential figure in this turn was Porteño writer and journalist José Gobello (1919-2013), with his seminal work *Lunfardía* (Gobello, 2009 [1953]). As succinctly put by Gobello in a recent interview, his basic claim is that "*lunfardo* is not so much the offspring of the prison as it is of the immigration wave" (arkegonio, 2010a).²⁴

In 1962, together with language scholars and literary writers, Gobello cofounded the *Academia Porteña de Lunfardo* ('Porteño Academy of Lunfardo'). An important part of their research involved tracing the various European etymologies of *lunfardo* words, and valuing the role of *lunfardo* in popular theater, literature, and *tango*, which had been hitherto considered low forms of literary expression (e.g. Gobello, 2009 [1953]; Peña, 1972; Soler Cañas, 1965, 1976; and, more recently, Conde, 2004b, 2011a; Gobello, 1996, 2004; Gobello & Oliveri, 2010, 2013).

The modern sense of *lunfardo* was, I believe, profoundly shaped by the contributions of Gobello and of those who followed his lead. As Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges once put it in an interview: "I have the impression that all of *lunfardo* is artificial. That it is an invention by Gobello" (Borges, 1983, p. 194).²⁵

²⁴ Original Spanish: "[E]l lunfardo es menos hijo de la cárcel que de la inmigración". The interview is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ng9udAK_uB0 (posted on 8 July 2010).

²⁵ Borges's full original line is: "Yo tengo la impresión de que todo el lunfardo es artificial. Que es una invención de Gobello...y de Vacarezza". Alberto Vacarezza (1886-1959) was one of Argentina's most popular playwrights, and perhaps one of the major exponents of popular theater of the River Plate region. His *sainetes* ('short humorous plays') portray the lives of immigrants in *conventillos* ('tenements') and make extensive use of *lunfardo* words and *cocoliche* ('Spanish-Italian hybrid language').

4.3 The semantic core of *lunfardo*

This section deals with a set of semantic components concerning the general make-up of *lunfardo*.

4.3.1 Many words of one kind

The example in (1) captures the moment in *Almorzando con Mirtha Legrand* when Mirtha, the show's legendary hostess, introduces her guests:²⁶

- (1) Muy bien. Hoy van a estar con nosotros...mire cuál mesaza, eh, remesaza: la señora Fátima Flores [actress], la señora Teté Coustarot [model, TV/radio hostess], el señor Ronnie Arias [comedian, journalist], el señor Rolando Barbano [author, crime journalist], el señor Oscar Conde [writer, lunfardo scholar]—**que va a hablar sobre lunfardo, si tienen palabras en lunfardo, mándenmelas a la mesa**—y el Doctor Diego Montes de Oca [medical doctor], que nos va a hablar sobre el estreptococo, que todos estamos bastante preocupados.

‘Alright. Joining us today...look at this table, hey, such an impressive table: Ms. Fátima Flores [actress], Ms. Teté Coustarot [model, TV/radio hostess], Mr. Ronnie Arias [comedian, journalist], Mr. Rolando Barbano [author, crime journalist], Mr. Oscar Conde [writer, lunfardo scholar]—**who will talk about lunfardo, if you at home have words in lunfardo, send them to the table**—and Dr, Diego Montes de Oca [medical doctor], who will talk with us about the streptococcus, which we are all very concerned about.’

The example in (2) is Mirtha and Conde's first exchange:

- (2) *Mirtha*: Bueno, vamos a ver qué comemos. Después voy a hablar con usted, Dr. Conde.

Conde: Cómo no.

Mirtha: Que **me anoté unas palabritas en lunfardo, de mi cosecha**. (*laughs*)

Conde: Bien. **Me da un poquito de miedo**, pero...

Mirtha: ¿Qué le da miedo? ¡No!

²⁶ The full programme is on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/n2i36G8G-hw> (posted on 17 September 2018). To familiarize the reader with Mirtha's guests, I have added professions between brackets. Also, I have used bold to highlight important passages in the direct quotations found in this chapter. For reasons of space and readability, I have removed false starts, filler words, and repetitions from transcripts, provided this removal did not alter the analysis in substantial ways. The same is true for transcripts in all the following chapters.

Conde: No, no...que usted me hable de **palabras que yo no conozca**, o no saber responder.

Mirtha: **Son las usuales, las comunes.**

Mirtha: Alright, let's see what we are eating. Then I will talk with you, Dr. Conde.

Conde: Sure.

Mirtha: Because **I just noted down a few words in lunfardo, that I harvested myself.**
(laughs).

Conde: Alright. **I am a bit scared**, but...

Mirtha: What are you scared of? Don't be scared!

Conde: Well... that you might talk to me about **words that I don't know**, or that I might not know how to answer.

Mirtha: **They are the usual ones, the common ones.'**

Both (1) and (2) suggest that *lunfardo* consists of “*palabras*” (‘words’) known by Porteños. Furthermore, both Mirtha and Conde seem to be aware that there are “*muchas*” (‘many’) such words. This is clearest in (2), where Conde fears that he will be asked about words that, despite being an expert, he has not heard of, and where Mirtha reassures him that she will only ask about “*las usuales, las comunes*” (‘the usual ones, the common ones’). The idea that *lunfardo* involves ‘many words’ is also evident in (1), where Mirtha encourages her whole audience to send her words in *lunfardo*. If Mirtha did not think there were many such words, this would make little sense.

4.3.2 Speaking “in” *lunfardo*

Note that in both (1) and (2) Mirtha uses the construction *en lunfardo* (‘in lunfardo’), which is commonly used among Porteños. In relation to this common construction, Conde (2011b, p. 145) has written:

Está claro que el lunfardo no es un idioma. No lo es porque no se puede hablar completamente *en lunfardo*, como sí puede hablarse en quichua, en guaraní o en portugués. Y esto es porque no existen dentro del lunfardo ni pronombres ni preposiciones ni conjunciones, porque prácticamente, carece también de adverbios y porque —esto es lo fundamental— el lunfardo utiliza los mecanismos morfológicos del español para la conjugación de verbos, la flexión de sustantivos y adjetivos, y se sirve de la misma sintaxis castellana que hemos estudiado en la escuela. Por más que se haya extendido la expresión «hablar *en lunfardo*», es claro que lo más que uno podría hacer, en todo caso, es «hablar *con lunfardo*».

‘It is clear that lunfardo is not a language [*idioma*]. It is not a language because one cannot speak entirely *in* lunfardo, as one can speak in Quechua, in Guaraní or in Portuguese. And this is because neither pronouns nor prepositions nor conjunctions exist within lunfardo, and because it practically lacks also adverbs, and because—this is what is fundamental—lunfardo utilizes the morphological mechanisms of Spanish for the conjugation of verbs, the inflection of nouns and adjectives, and it makes use of the same Castilian syntax that we have studied at school. Even though the expression «to speak *in* lunfardo» has spread, it’s clear that what one could do, at most, in any case, is «to speak *with* lunfardo.»’

Conde has an academic objection to the claim that *lunfardo* is a language, and it is on these grounds that he considers the expression *hablar en lunfardo* (‘to speak in lunfardo’) to be incorrect. However, Conde’s objection does not change the fact that many Porteños do think of *lunfardo* as a language in its own right, or as something that is on a par with languages, and that therefore the construction *en lunfardo* makes intuitive sense to them.

Robertro Arlt (1900-1942), one of Buenos Aires’s most celebrated writers, did not hesitate to give *lunfardo* the status of *idioma* (roughly, ‘language’) (Arlt, 1998 [1928], p. 369):

(3) Escribo en un **“idioma”** que no es propiamente el Castellano, sino el *porteño*. (...) Este **léxico, que yo llamo idioma**, *primará en nuestra literatura pese a la indignación de los puristas, a quien no leen ni leerá nadie.*

‘I write in a **“language”** that is not precisely Spanish, but *Porteño*. (...) This **lexicon, which I call language**, *will prevail in our literature despite the indignation of purists, who nobody reads or will read.*’

Likewise, in the first stanza of his sonnet *Musa rea* (‘Low-class muse’) (Flores, 1975), Celedonio Flores (1896-1947), another famous Porteño writer, notes that he writes “*in lunfardo*”:

(4) No tengo el berretín de ser un bardo,
chamuyador letrao, ni de spamento.
Yo escribo humildemente lo que siento
Y pa’ escribir mejor, ¡lo hago **en lunfardo!** (p. 76)

'I don't desire to be a poet,
A learned waffler, or a scene-maker.
I humbly write what I feel
And to write better, I do it **in lunfardo!**'

Notice that both Arlt and Flores convey the idea that *lunfardo* somehow offers great expressive potential. It is this property of *lunfardo*'s many words that seems to invite people to place it on a par with languages.

4.3.3 *Lunfardo* words vs. standard words

To explain what can be expressed with (or indeed *in*) *lunfardo*, Porteños often contrast *lunfardo* words against their counterparts in the standard language. This is exemplified in (5), an extract from a televised interview with Pedro Luis Barcia (the then president of the *Academia Argentina de Letras*) and Ricardo Ostuni (poet and member of the *Academia Porteña de Lunfardo*) (Bonnet, 2010):²⁷

(5) *Interviewer*: Ricardo [Ostuni], ¿a qué llamamos entonces “lunfardo”? Porque, eh, para ubicarnos en el tema. (...)

Ostuni: El lunfardo no es un idioma ni un lenguaje. Es un reservorio de palabras que expresan de otra manera que lo que expresa la lengua oficial. La misma cosa la dice de otra manera.

Interviewer: Cuando habla de la lengua oficial, es la lengua...

Ostuni: Española.

Interviewer: ...de la Academia...

Ostuni: De la [Real] Academia Española.

Barcia: La lengua en general, más que la [Real] Academia Española, que no es la nuestra.

Ostuni: Que no es la nuestra, no, no, está bien. Pero digo, es decir, el lunfardo expresa, con vocablos de cuño propio...

Barcia: [stand.] “¿Mujer”?

Ostuni: [lunf.] “Mina”.

Barcia: [stand.] “¿Trabajo”?

Ostuni: [lunf.] “Laburo”.

²⁷ The interview is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=83qEuUIy3Es> (posted on August 11 2010).

Barcia: Así es.

Interviewer: Ricardo [Ostuni], what do we call “lunfardo”? Because, um, so that we can orientate ourselves. (...)

Ostuni: Lunfardo is neither a language, nor a specialized way of speaking. It is a reservoir of words that express in another way what the official language expresses. It says the same thing in another way.

Interviewer: When you say official language, you mean the language...

Ostuni: Spanish language.

Interviewer: ...of the Academy...

Ostuni: Of the [Royal] Spanish Academy.

Barcia: Language in general, rather than the [Royal] Spanish Academy, which is not our Academy.

Ostuni: Which is not ours, it is not, I agree. But, I mean...with words of our own coinage, lunfardo expresses...

Barcia: “*Mujer*” [stand. ‘woman’]?

Ostuni: “*Mina*” [lunf. ‘woman’].

Barcia: “*Trabajo*” [stand. ‘work’]?

Ostuni: “*Laburo*” [lunf. ‘work’].

Barcia: It’s like that.’

Tango composer Mario Cécere does the same in the lyrics of *Milonga lunfarda* (1970).²⁸ This famous tribute to *lunfardo* includes 34 lunfardisms and their respective paraphrases in standard Spanish. In the final stanza, Cécere celebrates that *lunfardo* is a great medium for *parla* (‘waffling’), something which, he notes, even the *Real Academia Española* (‘Royal Spanish Academy’) would acknowledge:

(6) Si hasta la Real Academia, que de parla sabe mucho,
Le va a pedir a Pichuco y Grela, con su guitarra,
Que a esta milonga lunfarda me la musiquen de grupo.

‘Even the Royal Spanish Academy, that knows a lot about waffling,
Will ask Pichuco and Grela, with his guitar,

²⁸ The song was made popular by prominent *tango* singer Edmundo Rivero. Rivero’s recording is available in YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CMP7J-6QTY> (posted on 3 September 2012).

To play together this milonga lunfarda for me.’

4.3.4 Semantic explication of *lunfardo* (section [A])

To capture the semantic core of *lunfardo*, I propose the following partial explication [A]:

[A] semantic core [partial explication of *lunfardo*]

- a. many words of one kind,
 one of these words is *laburo**, another of these words is *mina**,
 another is *guita**, there are many other words of this kind
- b. people in Buenos Aires [m] know [m] many of these words,
 they often say many of these words
- c. people in other places in Argentina [m] know [m] many of these words,
 they often say many of these words
- d. people can say something about many things with words of this kind,
 like people can say something about many things with other words

Component (a) captures a basic idea behind *lunfardo*: it consists of ‘many words’, and all these many words belong to a single ‘kind’. Furthermore, people can readily exemplify words of this kind, as captured with the word exemplars *laburo*, *mina*, and *guita* (roughly, ‘work’, ‘woman’, and ‘money’).²⁹ For various reasons, these three words seem to be the best candidates for the exemplification: (1) Porteños themselves typically bring them up as examples of everyday *lunfardo* words³⁰, (2) all three words were recorded in the first *lunfardo* dictionary (Dellepiane, 1967 [1894]), (3) all three words are frequent in *tango*, and (4) two of them (*laburo* and *mina*) are Italianisms.

²⁹ As explained in Ch. 2, I have opted to mark exemplars with the symbol “*”, instead of “[m*]” proposed by Goddard (2017). This is because, while it is true that the words in question have complex meanings, it’s not the word-meanings that are being recruited for the explication. Rather, the explication recruits them as mere “word examples”, or as “word signifiers”. The concept of “exemplar” is only recent in the NSM theoretical apparatus; further discussion of the concept and its implications for the NSM theory is in order.

³⁰ For example, two of these words are brought up as examples in (5), and the three words appear in the lyrics of the aforementioned *tango* song *Milonga lunfarda* in (6). Also, the three words often appear in “amateur” *lunfardo* tutorials in YouTube (see e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QkUu6tSwMbA>). For a discussion of different considerations for an optimal choice of exemplars, see Goddard (2017).

Component (b) captures the knowledge that people in Buenos Aires know and say many *lunfardo* words. What is true for Buenos Aires in (b) is true also for ‘other places’—cities, regions, provinces, etc.—in Argentina, as stated in (c). Together, these two components suggest that people think of *lunfardo* as Porteño primarily, and as Argentine more broadly (the examples in §4.4. will support this hypothesis). Components (b) and (c) also imply an awareness that there may be *lunfardo* words that people do not know, or know but do not say, as implied in Mirtha and Conde’s first exchanges.

Finally, the first line in (d) captures the speaker’s construal of *lunfardo* as a vocabulary with a wide expressive potential: ‘people can say something about many things with words of this kind’. The second line puts *lunfardo* words on a par with ‘other words’, i.e. the words of *castellano*, *español*, *lengua oficial*, etc. It is by virtue of this comparison that many Porteños may construe *lunfardo* as an *idioma*, and perhaps legitimately so.

4.4 *Lunfardo* “descends from the ships”

This section explores Porteños’ understanding of *lunfardo* as an essentially “migrated” lexicon. As stated in §4.2, José Gobello (1919-2013), the most influential figure in the study of *lunfardo*, played a huge role in the dissemination of this understanding. A recent interview to Gobello begins like this (arkegonio, 2010b):³¹

(7) Nos gustaría saber, para empezar, don Gobello, primero, **cuál es el origen del lunfardo, para después empezar a hablar acerca de todo el lunfardo.**

‘We would like to know, to begin with, dear Gobello, first, **what the origin of lunfardo is, so that then we can begin to talk all about lunfardo.**’

To which Gobello replies:

(8) El lunfardo tiene el mismo origen que tengo yo, porque yo soy un producto de la inmigración de mis padres, y **el lunfardo es un producto de la inmigración** también, ¿no?

³¹ Available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9fDrNIDH4NY> (posted on July 8 2010).

‘Lunfardo has the same origin as I have, because I am a product of my parents’ immigration, and **lunfardo** also is a product of the immigration, isn’t it?’

For Gobello, *lunfardo* is clearly a product of the great European immigration wave to Argentina in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For Gobello’s interviewer, the origin of *lunfardo* is so important that, as she puts it, they cannot begin to talk about *lunfardo* without mentioning it first.

4.4.1 *Lunfardo*’s Italianizing potential

Similarly, in *Almorzando con Mirtha Legrand*, the question about *lunfardo*’s origin is raised early on, activating the word’s potential to Italianize all conversations. The exchange below illustrates the typical discursive progression of a conversation on *lunfardo*: speakers begin to explore, and indulge in, the Italian origins of various *lunfardo* words, and, as they do, they also begin to flesh out the stories of the Italian immigrants that had brought these words to the country.

(9) *Mirtha*: ¿El lunfardo qué es...? ¿Es porteño el lunfardo?

Conde: Bueno, originariamente es rioplatense, ¿no?

Mirtha: Es rioplatense...

Conde: Es un argot³² surgido en las ciudades del Río de la Plata—tanto en Buenos Aires como en Montevideo, La Plata, Rosario—entre 1870 y 1880, más o menos, con la llegada de la gran inmigración.

Mirtha: Claro, claro.

Conde: Y así empezó.

Mirtha: ¿[Inmigración] italiana más bien?

Conde: Sí, especialmente la italiana es la que aportó más palabras en los orígenes, ¿no?

Mirtha: ¿[Inmigración] napolitana o genovesa?

Conde: De todo. Hay palabras del [idioma] napolitano; hay quizá más [palabras] genovesas porque en Buenos Aires se quedaron muchos más genoveses.

³² As in much of his written work (e.g. Conde 2011a, 2011b, 2014), Conde here chooses to define *lunfardo* via the term *argot*, which can mean ‘popular, alternative vocabulary’, as intended by him, but also ‘criminal jargon’. His choice of this obscure and ambiguous term comes as a surprise, given that Conde—following the lead of Gobello (2009 [1953])—is determined to undermine the criminalizing discourses in which *lunfardo* was first conceived.

Mirtha: ¿“Pizza”, por ejemplo? Es genovés, me parece, ¿no?

Conde: ¿Qué palabra?

Mirtha: “Pizza”.

Conde: Sí, claro.

Mirtha: Pero todos pensamos en napolitana, la pizza napolitana, generalmente, erróneamente, ¿no es cierto?

Conde: Sí, no, pero... eh... Hay más palabras del genovés quizás. Y el genovés aportó muchas palabras al mundo de la gastronomía también, ¿no? “*Fainá*”, por ejemplo, “*tuco*” (...)

Teté: Aparte Génova era el puerto donde salían los inmigrantes, ¿no?

Conde: Claro, exactamente.

Mirtha: What is lunfardo...? Is lunfardo Porteño?

Conde: Well, it is originally from the River Plate region, isn't it?

Mirtha: It's from the River Plate region.

Conde: It is an argot that emerged in the cities of the River Plate—in Buenos Aires as in Montevideo, La Plata, Rosario—between, more or less, 1870 and 1880, with the arrival of the great immigration.

Mirtha: Right, right.

Conde: And so it began.

Mirtha: Italian [immigration] mostly?

Conde: Yes, especially the Italian is the one that contributed most words in the beginnings, right?

Mirtha: Neapolitan or Genoese [immigration]?

Conde: Everything. There are words from Neapolitan [language]; maybe there are more Genoese [words] because many more Genoese remained in Buenos Aires.

Mirtha: “Pizza”, for example? It's Genoese, I think so, isn't it?

Conde: What word?

Mirtha: “Pizza”.

Conde: Yes, of course.

Mirtha: But we all think of “*napolitana*”, the “*pizza napolitana*”³³, generally, erroneously, is that true?

³³ The *pizza napolitana* is the Porteño variant of the Italian *pizza napoletana*.

Conde: Yes, well, but... um... Maybe there are more words from Genoese. And Genoese contributed many words to the world of gastronomy, right? “*Fainá*”, for example, “*tuco*” (...)

Teté: Besides, Genoa was the port where the immigrants departed from, wasn't it?

Conde: Right, exactly.’

In the blink of an eye, the word *lunfardo* has propelled Mirtha's guests into a Buenos Aires at the turn of the 19th century, when a third of the city's population had just come from Italy (Latzina, Chueco, Martínez, & Pérez, 1889, p. 9), and when the smell of Genoese *fainâ*, *tocco*, and *pizza* (lunf. *fainá*, *tuco*, and *pizza*) had begun to fill the city's streets.³⁴

4.4.2 *Cocoliche*: Italian-Spanish mix

Next, one of Mirtha's guests conjures up a family memory:

(10) *Ronnie* [to *Conde*]: Y te hago una pregunta. Porque, por ejemplo, me acuerdo que mi abuela era hija de italianos, criada por italianos, y decía “*dotor*”, “*sétimo piso*”. Y uno pensaba, “*qué grasa, qué merza*” (...). Y con los años empecé a pensar (...) que los padres, al hablar en italiano, era el “*dottore*”, se transformaba en el “*dotor*”; el “*setimo*” era el... O sea, uno juzgaba.

‘*Ronnie* [to *Conde*]: So, let me ask you something. Because, for example, I remember that my grandmother had Italian parents, she was brought up by Italians, and she used to say “*dotor*” [instead of Spanish “*doctor*”], and “*sétimo piso*” [instead of Spanish “*séptimo piso*”]. And I would think “*how vulgar, how coarse*” (...). But, as the years went by, I began to think (...) well, it's because her parents spoke Italian, and they said “*dottore*”, and that transformed into “*dotor*”; and “*sétimo*” was... In short, one was prejudiced [against these people].’

³⁴ The rest of the city's population was at that time distributed as follows: 9 % were Spanish, 4.6 % French, and 6.9 % came from other countries. Only 47.2 % were Argentine born Porteños (Latzina et al., 1889, p. 9).

Ronnie is conjuring up a key protagonist in the narrative about the emergence of *lunfardo*, a protagonist which has been infinitely represented in Argentine film, TV, and in the popular theater of the River Plate region (Conde, 2011a; Di Tullio, 2010, pp. 73-168; Ennis, 2015). This protagonist is the Italian immigrant who, in their everyday interactions with Porteños, spoke Italianized Spanish, Hispanized Italian, or anything between these two—a mixed-language that in Buenos Aires came to be known as “*cocoliche*”.³⁵ Gobello’s thesis is that, in these interactions, local Porteños were exposed to many Italian words which they would subsequently incorporate into their everyday speech, often with semantic and phonetic adaptations, and these words comprised the early *lunfardo* (Conde, 2014; Gobello, 1989).

4.4.3 Other influences

However, Italians were not the only European group that contributed to the early *lunfardo* vocabulary. Conde (2011a) estimates that, towards the end of the 19th century, *lunfardo* must have comprised a corpus of 1500 words, half of which were borrowed from Italian, and, to a lesser extent, from other newly migrated European languages, especially French, English, and Portuguese. The other half comprised Hispanicisms, words from indigenous languages, and ruralisms brought from various Argentine provinces (pp. 147-148).

Importantly, once the immigration wave ceased, *lunfardo* continued to incorporate words throughout the 20th century, and quadrupled in size (Conde, 2011a, pp. 147-148; 2013, p. 81). The majority of these “second generation” *lunfardo* words emerged from Spanish words that underwent different processes of resignification (typically, metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche) and of morphological change (Conde, 2011a, 2012; also see §4.6.2).

Yet the perception that *lunfardo* words are majorly “first generation” European—i.e. majorly “*descended from the ships*”—and, most typically, Italian, is deeply embedded

³⁵ The word *cocoliche* comes from Antonio Coccolliccio (or Cucco(l)liccio), a Calabrian clown working at the famous circus of brothers Podestá, which toured in the River Plate area in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Coccolliccio became popular for his sketches parodying the speech of Italian immigrants. The word *cocoliche* is also used today to describe something as *híbrido* (‘hybrid’) or *ininteligible* (‘unintelligible’) (AAL, 2019, p. 197; Conde, 2011a; Ennis, 2015). My description of *cocoliche* as a “linguistic continuum” with two extremes is akin to Fontanella de Weinberg’s (1987, pp. 138-142). For a review of scholarly definitions on, and literary work written in, *cocoliche*, see Conde (2011a, pp. 164-188).

in the Porteño imaginary. The words that Mirtha and her guests choose to offer as examples of *lunfardo* words reflect this. Except for a few words from other European languages (e.g. from French in (18), English in (19), and Yiddish in (24)), the overwhelming majority of examples offered at Mirtha's table concern Italianisms, as in (11), (12), (13), and (14):

(11) *Teté*: “*Voy de tía*” [‘I’m going to my aunt’s house’]?

Conde: También, **es un italianismo**.

Mirtha: “*Voy del doctor*” [‘I’m going to the doctor’]?

Teté: **Es un italianismo dijo**.

Conde: Claro **es un italianismo**.

‘*Teté*: “*Voy de tía*” [‘I’m going to my aunt’s house’]?’

Conde: Also, **that is an Italianism**.

Mirtha: “*Voy del doctor*” [‘I’m going to the doctor’]?’

Teté: He said **it is an Italianism**.

Conde: Yes, **it is an Italianism**.’

(12) *Mirtha*: ¿*Mishiadura*” [‘poverty’]?

Conde: Y “*mishiadura*” tiene que ver con “*mishio*”, que **también es un italianismo**; “*mishio*” quiere decir “*pobre*”.

‘*Mirtha*: ¿*Mishiadura*” [‘poverty’]?’

Conde: “*Mishiadura*” has to do with “*mishio*”, which **is also an Italianism**; “*mishio*” means “*poor*”.

(13) *Mirtha*: Y dicen “*laburo*” [‘work’] (...) Viene de “*lavoro*” [‘work’], ¿no? **Del italiano**.

Conde: Sí, sí, “*laburo*” viene **del toscano**. De “*lavoro*”.

‘*Mirtha*: And they say “*laburo*” [‘work’] (...) It comes from “*lavoro*” [‘work’], right? **From Italian**.

Conde: Yes, yes, “*laburo*” comes **from Tuscan**. From “*lavoro*”.’

(14) *Mirtha*: Ay, yo tengo una: “*chichipío*”. **Eso es italiano**.

Conde: Sí, quiere decir “*tonto*”, ¿no?

‘*Mirtha*: Oh, I got one: “*chichipío*”. **That is Italian**.

Conde: Yes, it means “*silly*”, right?’

Porteños would find it hard to believe that no more than 12.66 % of today's *lunfardo* words are Italianisms, and that an overwhelming majority, at least 78.5%, comprise the abovementioned “second generation” Spanish-based words (Conde, 2011a, p. 217).³⁶

4.4.4 Unsettling influences

Despite their “European appearance”, some *lunfardo* words are in fact descended from the languages of the indigenous peoples in Argentina. In (15), Mirtha and some guests are convinced that the *lunfardo* word *cache* (pronounced /'katʃe/) must have come from a French word, which, they imagine, must be pronounced /kaʃ/. To their incredulity, Conde proposes a Guaraní origin for this word:

(15) *Mirtha*: ¿Y “cache” [/'katʃe/]? Vio cuando se dice “ay, es cache, es cache”. Como que fuera ordinario, fuera de moda, vulgar. ¿Qué origen tendrá?

Conde: “Cache”. Bueno, esa palabra...eso ya es una palabra que tiene que ver con el guaraní.³⁷

Ronnie: ¡No!

Fátima: ¡Ay!

Mirtha: ¿Con el guaraní? Ah sí... ¡Qué notable!

Teté: ¡Qué genial! Porque todos los que la utilizan pensarán que es una palabra francesa. Guaraní, me encantó.

Ronnie: ¡Francesa! [imitating refined French accent:] “¿Qué cache [/'kaʃ/]!”

Teté: [imitating refined French accent:] “¿Qué cache [/'kaʃ/]!”

Conde: No, para nada.

‘*Mirtha*: ¿And “cache” [/'katʃe/]? You know, when people say “aw, it’s cache, it’s cache”. Like when something is tacky, out of fashion, vulgar. What might the origin of this word be?

Conde: “Cache”. Well, that word... this is instead a word that has to do with Guaraní.

Ronnie: No way!

Fátima: Oh!

Mirtha: With Guaraní? Aha...How curious!

³⁶ This estimate is from the year 1965, so the proportion of “second generation” Spanish-based words should be even higher today.

³⁷ Elsewhere, Conde (2011a, pp. 236-237) offers a Quechuan origin for *cache*.

Teté: How marvelous! Because everybody that employs it must think that it is a French word.
But it is Guaraní. I loved it.

Ronnie: French! [imitating refined French accent:] “What a cache [ʎaʃ]!”

Teté: [imitating refined French accent:] “What a cache [ʎaʃ]!”

Conde: Not at all.’

4.4.5 Semantic explication of *lunfardo* (Section [B])

To capture speakers’ construal of *lunfardo* as a migrated lexicon, I propose section [B]. The section comprises—and compresses—a narrative consisting of three main parts: Act 1, Act 2, and Thesis. Chronologically speaking, the Thesis is what occurs at the end of the narrative. However, it appears first in the explication, so as to highlight precisely its status as “thesis” of the narrative, i.e. as speaker’s main “point” with the narrative.

[B] language contact [partial explication of *lunfardo*]

(Thesis)

- a. many words of this kind are like words people say in Italy [m],
 others are like words people say in some other countries [m] in Europe [m]
- b. it is like this because of this:

(Act 1)

- c. - a long time ago, many people in these countries [m] wanted to live in Argentina [m]
 many lived in Italy [m], many lived in Spain [m],
 many lived in other countries [m] in Europe [m]

(Act 2)

- d. - after this, these people lived in Argentina [m] for a long time,
 many of them lived in Buenos Aires [m]
- e. - often, when these people wanted to say something,
 they said it with words people say in Italy [m],
 they said it with words people say in these other countries in Europe [m]
- f. - because of this, people in Buenos Aires [m] often heard these words,
 after some time, many often said something with these words

Component (a) is an analogy that states that many words from *lunfardo* are like words people say in countries in Europe, particularly in Italy. The precise *tertium comparationis* in this analogy—i.e. the quality (or qualities) that motivates it—is left unspecified. This is because this quality varies from word to word. For example, speakers often know that the *lunfardo* words *birra* and *laburo* are like their Italian counterparts *birra* and *lavoro* in terms of both form and meaning. Many don't know what the (purported) European counterpart of *cache* may be like, but some may readily hypothesize that it is a French word of similar form (“The word *cache* [/'katʃe/] must come from French *cache* [/'kaʃ/]”).

Component (b) marks (a) as the Thesis that follows from the narrative, and it also introduces the two Acts of this narrative. Act 1 begins in (c) by introducing certain protagonists (‘many people’), and by setting these protagonists in time (‘a long time ago’) and in space (‘countries in Europe’, most prominently ‘Italy’ and ‘Spain’). Also, it entrusts these protagonists with a certain goal, a commitment to migrate (‘they wanted to live in Argentina’).

Act 2 offers a language contact-hypothesis that accounts for the emergence of *lunfardo*. In (d), the protagonists of the narrative have fulfilled their goal. The locus of the narrative changes from European countries to Argentina, and, within Argentina, Buenos Aires is profiled, in line with speakers’ knowledge that this city is where most immigrants settled.

In component (e), the immigrants engage in everyday interactions, and these interactions involve words from Italian and from other European languages. The component accounts for communicative situations involving one shared code (e.g. members of an immigrant family conversing with each other, or with other fellow countrymen), but also for mixed-language situations (e.g. Italians speaking *cocoliche*, immigrants of various origins conversing in the shared patio of the *conventillo*).

In component (f), the narrative zooms in to Buenos Aires to state that ‘people’—that is, local Porteños, but also immigrant families of various origins—were frequently exposed to these words from Italian (and other European) languages, and that, subsequently, many of them began to use these words in their everyday interactions. We witness with this the birth of the early *lunfardo* repertoire, whose predominantly European make-up justifies the Thesis expressed in (a). *Lunfardo* would continue to evolve with the input of “second generation” words, but this evolution does not enter into

the narrative. For *lunfardo* “descends from the ships”—much like Argentines themselves—and Porteños know it.

4.5 *Lunfardo* and *tango*

This section proposes that the concept of *lunfardo* also encodes a link between *lunfardo* words and historical *tango*. Internationally, *tango* calls to mind a visually enchanting dance: a man, a woman, and a deep connection between them involving sensual and elegant movements. *Tango* also brings to mind a certain kind of music: a distinct 2/4 rhythm, a melancholic mood, rich instrumental textures, etc. However, for Argentines, and especially for people in Buenos Aires (and Montevideo (Uruguay)), where it originated, *tango* is not only a dance and a music genre. It is also, and no less importantly, a poetic universe contained in the lyrics of over thirty thousand *tango* songs. In short, *tango* is a tripartite form: dance, music, and poetry (Conde, 2014).

I will argue that, because *lunfardo* words are strongly associated with *tango* (which, in turn, is strongly associated with a period in Argentine history), speakers think of *lunfardo* as largely consisting of words that have fallen out of use and that they don’t know—even if the great majority of *lunfardo* words are of current use. The examples will also illustrate that *lunfardo* words can be used to index a *tango*-like aesthetics.

4.5.1 The shared history of *lunfardo* and *tango*

As *lunfardo* continued to evolve on the streets of Buenos Aires, it also began to circulate in a range of artistic genres of broad popular appeal. For example, *lunfardo* was used extensively in *sainetes* (‘short humorous plays’) and other popular theatrical genres of Buenos Aires, in the *periodismo costumbrista* (‘regionalist journalism’), *historietas* (‘comic strips’), and in popular music genres like *rock nacional* (‘Argentine rock’) and *cumbia villera* (‘slum cumbia’). It also appeared in the work of many prominent Argentine writers, such as Ernesto Sábato (1911-2011), Julio Cortázar (1914-1984), Manuel Puig (1932-1990), and Roberto Fontanarrosa (1944-2007). However, despite its use across these different artistic genres, it is *tango* that is most strongly associated with *lunfardo* in the Argentine imagination (Conde, 2011a, 2014).

Tango, like *lunfardo*, originated in the late 19th century as a result of the contact between the newly-arrived immigrants and the existing inhabitants of Buenos Aires and

its surrounds. It is a product of cultural hybridization; the style of *tango* is a merging of various musical roots, including black people's rhythms, *habanera*, Andalusian *tango* and *milonga*. At first, it was a dance and instrumental music only, performed by lower-class European immigrants and local white and Afro Porteños in the *conventillos* ('tenement houses'), in *casas de tolerancia* ('houses of ill repute/brothels'), and in *academias* ('ballrooms') (Conde, 2011a, 2014).

In the 1910s, the Porteño upper classes also began to play and dance *tango*, encouraged in no small measure by the knowledge that *tango* had been well-received in France (Romano, 1982). But before long, *tango* music began to incorporate lyrics, with influences from various literary genres, such as Spanish *cuplé* ('variety song'), Argentine *payada* ('improvised singing') and *cancion criolla* ('creole song'), brothel songs, and ruffian poetry (Conde, 2004, 2014). Importantly, the introduction of lyrics to *tango* coincided with the early evolution of *lunfardo*, and from an early stage *tango* lyricists began to employ *lunfardo* words in their compositions (Conde, 2014). *Lunfardo* became a central ingredient in the poetics of *tango*, and *tango* has thus played a central role in the diffusion and preservation of *lunfardo* words (Conde, 2014). In the Argentine imaginary, *lunfardo* and *tango* became inextricably associated.

4.5.2 Making sense through *tango*

The majority of today's Porteños did not live during *tango*'s apogee and most productive period, which was in the 1920s-40s (Conde, 2004). Nevertheless, the stories narrated in *tango* songs continue to "offer them a way to interpret or give voice to their experiences", providing "a veritable mirror in which they can examine themselves, a refuge in which they find comfort and counsel" (Conde, 2014, p. 51). In other words, in Buenos Aires one does not need be a *tanguero/a* ('tango aficionado') to see the world through the lens of *tango* lyrics. Sociologist Julio Mafud (1966) proposes the concept of *tanguidad* ('tanguity') to capture the abiding presence of *tango* in the everyday life of Porteños:

La tanguidad es todo un estilo de vida. Toda una "metafísica" y una psicología que sostiene una suma de características argentinas y rioplatenses. Tanguero ya no es pura y únicamente quien canta o baila el tango. Es quien incluso, sin hacer nada de eso, vive y encarna el modus que hay tras la manifestación tanguística. Del mismo modo que hay un tipo de argentino del interior (...) expresado por el folklore, hay un tipo de rioplatense de la ciudad expresado por

el tango. (...) Es el tipo (...) insatisfecho afectivamente, cultor de la amistad y del amor materno, con un a gran carga de viveza en la conciencia social, (...) alunfardado en el hablar, encuevado en su yoísimo, (...) siempre agazapado para no pasar por gil. (pp. 13-14)

‘Tanguity is a whole lifestyle. A whole ‘metaphysics’ and psychology involving a sum of Argentine and rioplatense traits. A master of tango is not purely and exclusively someone who sings or dances tango. Rather, it is someone who, even without doing any of these things, lives and embodies the modus behind the tanguistic manifestation. In the same way that there is an Argentine type characteristic from the country’s interior [i.e. the provinces] (...) and expressed in folkloric music, there is also a rioplatense type from the city, expressed in tango. (...) It is the type (...) who is emotionally dissatisfied, who pays tribute to friendship and motherly love, someone with a great dose of cunning [viveza] in his social consciousness, (...) lunfardoed [alunfardado] in his speech, engrossed in his egoism, (...), afraid of being regarded as a moron [gil].’

Prominent themes in *tango* lyrics include: love (typically, the man abandoned and/or betrayed by a woman); the passing of time; nightlife, vices, games, and drink; the joyful-but-irrecoverable past (e.g. childhood, youth, first love); the mother; economic crisis; the city, the Porteño *barrio* (‘neighbourhood’) and its social archetypes; moral decay; and everyday axiology (Conde, 2004a; Mafud, 1966; Vidart, 1967).³⁸

Porteños frequently resort to *tango* lyrics to express accepted truths and popular wisdoms around these themes. Many Argentine *dichos* (‘sayings’) are based on *tango* lyrics, and are often introduced with the formulaic tag “*Como dice el tango: “--”*” (‘As the tango says: “--”’). For example, the *dichos* “*el que no afana es un gil*” (roughly, ‘the one who does not steal is a fool’), and “*la fama es puro cuento*” (‘fame is all lies’) are from the lyrics of the famous *tango* songs *Cambalache* (1934) and *Mi vieja viola* (1932), respectively (Conde, 2014, pp. 51-52).

³⁸ For an in-depth exploration of prominent themes in *tango*, see Vidart (1967). See also Bulat Silva (2011, 2012b, 2014), who proposes that *dolor* (roughly, ‘emotional pain/sadness’), *amor* (‘love’), *pasado* (‘the past’), and *muerte* (‘death’) are key words in *tango*.

4.5.3 *Lunfardo* and *tango* in Mirtha's show

The inextricability of *tango* and *lunfardo* in the minds of present-day Porteños is reflected in several exchanges in Mirtha's show. The first example of this is Mirtha and Conde's first exchange (presented as (2) in §4.3.1, although here it is extended). In this exchange, we see that, as soon as *lunfardo* takes the floor in the conversation, *tango* inevitably joins:

(16) *Mirtha*: Bueno, vamos a ver qué comemos. Después voy a hablar con usted, Dr. Conde.

Conde: Cómo no.

Mirtha: Que **me anoté unas palabritas en lunfardo** (...).

Conde: Bien. Me da un poquito de miedo, pero...

Mirtha: ¿Qué le da miedo? ¡No!

Conde: No, no...que usted me hable de palabras que yo no conozca, o no saber responder.

Mirtha: Son las usuales, las comunes. **Yo me acuerdo, hace años, no sé en qué gobierno, me parece que de Onganía, había una tango que se llamaba “Guardia vieja”,** y había que decirle “¡Cuidado, mamá!”.³⁹

‘*Mirtha*: Alright, let's see what we are eating. Then I will talk with you, Dr. Conde.

Conde: Sure.

Mirtha: Because **I just noted down a few words in lunfardo** (...).

Conde: Alright. I am a bit scared, but...

Mirtha: What are you scared of? Don't be scared!

Conde: Well... that you might talk to me about words that I don't know, or that I might not know how to answer.

Mirtha: They are the usual ones, the common ones. **I remember, many years ago, I don't know which government it was, I think it was Onganía's, there was a tango called “Guardia vieja”,** but people had to call it “¡Cuidado, mamá!”.’

Throughout the lunch, *tango* appears again several times as Mirtha and her guests draw on their knowledge of *tango* lyrics to offer examples of lunfardisms. In (17), (18), and

³⁹ The title “*Guardia vieja*” is standard Spanish, and can be translated as ‘Old guard’. Mirtha is telling the anecdote that this title was censored for being a near homophone of the *lunfardo* words “¡Guarda, vieja!” (‘Look out, mum!’), and that then people came up with a similar title in standard Spanish, namely, “¡Cuidado, mamá!” (‘Look out, mum!’). The censorship of *lunfardo* words and *tango* lyrics did occur in Argentina, but the veracity of this anecdote has been refuted (Gobello, 1999, p. 128).

(19), they recite by heart the lines of the songs from which their examples were retrieved, and they even say the titles and authors of these *tango* songs:⁴⁰

(17) *Mirtha*: Mire, anoté algunas: “*percanta*”.

Conde: “*Percanta*”. Bueno, “*percanta*” es una palabra muy linda porque se relaciona con la tela del percal, que es la tela que usaban las chicas humildes...

Mirtha: [reciting tango song] “*Percanta que me amuraste...*”

Conde: ...para hacerse los vestidos. No se hacían vestidos de seda, sino de percal, y entonces...

Mirtha: Hay un tango [llamado] “*Percal*”, de Mores me parece... [sic]

Conde: Sí, claro.

Teté: Claro.

Ronnie: [Es un tango] hermoso.

Mirtha: [reciting tango song] “*Percanta que me amuraste, en lo mejor de mi vida...*”

Conde: ...y por eso [decimos] “*percanta*”, ¿no? Una “*percanta*” es una chica vestida de *percal*.

Teté: ¡Qué lindo!

‘*Mirtha*: Look, I noted down some words: “*percanta*”.

Conde: “*Percanta*”. Okay, “*percanta*” is a beautiful word because it is related to the percale fabric, which is the fabric that humble young women used to use...

Mirtha: [reciting tango song] “*Percanta, you abandoned me...*”

Conde: ...to make their dresses. They wouldn’t make dresses with silk, but with percale, and so...

Mirtha: There is a tango called “*Percal*”, I think it’s by Mores... [sic]

Conde: Yes, sure.

Teté: Sure.

Ronnie: [It’s a] beautiful [tango].

Mirtha: [reciting tango song] “*Percanta, you abandoned me in the prime of my life...*”

Conde: ...so that’s why [we say] “*percanta*”, ¿right? A “*percanta*” is a young woman dressed in percale.

⁴⁰ Not always accurately, though. The correct names and authors of the *tango* songs cited in (17), (18), and (19) are, respectively: *Mi noche triste* (‘My sad night’) (Catriota & Contursi, 1916), *Esta noche me emborracho* (‘This night I’ll get drunk’) (Discépolo, 1928), and *Balada para mi muerte* (‘Ballad for my death’) (Piazzolla & Ferrer, 1968) (<https://tango.info> and <http://www.todotango.com>).

Teté: How beautiful!

(18) Teté: ¿“*Fané y descangallada*” también?

Conde: Eso es [de un tango] de Discépolo, ¿no?

Mirtha: ¿Cuál [palabra], Teté?

Teté: [reciting tango song] “*Fané y descangallada la vi en la madrugada...*”

Conde: Bueno, “*fané*” es una palabra francesa, quiere decir “*marchito*”, o “*marchita*”, es un participio. Y “*descangallada*” [‘deteriorated’] es una palabra que procede del gallego, ¿no? El verbo [gallego] “*escangallar*” sería... [interruption]

‘Teté: “*Fané and descangallada*” also?

Conde: That is [from a tango] by Discépolo, right?

Mirtha: Which [word], Teté?

Teté: [reciting tango song] “*Fané and descangallada I saw her in the small hours...*”

Conde: Well, “*fané*” is a French word, it means “*withered*”, it is a participple. And “*descangallada*” [‘deteriorated’] is a word that comes from Galician, right? The [Galician] verb “*escangallar*” would mean... [interruption]’

(19) Ronnie: Tengo otra [palabra]. Horacio Ferrer cuando dice “*mi puñado de esplín*”, en [el tango] “*Morir en Buenos Aires*” [sic], ¿qué es?

Conde: Sí, “*esplín*”.

Mirtha: Esa es inglesa, “*esplín*”, ¿no? ¿O no?

Conde: Sí, la palabra “*esplín*” es una palabra inglesa.

Mirtha: ¿Qué es? ¿“*Recuerdo*”? ¿“*Recuerdo*”? ¿“*Añoranza*”? ¿“*Recuerdo*”?

Conde: No, “*melaconlía*” sería.

Mirtha: “*Melancolía*”.

Conde: Sí, es una palabra que, sin embargo, siendo inglesa, la hizo famosa un gran poeta francés.⁴¹ Hay un libro [de este poeta] que se llama “*El spleen de París*”, y de ahí todos los tangueros empezaron a usar la palabra “*esplín*”.

‘Ronnie: I have another [word]. When Horacio Ferrer says “*my fistful of esplín*” in [the tango] “*To die in Buenos Aires*” [sic], what does it mean?

Conde: Okay, “*esplín*”.

Mirtha: That one is English, “*esplín*”, right? Or is it not?

⁴¹ The French poet in question is Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867).

Conde: Yes, the word *esplín* is an English word.

Mirtha: What is it? A “*memory*”? “*Memory*”? “*Yearning*”? “*Memory*”?

Conde: No, it would be “*melancholy*”.

Mirtha: “*Melancholy*”.

Conde: Yes, and although it is an English word, it was made famous by a great French poet. There is a book [by this poet] that is called “*Paris Spleen*”, and from there all tango people began to use the word “*esplín*”.

The abiding presence of *tango* lyrics in the collective memory of Porteños makes it possible for them to access *lunfardo* words which they don’t use anymore, or whose meanings they ignore, as illustrated above with the words “*percanta*” (‘young woman’), “*fané*” (‘withered’), “*descangallada*” (‘deteriorated’), and “*esplín*” (‘melancholy’).

Conde estimates there are a total of approximately 6000 *lunfardo* words, of which 1200 have fallen into disuse, and 300 are not recognizable by speakers under 50 (Conde, 2013, p. 81). This means that an important portion of *lunfardo* words lie outside the competence of Porteños; however, it also means that the great majority of these words remain in usage.

4.5.4 The status of new words

Because *lunfardo* words are largely perceived as “descended from the ships”, and as being lexical relics preserved in *tango* lyrics, Porteños are often conflicted about the *lunfardo* status of newly emerged words. As illustrated in (20) and (21):

(20) *Teté:* ¿Y [creadas] ahora hay también palabras? Porque ahora hay toda una generación con muchas palabras, ¿no?

‘*Teté:* Are there words [created] these days? Because there is a whole generation with many words, right?’

(21) *Mirtha:* Porque antes se empleaban más los...estos...estas palabras, ¿no?

Conde: Bueno, muchos lunfardismos han caído en desuso. Pero, como decía Teté recién, muchos han surgido a partir de los años 40, 50, 60...

Mirtha: El tango influyó mucho, ¿no? Muchísimo.

Oscar: Sí, claro.

Rolando: ¿Y se siguen incorporando— digamos—se siguen incorporando palabras?

Oscar: Sí, absolutamente.

Rolando: Por ejemplo, hay toda una generación de delincuentes actuales que usa sus propias palabras. Porque tienen lenguaje *tumbero* [roughly, ‘prison slang’]. ¿Eso lo siguen tomando como lunfardo?

‘*Mirtha*: All these words were used more in the past, right?’

Conde: Well, many lunfardo words have fallen into disuse. But, like Teté was just saying now, many have appeared after the 40s, 50s, 60s...

Mirtha: Tango was quite influential, right? Really influential.

Oscar: Yes, of course.

Rolando: And words continue to be incorporated?

Oscar: Yes, absolutely.

Rolando: For example, there is a whole generation of criminals these days that use their own words. They have *tumbero* language [roughly, ‘prison slang’]. Is that still considered to be lunfardo?’

4.5.5 Semantic explication of *lunfardo* (Section [C])

For the explication of *lunfardo*, I propose section [C], capturing a widely shared knowledge that relates *lunfardo* and *tango*:

[C] *lunfardo* and *tango* [partial explication of *lunfardo*]

- a. people can hear many words of this kind when they hear one kind of music [m],
 people can say what this kind of music [m] is with the word *tango*,
- b. people don't say many of these words anymore,
 they don't know [m] many of these words anymore

Component (a) captures the shared knowledge that people can hear many *lunfardo* words in one kind of music, and that they can jointly identify this kind of music with the word *tango*.⁴² Component (b) captures the perception that many of these words have fallen into

⁴² *Tango* is therefore not recruited as a molecule here, but as a “word sign”, like *laburo*, *mina*, and *guita* in section [A] of the explication. Unlike these, however, *tango* does not function here as an exemplar (salient example), and therefore it is not marked with the notation “*”.

disuse ('people don't say many of these words anymore'), and that people are no longer familiar with them ('they don't know [m] many of these words anymore').

4.6 Metapragmatic components in *lunfardo*

The final section of the semantic explication of *lunfardo* concerns speakers' knowledge of certain shared attitudes towards the use of *lunfardo* words, or what I will refer to as the metapragmatics encapsulated in the word *lunfardo*. This metapragmatics, I will argue, condenses the two currents of discourse around which *lunfardo* evolved: (a) the one which construed it as a deviant, inferior form of language, used by criminals and the uneducated, and (b) the one which has viewed *lunfardo* in positive terms, as an offspring of immigration, and as a distinctively expressive, culture-rich word repertoire.

4.6.1 Stigmatizing discourses

Despite the efforts of people like Gobello, *lunfardo* has never freed itself from the stigmatizing discourses in which it originally emerged. Some prominent Argentine linguists (e.g. Fontanella de Weinberg, 1983; Lavandera, 1976; Martorell de Laconi, 2002a, 2002b) have staunchly defended the thesis that *lunfardo* originated as a vocabulary of criminals and/or the penitentiary system. However, as Conde (2011a, 2011b, 2013) observes, these linguists' positions are not based on concrete reasons, but on the early work of criminal researchers who were not able to see that the vocabulary they noted down was also being used beyond the criminal circles that they were studying.

Historically, dictionary definitions of *lunfardo* have also described it as a crime-related vocabulary (e.g. AAL, 2008; RAE, 1992). Take, for example, a definition of *lunfardo* offered not long ago in *Real Academia Española's* prestigious DLE dictionary (RAE, 1992, p. 902):

(22) Jerga que originalmente empleaba, en la ciudad de Buenos Aires y sus alrededores, la gente de mal vivir. Parte de sus vocablos y locuciones se difundieron posteriormente en las demás clases sociales y en el resto del país.

'Jargon originally used by undesirables in the city of Buenos Aires and its surroundings. Some of its terms and expressions later spread to other social classes and the rest of the country.'

Although today's Porteños no longer conceive *lunfardo* as jargon used by “undesirables”, some of their attitudes towards the use of *lunfardo* words seem to be reflective of this early conception. For example, in (23), Mirtha finds it quite astounding that “*gente bien*” (roughly, ‘well-off/decent people’),⁴³ people who are “*leída*” (‘well-read’), and “*informada*” (‘well-informed’), use the lunfardism “*laburo*” (‘work’). For her, standard Spanish “*trabajo*” (‘work’) is more appropriate for these well-informed, decent classes:

(23) *Mirtha*: Teté, la gente no dice más [stand.] “*trabajo*”.

Teté: No, [dice] [lunf.] “*laburo*”.

Mirtha: “*Laburo*” dice, “*laburo*”. Pero **gente bien**.

Fátima: Sí.

Conde: **De todos los niveles sociales.**

Fátima: Sí, es verdad.

Mirtha: **Gente bien en el sentido de que es gente informada. Gente “leída”,** como se decía antes.

Conde: Sí, tal cual.

Mirtha: Y dicen “*laburo*”. ¡Qué notable! No existe más la palabra “*trabajo*”. Viene de “*lavoro*”, ¿no? Del italiano.

Conde: Sí, sí, “*laburo*” viene del toscano. De “*lavoro*”.

Mirtha: Teté, people don't say *trabajo* [stand. ‘work’] anymore.

Teté: No, [they say] “*laburo*” [lunf. ‘work’].

Mirtha: They say “*laburo*”. And it's **well-off, decent people**.

Fátima: Yes.

Conde: **[People] from all social classes.**

Fátima: Yes, it's true.

Mirtha: **I mean, it's decent people in the sense that they are well-informed people. “Well-read” people,** as they said in the old days.

Conde: Yes, sure.

Mirtha: And they say “*laburo*”. How remarkable! The word “*trabajo*” does not exist anymore.

“*Laburo*” comes from “*lavoro*”, from Italian, right?

⁴³ The Spanish term *gente bien* (roughly, ‘well-off/decent people’), composed of the terms *gente* (‘people’) and *bien* (‘good’), implies that well-off people are good, and that lower-class people are bad (Conde, 2011a, p. 127).

Conde: Yes, yes, “*laburo*” comes from Tuscan. From “*lavoro*”.’

In (24), the *lunfardo* word *tujes* (roughly, ‘ass’) is met with the approval and laughter of Mirtha’s guests, but it takes Mirtha to observe that “*speaking with lunfardo words is not elegant*”:

(24) Conde: “*Tujes*” también es palabra del yiddish.

Fátima: Ay, “*tujes*” es muy divertido. “*Me va como el tujes*” cuando [alguien] dice. [Laughter].

Mirtha: **Yo sabía que íbamos a caer en esto. ¡Estaba segura! En algún momento, vamos a ir a esto.** Que [Conde] lo dice aquí en el libro.

Ronnie: [Ya íbamos] a llegar a las palabras...

Mirtha: **¡Y a algunas peores!**

Conde: Bueno, sí, sí, pero...

Mirtha: Bueno, son las [palabras] que se usan. Pero **no es elegante hablar en...con palabras lunfardas, ¿no?**

‘Conde: Also “*tujes*” is a word from Yiddish.

Fátima: Yes! “*Tujes*”, it’s so funny. Like when [someone] says “*My life is going bad, like the tujes*”.

[Laughter].

Mirtha: **I knew we would end up here, I was convinced! At any time, we would end up here.** [Conde] talks about this in his book!

Ronnie: [We would finally] arrive at these words...

Mirtha: **And even at some worse words.**

Conde: Well, yes, yes, but...

Mirtha: Well, these are the words that are used. But **it is not elegant to speak in...with lunfardo words, is it?**

Conde’s reply to Mirtha is instructive and well-substantiated:

(25) Bueno, pero a esta altura, eh, la mayor parte de los hablantes utilizan palabras lunfardas y ni siquiera se dan cuenta de que las están usando, ¿no? En esta mesa yo tomaba nota recién, se dijo: “*relojear*” [‘peep’], “*infumable*” [‘obnoxious’], “*cajetilla*” [‘dandy’], “*chorear*” [‘steal’], “*cartonero*” [‘cardboard collector’]. Son todas palabras lunfardas, todas las usamos naturalmente y no tiene nada de malo. Porque mucha gente piensa que por ahí usar una

palabra lunfarda es algo grosero... no necesariamente. Las groserías o los insultos van por otro lado.

‘Well, but, at this point, uh, most speakers use *lunfardo* words and they don't even notice that they are doing so, right? I was just taking notes at this table, and these words were said: “*relojear*” [‘peep’], “*infumable*” [‘obnoxious’], “*cajetilla*” [‘dandy’], “*chorear*” [‘steal’], “*cartonero*” [‘cardboard collector’]. These are all *lunfardo* words, we use all of them in a natural way and there is nothing wrong with them. Many people think that maybe using a *lunfardo* word is vulgar...not necessarily. Vulgarities or insults are another thing.

Conde may be right, and everybody at the table agrees with him, and yet negative attitudes as expressed by Mirtha prevail.

4.6.2 Positive metapragmatics

Note that earlier, in (24), Mirtha reacts negatively to the word *tujes* (roughly, ‘ass’), but Fátima celebrates people’s use of that word, finding it “*divertido*” (‘funny’). By using *lunfardo* words (or indeed, by speaking *in lunfardo*), Porteños can be playful in ways that don't seem to be possible via standard Porteño words. In relation to this and other valued functions afforded by *lunfardo* words, Conde writes (2011a, pp.110-111):

Nadie reclamaría un aumento de sueldo a su jefe alegando que no le alcanza la *guita*, pero alguien podría en cambio decirles a sus amigos que no tiene *guita* para salir. En suma, cuando se usa un lunfardismo, por lo general se lo hace en pleno conocimiento de su equivalente en la lengua estándar, de modo que por razones estilísticas o expresivas, con intención transgresora o lúdica, o para explicitar cierta intimidad o confianza con el otro, puede decirse *quilombo* en lugar de *lío*, *pucho* en lugar de *cigarrillo* o *péndex* en lugar de *joven*.

‘Nobody would ask their boss for a pay raise arguing that they are not getting enough *guita* [lunf. ‘money’], but someone may tell a friend that there is no *guita* to go out. In short, when people use a word from lunfardo, they generally do it knowing the equivalent in the standard language, such that, for stylistic or expressive reasons, with transgressive or playful intentions, or to make intimacy or trust in the other person explicit, one can say *quilombo* instead of *lío* [‘mess’], *pucho* instead of *cigarrillo* [‘cigarette’], or *péndex* instead of *jóven* [‘young’].’

The playful dimension of *lunfardo* words is often realized via a kind of wordplay called *vesre*. *Vesre* is a form of syllabic inversion in which (typically) the order of the syllables of a (*lunfardo* or standard Spanish) word is reversed, e.g. *zabeca* is *vesre* for *cabeza* ('head'), *dorima*, for *marido* ('husband'), *bolonqui*, for *quilombo* ('a mess'), *dolobu* for *boludo* ('moron'), *lleca*, for *calle* ('street'), and *feca*, for *café* ('coffee'); the term *vesre* itself is an inversion of *revés* ('backward') (Conde, 2014). Note that many widely used *vesres* are specialised cases, e.g. *vesre* for *boludo* ('moron') is not *dolubo*, but *dolobu*. Also, many *vesres* take on a different propositional meaning altogether, e.g. *jermu*, which is the *vesre* for *mujer* ('woman'), means 'wife' (Conde, 2014).⁴⁴

The last point to make about Porteños' positive attitudes towards the use of *lunfardo* words relates to arguments I presented in §§4.4-4.5. Recall that, for Porteños, *lunfardo* words are largely perceived as "descended from the ships" (§4.4.), and are inextricably associated with the artform of *tango*, which itself is a product of the European immigration wave (§4.5). As a result, *lunfardo* words have the capacity to convey a shared sense of Argentine identity with European roots, and also a much-valued *tango*-like aesthetics, with words that "voice" the poetry of *tango* songs, as it were. These two functions, I believe, were made evident in most of my examples from Mirtha's show.

4.6.3 Semantic explication of *lunfardo* (Section [D])

I propose the following section [D] to capture the metapragmatic knowledge condensed in the word *lunfardo*:

[D] metapragmatic awareness [partial explication of *lunfardo*]

- a. many people think like this:
- b. "often it is good when people say things with words of this kind
at time like this, they can feel something good if they say these words,
they can feel something good if they hear these words
- c. sometimes it can be bad if someone says things with words of this kind
at times like these, some people can feel something bad if they hear these words

⁴⁴ Porteño *vesre* has the same rules for word formation as *verlan*, which is a form of wordplay in French. The French name is derived from the phrase *à l'envers* ('in reverse') (Conde, 2014, p. 57).

these people can think like this:

“this someone can say the same with other words”

The section captures the speaker’s knowledge of certain widely shared attitudes towards *lunfardo*, as signaled in component (a). Component (b) renders the metapragmatic knowledge that using *lunfardo* words is generally deemed ‘good’ by speakers, and that it promotes good feelings among speakers. As noted earlier, there are multiple reasons why this is generally so—*lunfardo* words may convey a sense of identity, trust, fun, intimacy, etc.

In addition, speakers know that there are certain situations where the use of *lunfardo* may trigger a negative outcome. In these contexts, some people may deem the use of *lunfardo* words to be ‘bad’, and they may do so for various possible reasons noted earlier—*lunfardo* words are considered to be vulgar, coarse, inelegant, too intimate, etc. Whatever the reason(s) may be, it is known that ‘other words’ (standard, elegant, formal, official, words) would be preferred.

4.7 Full semantic explication of *lunfardo*

The entire explication with its four sections—[A], [B], [C] and [D]—reads as follows:

lunfardo

[A] semantic core

- a. many words of one kind,
 one of these words is *laburo**, another of these words is *mina**,
 another is *guita**, there are many other words of this kind
- b. people in Buenos Aires [m] know [m] many of these words,
 they often say many of these words
- c. people in other places in Argentina [m] know [m] many of these words,
 they often say many of these words
- d. people can say something about many things with words of this kind,
 like people can say something about many things with other words

[B] language contact

(Thesis)

- a. many words of this kind are like words people say in Italy [m],
others are like words people say in some other countries [m] in Europe [m]
- b. it is like this because of this:

(Act 1)

- c. - a long time ago, many people in these countries [m] wanted to live in Argentina [m]
many lived in Italy [m], many lived in Spain [m],
many lived in other countries [m] in Europe [m]

(Act 2)

- d. - after this, these people lived in Argentina [m] for a long time,
many of them lived in Buenos Aires [m]
- e. - often, when these people wanted to say something,
they said it with words people say in Italy [m],
they said it with words people say in these other countries in Europe [m]
- f. - because of this, people in Buenos Aires [m] often heard these words,
after some time, many could often say something with these words

[C] lunfardo and tango

- a. people can hear many words of this kind when they hear one kind of music [m],
people can say what this kind of music [m] is with the word *tango*,
- b. people don't say many of these words anymore,
they don't know [m] many of these words anymore

[D] metapragmatic awareness

- a. many people think like this:
- b. "often it is good when people say things with words of this kind
at time like this, they can feel something good if they say these words,
they can feel something good if they hear these words
- c. sometimes it can be bad if someone says things with words of this kind
at times like these, some people can feel something bad if they hear these words
these people can think like this:
"this someone can say the same with other words"

4.8 Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I looked into a highly-complex Porteño key word about words: *lunfardo*. A review revealed that there have been various technical, obscure, changing, and, at times, contradictory descriptions of *lunfardo* in the literature. Even so, the word seems to have a contemporary meaning that is shared by most speakers, and that can be paraphrased in NSM terms. An important finding was that the concept of *lunfardo* tells us not only something about the way Porteños construe the Argentine linguistic world, but also something about how they construe people and places that they associate with that linguistic world.⁴⁵ This was captured across the four sections of the explication, which I now summarize.

The first section captured the understanding of *lunfardo* as a vast, rich collection of words known and used primarily in Buenos Aires, and, to a lesser extent, in other places in Argentina. In addition, this first section involved a component through which speakers construe the vast *lunfardo* repertoire as having wide expressive potential and semantic scope. These qualities, I argued, invite speakers to think of *lunfardo* as being like a *idioma* ('language'), in spite of academic objections to this understanding.

The second section of the explication compressed a historical narrative involving European migration to Argentina and the consequent language contact in that country. This narrative concludes with a "thesis" component expressing that many *lunfardo* words are like words from Italian and other European languages which came to Argentina during the immigration period. With the concept of *lunfardo*, then, people can think of most *lunfardo* (and, by extension, Argentine) words as being essentially "descended from the ships" (despite evidence to the contrary). In other words, *lunfardo* seems to perform with Argentine 'words' a function that is analogous to that one performed by "*Buenos Aires es la París...*" and "*Los argentinos descenden...*" with Argentine 'places' and 'people', respectively.

⁴⁵ It is not within the scope of my thesis to do cross-cultural ethnopragsmatics, so I will restrict myself to only raising the following questions: What do the counterparts of *lunfardo* in other Latin American speech communities tell us about the way they construe their linguistic worlds? What do, for example, Brazilians mean with *gíria*, Chileans with *coa*, Colombians with *parlache*, and Peruvians with *jeringa*? What do Americans or Londoners mean with *slang*, Parisians with *argot*, and Quebecois with *joual*? How are people and places construed in each of these terms? All these questions are worthy of exploration.

In the third section of the explication, *lunfardo* is conceptualized as a vocabulary which is characteristic of, and preserved in, *tango* music. Given this salient relation to *tango*, *lunfardo* appears to speakers as largely consisting of words that people don't know/use anymore (even if the majority of *lunfardo* words are of current use). This section of the explication also invites speakers to think of *lunfardo* as words which “voice” the poetry of historical *tango* songs.

The fourth and final section of the explication encodes metapragmatic knowledge: speakers can deem the use of *lunfardo* words as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’. To a great extent, these attitudes reflect two historical currents of discourse around *lunfardo*: an early one, which disparaged and criminalized it, and a later one, which valued it as an offspring of the European immigration wave, and as a distinctively expressive, culture-rich repertoire of words.

Chapter 5. Porteño sociality and social categories: *viveza criolla, vivo, and boludo*

5.1 Introduction

This chapter uses the NSM approach to explore the semantics of three interrelated cultural keywords in Porteño Spanish: *viveza criolla*, *vivo*, and *boludo*. *Viveza criolla* has been variously translated as “native wit” (Wilson, 2007, p. 38), “native wit and cunning” (Persico, 2016, p. 91), “creole cunning”, and “artful lying or cheating” (France, 1999, p. 27); the keyword *vivo* as “clever, vivacious” (Wilson, 2007, p. 38); and *boludo* as “moron” and “dumb-ass” (Persico, 2016, p. 16). However, it will become evident throughout this chapter that none of these glosses can capture the exact meanings and logic that guide Porteños when they use these words.

In Argentina, *viveza criolla* is both despised as a national curse and embraced as an exceptional Argentine quality. One can encounter it anywhere in the country, but it manifests in everyday interaction primarily in Buenos Aires, where it first emerged. Anything in this city, from verbal exchanges to drivers’ behaviour in traffic jams to *tango* and football, may contain traces of *viveza* (the form the keyword is often shortened to). Yet despite the pervasiveness of *viveza criolla* in so many disparate domains, or rather by virtue of it, the concept remains elusive for cultural outsiders.

Wherever there is *viveza criolla*, there are also people of two complementary kinds implied. Among the vast number of words that Porteños have devised to identify the two kinds, the social category words *vivo* and *boludo* stand out today as the most prominent. It is not an exaggeration to assert, as Porteños often do, that *vivos* and *boludos* abound in Buenos Aires, or rather, as the logic in those words dictates, that people have no choice but to be one or the other.

The chapter is structured as follows. In §5.2, I look at *viveza criolla*. In §5.2.1, I put *viveza* in historical context, pointing out its original link to Porteño *criollo* culture, opposed to the alien immigrants’ culture. In §5.2.2, I discuss definitions of *viveza* in dictionaries. I show that these definitions are conceptually inaccurate and circular, if not altogether absent. By discussing them, however, I pave the way for a more detailed semantic analysis in §5.2.3, which attends to word usage in paradigmatic examples of

viveza. In §5.2.4, I propose NSM explications for two meanings of the term *viveza criolla* that emerge from the analysis. In §5.3, I turn to *boludo* and *vivo*. In §5.3.1, I note a couple of caveats and set the scope for the study of those words. In §5.3.2, I look critically at definitions in dictionaries. In §5.3.3, I present a semantic analysis of *boludo*, followed by an NSM explication in §5.3.4. In §5.3.5, I present a semantic analysis of *vivo*, followed by an NSM explication in §5.3.6. This is followed by some concluding remarks. The explications are supported with evidence from common sayings, fixed expressions, dictionary definitions, news articles, *tango* lyrics, tweets, TV programmes, essays, travel literature, and travel guides.

5.2 *Viveza criolla*

5.2.1 *Porteña* and *criolla*: a long-standing tradition

To understand *viveza criolla*, one must again step back to late 19th century Buenos Aires. The Argentine state had opened its doors to massive immigration in pursuit of the Porteño ruling elite's dream of a nation with "civilized", European values and people (Shumway, 1991). Between 1871 and 1914, nearly 6 million immigrants flooded Argentina, and Buenos Aires became the largest metropolis in Latin America as its population multiplied nine times (Lewis, 2003, pp. 54–55). But the Porteño dominant classes' European dream did not quite materialize: the much-desired "civilized" workers (i.e. German, French, British, and Swiss workers) were vastly outnumbered by Southern and Eastern Europeans, mostly Italians of peasant background (Shumway, 1991; Cara, 2011). They had fled from war, poverty, and political turmoil, and, to the elite's dismay, seemed to bring anything but the seeds of unified national harmony. The work culture and skills of the newcomers were nevertheless valued, so discontent in the Porteño working classes grew as well: now, they had to compete against the overwhelmingly male immigrants for jobs, housing, and women (Cara, 2011).

Fearing disintegration, Porteño society sought unity by embracing—and constructing—a *criollo* culture, that is, a national culture rooted in local traditions, to be distinguished from the alien culture of the immigrants. The unifying descriptor *criollo* began to be applied to a variety of cultural forms, from *tango* to popular literature to traditional aspects of rural life, including the figure of the hitherto poorly regarded *gaucho*

(‘rural man’), and, in doing so, these forms were marked as expressions of the local culture and way of life (Cara, 2011; Pite, 2016).⁴⁶

One such expression of *criollo* culture that strongly emerged in the popular sectors was *viveza criolla*, which was performed against the immigrant in particular. In *Psicología de la viveza criolla* (‘The psychology of *viveza criolla*’), the only in-depth study on the topic, sociologist Julio Mafud (1965) relates:

Ante esa opresión social y económica los hombres de aquí tenían que reaccionar de algún modo y reaccionaron a través de la viveza. Al quedar fuera de competencia, el nativo recurrió a la viveza criolla como arma de lucha contra los que venían mas allá del charco grande, que es el océano. Esto explica también el por qué la reacción psicológica se expresó con toda su violencia en Buenos Aires, donde el nuevo tipo de vida fue mas total y la lucha por la existencia mas aguda. (...) [La viveza criolla] tampoco casi tuvo vigencia en las zonas del interior. Todavía hoy en las provincias del interior la llaman viveza porteña y no criolla por considerarla peculiar de la capital. (pp. 113–114)

‘Faced with that social and economic oppression, the men from here had to react in some way and they reacted through *viveza*. Unable to compete, the native drew on *viveza criolla* as a weapon against those who kept coming from across the pond, which is the ocean. This explains also why the psychological reaction expressed itself at its strongest in Buenos Aires, where the new way of life was more total and the struggle for existence more acute. (...) [*Viveza criolla*] didn’t have the same validity in the interior regions of the country. Even today, in the provinces of the interior, they call it *viveza porteña* and not *criolla* because they regard it as peculiar to the capital.’

Now, *viveza criolla* was not the innate gift of those who were Porteño by birth, but a transmissible and learnable cultural form, just like other forms of *criollo* culture (Cara, 2011). Immigrants who sought to thrive in the new society could likewise perform and

⁴⁶ The word *criollo* (fem. *criolla*) had enjoyed a wide range of senses across Spanish America throughout the colonial period. Primarily, it had been used to describe a person as born in the New World from European or African parents, and as therefore belonging to a lower rank. The term was also applied to animals or plants of European origin that thrived on American soil. With the emergence of Latin-American states in the 1800s, *criollo/a* became a way of saying that someone or something is national (Arrom, 1951; Cara, 2011; Pite, 2016).

display *viveza*, and, in doing so, prove they had become *criollo* or, as Argentines have it, had been able to “*acriollarse*”:

Lo hacían impelidos por una necesidad intrínseca: en sus espaldas se iban quemando las naves que los vinculaban con sus padres. Sin nada detrás y empedrado de vacíos su adelante, tenían que conquistar a codazos su espacio vital. Entonces, no pensaban en los medios. Ni tampoco en las formas. La *viveza* siempre era el camino que los entubaba más rápido hacia su fin. En última instancia, la *viveza* los ponía en pie de igualdad con los otros y no los inferiorizaba. *Ser vivo era la mejor forma de acriollarse y adquirir prestigio.* (Mafud, 1965, p. 118)

‘They did it impelled by an intrinsic need: the bridges that linked them with their parents were burning right in front of them. With nothing behind them and only emptiness ahead, they had to shove their neighbors aside. Therefore, they didn’t worry about their methods or their means. It was *viveza* that tunneled them faster towards their goal. It was *viveza* that put them on an equal footing with others, and not inferior to the others. *Being vivo was the best way of becoming criollo [acriollarse] and acquiring prestige.*’

Before long, *viveza criolla* crossed the city boundaries and penetrated in the country’s provinces of the *interior*, where it became widely practised. The Porteño provenance of *viveza*, however, has never been a matter in dispute. In his book-length essay *El atroz encanto de ser argentinos* (‘The atrocious charm of being Argentine’), public intellectual Marcos Aguinis (2002) devotes an entire chapter to *viveza*; even if he considers it as one of the traits of the Argentine mentality, he stresses from the outset where that trait is originally from:

Se la conoce como *viveza criolla*, pero es la *viveza argentina* frecuentada por todas las capas psicosociales y extendida a la totalidad del territorio nacional, aunque en sus comienzos haya predominado en Buenos Aires. Resulta una expresión incomprensible para quien no la haya experimentado—o sufrido—. Refleja o encubre habilidades y miserias. Juega con los equívocos, hace reír y hace llorar, por un lado eleva y por el otro humilla. (p. 81)

‘It is known as *viveza criolla*, but it is the *Argentine viveza* common to all psychosocial strata and extending to the entire territory of the nation, although in origin it was predominant in Buenos Aires. It is an incomprehensible expression for anyone who has not experienced it—or suffered from it. It reflects and covers up abilities and miseries. It plays with equivocation, it makes us laugh and cry; on the one hand, it elevates, on the other, it humiliates.’

Argentines lay claim to *viveza criolla*, but rightly so do Venezuelans, in whose country the same word with a similar meaning has wide currency. In Brazil, *viveza*'s counterpart takes the form of *jeitinho* (roughly, 'little way/knack'), in Peru, of *criollada* (roughly, 'creole action'), and, in Colombia, of *malicia indígena* (roughly, 'indigenous malice'). Space precludes contrastive examination to explore similarities and differences between the semantics and discursive behaviors of *viveza* and these other terms.

5.2.2 *Viveza* in dictionaries

The *Academia Argentina de Letras*' (AAL, 2019) *Diccionario de la lengua de la Argentina* (hereafter DiLA) aims to be the most comprehensive register of the Argentine Spanish lexicon, and yet *viveza criolla* does not have an entry in it. But when dictionaries do grant *viveza* the place it deserves, definitions often leave much to be desired. To back up this statement, and also to pave the way for a sound analysis of *viveza*, I will explore definitions of the word in three prestigious dictionaries: Gobello and Oliveri's (2013) *Novísimo diccionario lunfardo* (hereafter NDL), *Real Academia Española*'s (RAE, 2014) *Diccionario de la lengua española* (hereafter DLE), and the *Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española*'s (ASALE, 2010) *Diccionario de americanismos* (hereafter DiAm). NDL is a *lunfardo* dictionary, DLE is a dictionary of words used in Spain and Spanish-speaking countries, and DiAm focuses on words used in the Spanish-American world.

When consulting *viveza* in NDL, one would expect it to receive special treatment, as the word possesses certain prototypically *lunfardo* traits: it descends from Peninsular Spanish, but has a different meaning in Porteño Spanish; it is not used in other Spanish varieties; importantly, it is related to semantic fields from which *lunfardo* hosts a vast number of words, or to which it has been historically associated, such as *engaño* ('deceit'), *delincuencia* ('crime'), *broma* ('prank'), *burla* ('mockery'), and *maldad* ('malice') (Conde, 2011a; Iribarren Castilla, 2009; see also Ch. 4 of this thesis).

It therefore comes as a surprise to find that *viveza* is not even given its own entry in NDL. It is instead treated within the entry for *vivo* (Gobello & Oliveri, 2013; p. 329), and its different senses are claimed to be Spanish- rather than *lunfardo*- or Argentine-specific:

Corre también **viveza**, pero sus acepciones corresponden al *cast.* [1] agudeza de ingenio, [2] dicho pronto e ingenioso; [3] por antífrasis acción o palabra irreflexiva. (numbering added)

‘**Viveza** is also used, but its senses correspond to *Peninsular Spanish* [1] acuteness of mind, [2] quick and ingenious remark; [3] by antiphrasis, thoughtless action or word.’

As a matter of fact, these definitions are almost exact reproductions of the DLE definitions given for *viveza*. In the first sense above ([1]), *viveza* loosely translates as ‘wits’ or ‘ingenuity’. The corresponding DLE definition reads: “*agudeza o perspicacia de ingenio*” (roughly, ‘acuteness or perspicacity of mind’). However, if we then look up *agudeza* and *perspicacia* (in the same dictionary), the meaning differences between these two words and *viveza* become blurred, as we get caught up in a web of definitional circularities. *Agudeza* is defined as “*perspicacia o viveza de ingenio*”, but this is practically the same as the definition for *viveza*, the difference being that those two words, *agudeza* and *viveza*, have swapped places.

If DLE’s definitions of *viveza* and *agudeza* send us around in circles, its definition of *perspicacia* as “*penetración de ingenio o entendimiento*” (roughly, ‘penetration of mind or understanding’) is no less problematic. For example, it follows that, if we replace *perspicacia* with its definiens (i.e. with the words used to define it), the definition for *viveza* would read “*agudeza, o penetración de ingenio o entendimiento, de ingenio*” (roughly, ‘acuteness, or penetration of mind or understanding, of mind’). The repetition of *ingenio* in this definition implies additional circularities, whereas that of the conjunction *o* (‘or’) reveals a failure to posit the invariant meaning of the term *viveza*.

The DLE definition of *ingenio* reads as follows:

facultad del ser humano para discurrir o inventar con prontitud y facilidad.

‘the human being’s faculty of thinking or inventing quickly and easily.’

While this definition offers a way out of the circular web in which *agudeza*, *viveza*, and *perspicacia* are nodes, it introduces other equally complex and hardly circular-free nodes, such as *facultad*, *discurrir*, and *prontitud*. No further consultation is necessary to affirm that the first definition of *viveza* in NDL, and also the one in DLE on which it is based, are marred by technical issues. What is more important, however, is that none of them seem to account for the concept of *viveza* as Argentines understand it: both definitions

aim to capture human faculties which are construed as culture-neutral and universal, and attributed to human beings as individuals. However, as the examples in the next section will show, *viveza criolla* always construes events and situations as primarily culture-specific and social: it entails a claim about Argentine society and culture, and it positions people in relation to other people (crucially, *viveza* is always *bad for other people*).

The second sense attributed to *viveza* in NDL corresponds to DLE's "*dicho agudo, pronto o ingenioso*" (roughly, 'acute, quick or ingenious remark'). If we look up the terms in this definition, we immediately lose ourselves in vicious circles of the kind shown above. Space limitations make it impossible to provide illustration. In what follows, I will also acknowledge a second sense for *viveza criolla*, but, again, I will argue that it cannot be framed in terms of *acuteness*, *ingenuity*, etc., because these terms miss the point of the Argentine meaning of the word, where events and situations are construed as social and culture-specific. Furthermore, as the examples will show, many things that are not *dichos* ('remarks') can nevertheless be likewise conceptualized as *vivezas* in this second sense of the word. The definitions in DLE and NDL are therefore over-specific.

The third sense suggested by NDL clearly results from gluing together two other senses given by DLE: "*acción poco considerada*" ('thoughtless action') and "*palabra que se suelta sin reflexión*" ('word that one thoughtlessly comes out with'). These senses seem unjustified: it is rather the rhetorical device—the cultural script—of antiphrasis mentioned in NDL's definition that calls for explication. It is by virtue of that cultural script that *viveza*, but many other words also, can take on their opposite meaning.

This brings us to the third of our dictionaries, DiAm, where *viveza criolla* is portrayed as an idiomatic expression used in Argentina, but also in Venezuela, Ecuador, Perú, Bolivia, and Uruguay. Its definition reads as follows:

Picardía para obtener provecho sin ningún esfuerzo o a expensas de los demás.

'Cunning that is used to take advantage without any effort or at the expense of others.'

The word *picardía* does not mean the same as *viveza criolla*, but it is semantically closer to it than *perspicacia*, *agudeza*, and *ingenio* (or combinations of those words). Unlike those words, both *viveza criolla* and *picardía* are personified in words for social categories, namely, *vivo* and *pícaro* (roughly, 'rogue'). The latter is the central character

of the Spanish 16th–17th centuries *novela picaresca* ('picaresque novel'). The *pícaro* is a social outsider who resorts to lying, stealing, and fraudulent cheating, or rather to his *picardías* ('rogueries'). In *Psicología de la viveza criolla*, Mafud (1965, pp. 105–112) presents the *pícaro* as the forerunner of the Argentine *vivo* and draws an extensive parallel between those two kinds of people. Like *viveza criolla*, *picardía* could therefore also be said to be rich in social meaning, in that it, too, establishes specific relations between people, as correctly captured in the above component "at the expense of others". However, the component "without any effort" in the definition above is inadequate; for further discussion, with examples, see §5.2.3.

An important difference between *viveza criolla* and *picardía* is that the latter lacks any reference to a national culture. This explains why *picardía* may be attributed to any person, irrespective of his/her cultural background, as long as his/her deeds call for that attribution. *Viveza criolla*, on the other hand, insofar as it belongs exclusively in the stock of Argentine *criollo* culture, is available and ascribable to cultural insiders only.

5.2.3 The ubiquity of *viveza criolla*

In this section, I present and discuss paradigmatic examples of *viveza criolla*. The discussion will shed light on the exact meanings that guide Porteños when they use that word, and show how these meanings are in conflict with those proposed by dictionaries.

5.2.3.1 *La mano de Dios*

In the Mexico 1986 World Cup, Diego Maradona scored one of the most (in)famous goals in soccer history. The great Argentine legend, a little Porteño of 1.65 meters, had outjumped the 1.83-meter-tall English goalkeeper to gloriously head the ball into the back of the net—or so believed a majority of people in the Aztec stadium, including referees. The Argentine had in fact punched the ball in such skilled manner that the foul went unnoticed. The validated goal, later baptized by Maradona himself as *La mano de Dios* ('The hand of God'), is a national trophy that remains indelible in the Argentine memory.

The Argentine speaker can say that Maradona could perform his *Mano de Dios* because "*él tiene viveza criolla*" ('he has *viveza criolla*'). In this sense, *viveza criolla* designates *something* by virtue of which many people in Argentina, but not in other countries, can do things of a particular kind. The speaker may also construe the event of

La mano de Dios as precisely one thing of such kind, and then say about that thing: “*esto es una viveza criolla*” (‘this is a *viveza criolla*’); this is the second sense of the word. I will refer to the first and second senses as *viveza criolla*₁ and *viveza criolla*₂, respectively; I will not use any numbers in subscript in cases when what is said applies to both senses, or when it is obvious which of the two senses is being referred to.

Three observations about *La mano de Dios* are in order. First, it is regarded as a *viveza criolla*₂ par excellence, and yet Maradona used no words to accomplish it. Therefore, the category *dichos* (‘remarks’) used by dictionary definitions (see §5.2.2) over-specifies the range of applicability of *viveza criolla*₂. For something to be called a *viveza criolla*₂, what is crucial is that ‘someone does something’, and this may or may not be done with words.

Second, *La mano de Dios* shows that a *viveza criolla*₂ is done “at the expense of others”—as rightly stated in DiAm—or, to put it in cross-translatable terms, *viveza criolla*₂ ‘is bad for other people’. In this example, the people for whom it is bad are the English team, their supporters, etc.

Third, the example shows that a *viveza*₂ is not something necessarily done “without any effort”, as was also stated in that dictionary. A lack of effort is not what Argentines wish to pinpoint when they refer to *La mano de Dios* as a *viveza*₂. In fact, it is clear to all that it must have demanded a great effort from the little man to outjump the 1.83-meter-tall English goalkeeper.

The claim that a *viveza*₂ is done “without any effort” does not come from nowhere, though: the Argentine *vivo* is often discursively portrayed as someone who has other people—known as *boludos*, *giles*, *zonzos*, to name a few labels—make the effort that he is not willing to make (see e.g. Aguinis, 2002, p. 90). This trait is reflected in the common saying “*El vivo vive del zonzo, y el zonzo de su trabajo*” (roughly, ‘The *vivo* lives off the fool, and the fool off his job’). Argentine discourses linking *vivos*, *boludos*, *esfuerzo* (‘effort’), and *trabajo* (‘work’) will be explored with examples in Ch. 7, and captured via the cultural scripts technique.

Maradona is a full-fledged *vivo*, “the supreme embodiment of *viveza criolla*”, as put in the successful travelogue *Bad times in Buenos Aires* (France, 1999, p. 27). He can often surprise Argentines with truly original, novel displays of *viveza criolla*₁, as he did back then with his *Mano de Dios*. But something need not be regarded as original, new, or unique to be considered a *viveza criolla*₂. In fact, Maradona’s *Mano de Dios* has been

replicated by other players after him, and, deservedly so, *viveza criolla* was attributed in those cases as well. The examples that follow will show that, in the eyes of Argentines, the mundane can also be regarded as *viveza*.

5.2.3.2 Behind the wheel

Time-honoured *vivezas*₂ abound and are known to most Porteños. At the bank, there is *viveza* when someone jumps the long queue with the excuse that “*es una preguntita nada más*” (‘it’s just a question I want to ask’). In a traffic jam, a motorist will use some *viveza*₁ to overtake on the hard shoulder, and then again to park in a prohibited space. To succeed in the latter, some extra *viveza*₁ may be crucial, though. As reported, not without irony, in one of Argentina’s major newspapers, *La Nación* (Larrondo, 2014):

(1) Se trata de un Mini Cooper estacionado en la avenida Scalabrini Ortiz, entre Córdoba y Cabrera, sobre las marcas amarillas correspondientes al espacio para ubicar contenedores de basura. Además, el propietario, utilizando su *viveza criolla* al máximo, tomó la precaución de taparle la patente con papel para evitar multas a través de fotografías. Un vivo con todas las letras. (para. 2)

‘It’s a Mini Cooper parked in Scalabrini Ortiz Avenue, between Córdoba and Cabrera, on the yellow marking indicating space reserved for rubbish skips. Furthermore, the owner of the car, using his *viveza criolla* to the max, took the precaution of covering his number plate to avoid fines from traffic cameras. A fully-fledged vivo.’

Covering the number plate in prohibited parking, like jumping a queue or overtaking the hard shoulder, is a long-established, everyday *viveza*₂. Unlike *La mano de Dios*, its execution does not require any exceptional quality or dexterity. In construing any of these as a *viveza*₂, however, the *vivo* in question is automatically attributed a kind of exceptionality, paraphrasable in NSM terms as ‘this someone did something very well, not everyone can do something like this’. At the same time, and to many Argentines’ pride, *viveza criolla* implies that such an exceptional behaviour is a habitual practice in their country: ‘in Argentina we often do things like this’.

5.2.3.3 Subway *viveza*

In 2012, a subway fare increase from \$1.10 to \$2.50 was announced in Buenos Aires. The city's *vivos* seized their opportunity as only *vivos* can, or, to put it in local terms, “*se avivaron*”. If they could buy \$1.10 tickets, then they could resell them at a competitive price once the fare increase had been put into effect. So it happened, and a newspaper's headline published the day after read (“Viveza,” 2012):

(2) Viveza criolla: venden por internet viajes en subte a \$2

‘Viveza criolla: subway tickets sold on the internet for \$2’

A reader who did not agree with the headline's wording commented: “No es una *viveza*. Es un mercado secundario, legítimo y conveniente para todas las partes” (‘This is not a *viveza*. It is a secondary market, legitimate and convenient for all parties’). If a business is regarded as “convenient for all parties”, then it cannot be called *viveza*₂ at the same time because the latter implies, by definition, ‘something bad for other people’. Whether something is or is not bad is, however, up for discussion, and it is therefore arguable also whether something can be called *viveza*₂.

5.2.4 Semantic explications for *viveza criolla*

I propose the following NSM explications for the two senses of *viveza criolla*:

[A] *viveza criolla*₁ (e.g. We Argentines have *viveza criolla*₁)

a. something

people can say what this something is with this word: *viveza criolla*

people can say something about something with this word when they think like this:

b. “in Argentina [m] many people can do things of one kind, not like in other countries [m]

c. when someone does something of this kind, this someone thinks like this:

d. “if I do this in this way, something can happen because of it, it will be good for me”

e. people can think about it like this:

“it can be bad for other people if someone does something like this”

f. at the same time, they often think about it like this:

“this someone did something very well, not everyone can do something like this,

- in Argentina [m] we [m] often do things like this”
- g. when they think like this, they can feel something good because of this”

[B] *viveza criolla*₂ (e.g. This is a *viveza criolla*₂)

- a. (this is) something of one kind
- b. in Argentina [m] many people can do things of this kind, not like in other countries [m]
- c. when someone does something of this kind, this someone thinks like this:
- d. “if I do this in this way, something can happen because of it, it will be good for me”
- e. people can think about it like this:
 “it can be bad for other people if someone does something like this”
- f. at the same time, they often think about it like this:
 “this someone did something very well, not everyone can do something like this,
 in Argentina [m] we [m] often do things like this”
- g. when they think like this, they can feel something good because of this”

*Viveza criolla*₁ and *viveza criolla*₂ only differ in their opening components (identified as ‘a’). These opening components are based on templates proposed by Goddard and Wierzbicka (2014, pp. 205–237) for the explication of “abstract” and “concrete” nouns, respectively. In *viveza criolla*₂, i.e. the “concrete” sense of the word, component (a) suggests that the word is used to speak *about* something, and that this something spoken about can, in principle, be jointly identified and pointed at. In *viveza criolla*₁, the “abstract” sense, component (a) indicates that speakers say something *with the word* *viveza criolla*, not *about* something identified with that word. Rather than designating something tangible or localizable “out there”, *viveza criolla*₁ functions here as a lexical and discursive tool with which speakers can construe a particular complex scenario—namely components (b) to (g)—as ‘something’.

Component (b) establishes a special connection between *Argentina* and *viveza*, namely that it is in *Argentina* specifically that many people can do *vivezas*. Component (c) presents the agent of a *viveza* and introduces components (d) to (g) as the putative scenario for anything construed as something of that kind. The first component in this scenario captures minimally the goal-directed thought that takes someone to engage in *viveza*. It is a self-centered plan and, as such, it does not necessarily contemplate its bad

consequences for other people, even if these may be evident to other people (see component ‘e’).

The “celebratory” compound in components (f) and (g) conveys, in the form of a thought and an associated good feeling, the evaluative stance towards *viveza* that is shared by a collective subjectivity ‘they’ (which refers back to ‘people’ in component ‘e’). It singles out the person behind *viveza* from the larger group for having done something very well, but, at the same time, it regards what is done as habitual practice in Argentina.

Something components (f) and (g) do not predict is that the celebratory attitude of the larger group is shared also by the speaking subject: the speaker’s personal attitude towards *viveza* is not, at least in today’s use of the word, a built-in component in the semantics of that word. More often than not, however, people using the word will leave no doubt as to what their own stance is. When criticizing *viveza*, speakers will normally “take responsibility” for it by acknowledging being themselves members of the Argentine society that celebrates it. The pronouns *nosotros* (‘we’) (and/or corresponding verb conjugations) and *nos* (‘us’) and the adjective *nuestra* (‘our’) are often used to this end. The following extracts from newspaper articles illustrate this (bold added for emphasis):

- (3) **Los argentinos somos** conocidos por vivos. Pero lamentablemente en muchos casos esta cualidad no se refiere a pensamiento veloz o agudeza mental, sino a **nuestra** tristemente famosa viveza criolla, que tanto **nos** perjudica fuera de **nuestras** fronteras. (“La honradez,” 2003, para. 1)

‘**We Argentines are** well-known for being vivos. In many cases, unfortunately, this trait does not refer to quick-wittedness or acuteness of mind, but to **our** sadly famous viveza criolla, which does so much harm to **us** outside **our** borders.’

- (4) La famosa viveza **nuestra** que no **nos** lleva a ningún lugar. (Trenado, 2015, para. 2)

‘**Our** famous viveza that leads **us** nowhere.’

- (5) **Nosotros pensamos** que **nuestra** viveza criolla **nos** hace más grandes, y la verdad es que **nos** empobrece. (Yarroch, 2017, para. 10)

‘**We think** that **our** viveza criolla makes **us** greater, and truth is that it makes **us** poorer.’

Example (6) is from an interview with renowned neuroscientist Facundo Manes, conducted by Alejandro Fantino, host of a popular late-night talk show (jmoritz77, 2016). The interlocutors exchange different views on *viveza*:

(6) *Manes*: Nosotros [los argentinos] nos jactamos de la viveza criolla. Para mí la viveza criolla es parte del problema de este país.

Fantino: Me gusta eso, che. ¿Es parte del problema de este país la viveza criolla? Yo pensé que era un...

Manes: Obvio.

Fantino: Perdón, yo pensé que me tenía que golpear el pecho porque, al ser vivo y al tener esa viveza criolla, sobrevivo si me voy a vivir a Estados Unidos, sobrevivo en Francia. Esa viveza criolla me permite, eh, entro como lavabaños y termino como gerente general de Coca Cola si me voy a Estados Unidos.⁴⁷

‘*Manes*: We [Argentines] boast about *viveza criolla*. For me, *viveza criolla* is part of the problem with this country.

Fantino: Is it? I like that idea. *Viveza criolla* is part of the problem of this country?

Manes: Yes, obviously.

Fantino: I thought I had to thump my chest because, being *vivo*, and having that *viveza criolla*, I can survive if I go to live in the USA, I can survive in France. That *viveza criolla* enables me to, er, I start a job as a toilet cleaner and end up as CEO of Coca-Cola if I go to the USA.’

An openly praising stance like Fantino’s is less common in the public sphere today; he may well be playing devil’s advocate here. Repudiation of *viveza criolla* in the vein of Manes is instead the norm. As a matter of fact, a central element in the effective rhetoric of *Cambiemos* (‘Let’s change’)—Argentina’s then ruling political party, of which Manes was a supporter at the time of the exchange above—consisted precisely in the condemnation of *viveza criolla*, which they saw as epitomized by the corrupt Kirchner presidencies that had preceded them.

In the private sphere, a common attitude is to judge *vivezas* on a case-by-case basis according to whether they work or not in one’s favour: if it is *La mano de Dios*, then

⁴⁷ The full interview is on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yPO-T9xImko> (posted on 30 November 2016).

one's in-group favouritism for Argentina will be an overriding factor; if it is corruption by politicians, *viveza* is the curse that dooms Argentines to failure.

5.3 *Boludo and vivo*

5.3.1 Introduction

In his prologue to *Che Boludo! A Gringo's guide to understanding the Argentines*, American author James Bracken (2005) observes:

Argentines in particular ways seem to be just as aware of their own shortcomings as well as they are of other's. This keen sense of discernment is illustrated by the vast quantity of words used to accurately describe an idiot, a braggart, a liar, a scam or the quality of anything from personal character to household appliances. The Argentines use these words with such frequency and passion that the unsuspecting foreigner will eventually have to ask "What is a 'boludo' and why can't I find it in my Spanish dictionary?" (pp. 7-8)

Bracken's observation is well intentioned, but an English word like *scam* frames the issue from the perspective of the English language and culture, whereas *viveza*, like the "vast quantity of words" the author refers to, does it from the insiders' perspective. Similarly, while words like *braggart*, *liar*, and *idiot* may accurately describe the beneficiary and victim of a *scam*, local categories, tailored by and for Argentines, can best capture the two participants at play in *viveza criolla*.

The words *vivo* and *boludo*—the latter of which Bracken brings up—are the most prominent among such local categories, as the analyses in this section will show. But they are surely not the only ones: in *Psicología de la viveza criolla*, Mafud (1965, pp. 124–125) notes 24 words used for designating the beneficiary of *viveza*, and 55 words for designating the victim, and his list does not aim to be exhaustive.

Before exploring definitions of *boludo* and *vivo* in dictionaries, a couple of caveats need to be noted. The first one is that while both *boludo* and *vivo* are highly polysemous, I am only interested here in one sense of each of these words, namely, the one that is most directly relevant to *viveza criolla*. In these senses, *vivo* and *boludo* designate two opposite *social categories*. Words for social categories, I will propose, position people in relation to other people by virtue of a categorization into kinds with identifying traits, and NSM

explications are able to capture this.⁴⁸ If someone is said to be a *boludo*, and someone else a *vivo*, each of them is being categorized as a different ‘someone of one kind’, and the corresponding identifying traits for one and the other kind are being thereby attributed. The NSM explications in this section will capture radically opposite ways of thinking and acting attributed to *vivos* and *boludos* as their identifying traits. The explications will also predict the special relations these two kinds of people hold with each other, with *viveza criolla*, and with the larger Argentine society.

The second caveat is that while the social categories *boluda* and *viva* applied to women do exist, their meanings cannot be thought of as exact female counterparts of the male *vivo* and *boludo*. Their analysis is needed but lies outside the scope of this study. The focus here is only on the more frequent meanings *vivo* and *boludo*, originally conceived for men. Like *viveza*, these meanings have played an active part in the definition of gender stereotypes in the male chauvinist Argentine society. This becomes evident from the literature and word-usage examples covered in this and following chapters, but space precludes further discussion on the matter.⁴⁹

5.3.2 *Boludo* and *vivo* in dictionaries

5.3.2.1 Meet the *boludo*

Boludo is a word pervasively used by Porteños, and by a majority of Argentines today. At the 6th International Congress of the Spanish Language (2013), it was selected as the word that best represented Argentine Spanish. Porteño poet and Cervantes Prize awardee Juan Gelman, who was entrusted with the selection, was quoted in *La Nación* as saying:

- (7) Es un término muy popular y dueño de una gran ambivalencia hoy. Entraña la referencia a una persona tonta, estúpida o idiota; pero no siempre implica esa connotación de insulto o despectiva. En los últimos años me ha sorprendido la acepción o su empleo entre amigos, casi como un comodín de complicidad. Ha venido perdiendo el sentido insultante. Ha mutado a un lado más desenfadado, pero sin perder su origen. (Crettaz, 2013, para. 2)

⁴⁸ Recommended NSM studies of social category words across languages can be found in §2.2.1.1.

⁴⁹ In this and the following chapters, I will sometimes use the pronoun “he” (and its derived forms). This use is *not* generic, i.e. I use “he” to refer to males only.

‘It is a very popular term that possesses great ambivalence today. It involves reference to a dumb, stupid or idiotic person, but it does not always imply this derogatory or insulting connotation. In recent years, what has surprised me is its meaning or usage among friends as a wildcard for fellow-feeling. It has been gradually losing its insulting sense. It has mutated into a more lightweight term, but without losing its origin.’

Gelman is touching here on the two most frequent senses of *boludo*, each of which constitutes, in its own way, an indispensable conceptual tool in Argentina. In the first sense, *boludo* is an insult, or rather the Porteño insult par excellence. In the second, *boludo* is a term of address used in friendly interaction, as in “¿Cómo estás, *boludo*?” (‘How are you doing, *boludo*?’).

Persico’s Porteño Spanish-English dictionary (Persico, 2016, p. 16) glosses the first of these senses via various words, among these *moron*, *dumb-ass*, and *dipshit*, but these words have all different meanings. Monolingual Spanish dictionaries (e.g. DLE; DiLA; NDL) do the same, using words as different as *necio*, *estúpido*, *tonto*, *gilipollas*, and *imbécil* (roughly, ‘foolish’, ‘stupid’, ‘silly’, ‘dickhead’, and ‘idiot’), to name but a few.

As for the second sense of *boludo*, DiAm merely states that it is used among young Argentines to address a friend. Bracken’s dictionary points out that it is “used casually among friends” and that it has the “same definition” as the first sense, which is defined as “*fool, idiot*” (Bracken, 2005, p. 17). But if both senses have the same definition, then positing two senses is hardly justified. Bracken concludes, not without resignation, that the common expression *che boludo* “could be anything from ‘you idiot’ to ‘hey buddy’ depending on the context of the situation” (p. 17). However, to say that the meaning of an expression “could be anything depending on the context” is to throw the whole issue into the pragmatics wastebasket.

5.3.2.2 Meet the *vivo*

If *boludo* is highly polysemous, *vivo* is even more so. For the purposes of this study, a distinction must be made between two senses. The first sense, often overlooked by dictionaries, corresponds to the noun *vivo* and designates a social category. This is the sense I want to explicate. It is used, for example, in the following excerpt of *El atroz encanto de ser argentinos* (Aguinis, 2002):

(8) La viveza criolla nació en Buenos Aires. El resto del país no la aceptó como propia hasta que sus hazañas cundieron. Quien la ejerce se llama *vivo*. El *vivo* de Buenos Aires, después el *vivo* de cualquier localidad argentina. (p. 83)

‘Viveza criolla came into being in Buenos Aires. The rest of the country did not accept it as such until its feats started spreading. The one who practises it is called *vivo*. First the *vivo* from Buenos Aires, then the *vivo* from any Argentine locality.’

The second sense corresponds to the frequently used adjective *vivo* and is used to describe a socio-cognitive trait. Dictionaries define this sense via near-synonyms like *ingenioso* (‘ingenious’), *listo* (‘clever’), and *astuto* (‘astute’) (see e.g. DLE; NDL).

NDL offers three senses for *vivo* (Gobello & Oliveri, 2013). The first two are as follows:

1. Astuto, hábil para engañar o evitar el engaño, o para lograr artificiosamente cualquier fin
2. Bribón, doloso, pícaro. Por extensión del significado del cast. **vivo**, ingenioso, sutil (p. 329)

- ‘1. Astute, skilled in deceiving or avoiding deceit, or in achieving with artifice any goal
- ‘2. Lazy, deceitful, rogue. Meaning extension from Peninsular Spanish **vivo**, ingenious, subtle’

The multiple, mutually non-substitutable glosses within each of the posited senses reveal a failure to capture the semantic invariant in each of those senses. Furthermore, the first definiens is an almost exact reproduction of DLE’s definition of *astuto* (‘astute’), the only difference being that the word *agudo* in DLE’s original has been here replaced with *astuto*. For reasons of space, I will leave aside the problem of circularity this introduces, and will look at the third sense proposed by NDL (Gobello & Oliveri, 2013, p. 329; bracketed clarification as per the original):

3. Ladrón [Por oposición al gil u otario, que es la víctima del robo]
- ‘3. Thief [As opposed to gil or otario, who is the victim of the theft]’

This is the *ladrón* sense of *vivo*, frequent in *lunfardo* literature and *tango* lyrics. It designates a social category that could be thought of as the forerunner of the modern *vivo*.

As the definition suggests, if I say that someone is a *vivo*, I am not only saying that he is a *ladrón* ('thief'), and that, as such, he often engages in *robo* ('theft'). I am also making a crucial distinction between two mutually exclusive kinds of people: on the one hand, those who, like the *vivos*, engage in theft, and, on the other, those who, like the *giles* and the *otarios* (roughly, 'suckers, mugs, fools'), are often the victims of that theft. Both *giles* and *otarios* are also characterized by their incapability or unwillingness to commit theft. This means that a person who does not take an opportunity to commit theft may well earn the label of *otario* or *gil*, independently of whether he has or has not fallen victim of theft. Porteños are reminded about this in many *tangos*, one of which is Enrique Santos Discépolo's famous 1934 *Cambalache* with its no less famous dictum "*El que no afana es un gil*" (roughly, 'The one who does not steal is a fool').⁵⁰

5.3.3 The Argentine *boludo*: a social category

Vivo, *boludo*, and *viveza criolla* relate to each other much like *vivo*, *gil*, and *robo* relate in NDL's third definition. If someone is said to be a *vivo*, a distinction is being introduced between people like him, who often engage in behaviour of a certain kind—most notably *viveza*—, and people who must suffer the consequences of that behaviour—most notably *boludos*. In turn, someone may be called *boludo* if he falls victim to a *viveza*, but also if he does not take the opportunity to engage in *viveza* for his own benefit. Or, what is worse, if both of these things are true of someone, as is the case with the author of this tweet:

(9) [Soy un boludo p]orque no estaciono en cualquier lado, y menos enfrente de los garages ajenos. Que BOLUDO, no pude sacar mi auto por un vivo. (Dia del Boludo, 2009)

'[I am a boludo b]ecause I don't park just anywhere, let alone in front of someone else's garage. What a BOLUDO! I could not take my car because of a vivo.'

⁵⁰ In *El tango en su etapa de música prohibida* ('Tango in its phase of prohibited music'), Tallón (1959, pp. 31-32) puts it this way: "*vivo* es vocablo lunfardo, es decir, de lardones, y fue sinónimo de ladrón en su origen (...). Ser *vivo* era estar en la "realidad" (el *gil* era, justamente, el que estaba fuera de ella)" ('*vivo* is a lunfardo word, that is to say, of thieves, and was originally a synonym of thief (...). To be *vivo* was to be in "reality" (the *gil* was precisely the one who was outside of reality)').

Clearly, it is for ethical reasons that the tweeter in (9) does not engage in *viveza*. He knows that he could park in front of other people's garage, but he just doesn't want to, and thus he earns his status as a *boludo*. His tweet enacts the very common Argentine discourse of the "right minded *boludo*", a discourse in which the speaker openly, and sometimes even proudly, prefers to call himself a *boludo* than to do wrong. In Ch. 7, I will continue exploring this common discourse, and capture it via a cultural script. But, along with the "right minded *boludo*", there is also the *boludo* who earns his status out of ineptitude: he would engage in *viveza*, but he misses the opportunities. The inept *boludo* is the one who exclaims regretfully: "¡Qué boludo! ¿¡Cómo no me avivé!?" (roughly, 'What a *boludo*! How come I didn't notice (like a *vivo* can)!?'). It is also the *boludo* described in (10), taken from an opinion piece in *La Nación*:

(10) El argentino, acompañado de un sensible sentido del ridículo, revela que su temor más profundo es el ser o parecer un tonto, pierde su estima si se siente por debajo del estándar de viveza que el medio parece reclamarle y alcanza la cumbre de su enojo cuando cree que se lo está tomando por tonto. Tal vez ponga en descubierto este temor el hecho de que nuestro insulto nacional y popular es el de b... El término indica, al menos en su origen, la falta, ausencia, carencia o déficit de viveza. (Urtizberea, 2002, para. 5)

'The Argentine, with a sensitive sense of the ridiculous, reveals that his deepest fear is to be or appear to be a fool, and loses esteem if he feels below the standard of viveza that the situation seems to require, and his anger peaks when he believes he is being taken for a fool. Perhaps this fear is revealed most clearly by the fact that our national and most popular insult is that of b... The term indicates, at least in its origin, the lack, absence, shortfall or deficit of viveza.'

A "lack" (or "absence", "shortfall", etc.) of *viveza* may explain the behavior of the inept *boludo*, but not of the right-minded, self-proclaimed *boludo*, who may contend that he *does* have *viveza*, but simply does not put it to use. Whether inept or right-minded, what is common to all specimens of the *boludo* kind is that they do not carry out *vivezas*. This, together with the fact that *boludos* fall prey to *vivezas*, is the semantic invariant the explication of *boludo* must capture in order to achieve full predictive power. Attributions of ineptitude, right-mindedness, etc. are made by speakers on a case-by-case basis.

Now, in saying that someone is a *boludo*, one is passing judgment on that person, as well as saying that there is a widely shared negative attitude towards people of that kind. But Argentines are becoming increasingly reflective about, and intolerant of, the negative and often long-lasting consequences for their community that come from habitually thinking in terms of *boludos*, *vivos*, and *viveza*. One of the effects of this cultural turn is a recent campaign called *Día Nacional del Boludo* ('Boludo National Day'). Its staunch proponents actively advocate a change in the meaning of the word *boludo*, declaring on their Twitter account:

(11) Ser BOLUDO cobra un nuevo significado. Ante los resultados de tanta “viveza criolla”, más que un insulto, es un elogio. (Día del Boludo, 2017)

‘Being BOLUDO takes on a new meaning. Given the outcomes of so much “viveza criolla”, rather than an insult, it is a praise.’

An Argentine society in which *boludo* takes on this new meaning—in which *boludos* and not *vivos* are celebrated, where *viveza* is discouraged—would be a different place altogether.

5.3.4 Semantic explication of *boludo*

I propose the following NSM explication for *boludo*:

[C] This someone is a “*boludo*”

- a. (this someone is) a man [m] of one kind
- b. if someone is someone of this kind, it is like this:
- c. - bad things often happen to this someone because many people think like this:
 - “I want to do something, it will be good for me if I do it,
 - I know that it will be bad for other people
 - I don't want not to do it because of this”
- d. - this someone doesn't think like this
 - because of this, good things don't happen to this someone
- e. people don't want to be someone like this
- f. it is bad if someone is someone like this

When someone is said to be a *boludo*, he is being assigned to a specific category of men, as reflected in component (a). Component (b) introduces the two traits that are characteristic of people who fall into this category; these two traits are captured in (c) and (d), respectively.

Component (c) states that bad things often happen to *boludos*. The reason for this is a self-serving thought pattern exhibited by many people (captured in the lines between inverted commas). This thought pattern is typically—but not necessarily—conducive to *viveza criolla*, and is typically—but not exclusively—entertained by the *vivos*. The discursive attraction that exists between *boludos*, *viveza*, and *vivos* is thus implied in component (c), and yet not presented as exclusive, i.e. the thought pattern that harms *boludos* may not only lead to *viveza*, and it may not only be exhibited by *vivos*. The second identifying trait is captured in (d). It dictates that good things don't happen to *boludos* because they do not think self-servingly (i.e. they are not guided by the thought pattern presented in 'c').

Component (e) captures a widely shared attitude towards being a *boludo*, and (f) is a negative judgement about people of this kind.

5.3.5 The Argentine *vivo*: a social category

The Argentine *vivo* is convinced of his own exceptionality and of his unusual cognition (Aguinis, 2002; Mafud, 1965). Along with this conviction, there is always a strong desire to be recognized by others, as noted by Aguinis (2002):

El vivo necesita de la *barra*. *Barra* es el auditorio que le festeja sus gracias. Actúa para que lo vean y lo aplaudan, para que lo festejen con asombro. (p. 85)

'The vivo needs the *clique*. *Clique* is the audience that celebrates his witticisms. He acts to be seen and applauded, to be cheered in amazement.'

Whatever his intentions are, the *vivo* finds justification in a maxim which I will paraphrase in NSM terms as follows: 'If I don't do it, someone else will do it'. Mafud (1965, pp. 125, 128) articulates this maxim in various ways, including the following:

(12) Total, si no robo yo, robará otro.

‘After all, if I don't steal, someone else will.’

(13) Antes de que me jodan yo jodo.

‘Before they fuck me over, I fuck them over.’

(14) Hay que avivarse antes de que le ganen de mano.

‘One should notice things before other people beat one to the punch.’

A *lunfardo* variant of the maxim is “*madrugar antes de que te madruguen*” (Aguinis, 2002, p. 95), roughly ‘attack first before they attack you’. This variant of the maxim profiles yet another aspect of the *vivo*'s psychology, namely the conviction of his own mental agility. A cultural guide to Buenos Aires draws attention on this aspect (Wilson, 2007):

In my experience, though, the terms *vivo* (clever, vivacious) and *viveza criolla* (native wit) stand for what is most peculiar to the city. To be *vivo* is to be street-wise, agile, cunning—all desirable, if arguably anti-social, attributes. Florencio Escardó (1904–92), a medical doctor and popular writer, saw the *vivo*'s “mental agility” and “rapid communication” as typical of the *porteño*. (p. 38; bracketed translations as per the original)

Convinced of his own exceptionality and agile cognition, the *vivo* thinks himself capable of doing whatever he pleases.

5.3.6 Semantic explication of *vivo*

I propose the following semantic explication for *vivo*:

[D] This someone is a “*vivo*”

a. (this someone is) a man [m] of one kind

b. someone of this kind often does something because he thinks like this:

“it will be good for me if something happens,

it can happen if I do something now

if I do it, it will be bad for other people

I don't want not to do it because of this

if I don't do it, someone else will do it”

c. someone of this kind often thinks like this:

“I can think quickly [m], I can think well
many other people are not like me,
because of this, I can do many things as I want
I want people to know this”

Component (a) states that, when someone is said to be a *vivo*, he is being assigned to a specific category of men. The traits that are characteristic of people in this category are outlined in components (b) and (c).

Component (b) begins by acknowledging the *vivo*'s always active role: he often *does* something. This active role for the *vivo* is in sharp contrast with the passive role identified for the *boludo*. Bad things *happen to* the *boludo*, good things do not; the *boludo* does not think about doing certain things, other people do.

The lines between inverted commas capture the thought pattern the *vivo* is guided by. The first line of this pattern concerns a self-serving thought ('it will be good for me if something happens'). With the second line ('it can happen if I do something now'), a sequence of events is formulated that evokes the goal-directed, planned nature of the *vivo*'s behaviour. The third line introduces the *vivo*'s awareness that his plan is socially deviant ('if I do it, it will be bad for other people'), and the fourth captures the fact that this does not deter him from taking action ('I don't want not to do it because of this'). The fifth line ('if I don't do it, someone else will do it') expresses the "maxim" with which the *vivo* justifies his action. Altogether, the thought pattern formulated in (b) predicts the special relationship there is between *vivos* and *boludos*.

Component (c) captures the self-perception model attributed to someone who is said to be a *vivo*. It includes the conviction of his superior cognition ('I can think quickly, I can think well') and exceptionality ('many other people are not like me'). In his eyes, these traits make him omnipotent ('because of this, I can do many things as I want'). The final line ('I want people to know this') expresses his desire to be recognized by others.

5.4 Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I looked at *viveza criolla*, *vivo*, and *boludo*, Porteño keywords that emerged in response to the inequities and social tensions engendered by the Argentine "civilizing" project. Following Mafud (1965), I noted that *viveza* emerged as an

expression of *criollo* ('local') culture, in opposition to the alien culture of the newly-arrived European immigrants. Before long, however, *viveza* also began to be performed and displayed by these immigrants, who sought to thrive in the city of Buenos Aires.

Using the NSM approach of simple, cross-translatable terms and grammar, I have represented the meanings of the three words from the vantage point of the cultural insider. I proposed that Argentine *viveza* involves a person with a self-centered plan, and no contemplation of potential bad consequences for other people. Crucially, I showed that, when speakers label an action or way of thinking as *viveza*, they are construing it as an expression of a widely celebrated form of sociality (i.e. "how people do things with others") which is typical in Argentina (hence the need to include 'Argentina [m]' in the semantic explication).

Vivo and *boludo*, I showed, are culture-specific frames for categorizing and evaluating someone as one of two kinds of people with radically opposite ways of thinking and acting. Briefly, the word *vivo* designates a man whose actions are prompted by self-serving thinking and justified by the maxim that 'If I don't do it, someone else will do it'. Furthermore, *vivo* describes a man as being convinced of his superior cognition and as desiring others' recognition. When someone is said to be a *boludo*, on the other hand, he is being assigned to a category with two identifying traits: (a) bad things often happening to them due to other people's (typically, the *vivos*') self-serving behaviour, and (b) "missing out" on good things happening to them because they don't behave self-servingly.

The chapter also discussed and criticized definitions of *viveza*, *vivo*, and *boludo* in a varied sample of monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, pointing at issues of conceptual inaccuracy, ethnocentric framing, and circularity. These shortcomings provided the starting point for elucidating the precise meanings that guide local Porteños when they use these three words.

As discussed, Argentines seem to be increasingly aware of the potential negative and long-lasting consequences of viewing reality through the lens of *viveza*, *vivos*, and *boludos*. In this regard, I have drawn attention to the semantic renegotiation and redefinition of these terms, and to certain rising themes (e.g. the "right-minded *boludo*") perceivable in political discourse, civil society campaigning, and social-media commentary. These themes will be taken up further in Ch. 7.

Chapter 6. *Bronca*, a distinctively Porteño feeling

6.1 Introduction

Bronca is central in the emotional world of Porteños, and Buenos Aires gives Porteños infinite opportunities to feel it. As a Porteño, you feel *bronca* when, time and again, you step in one of the countless *regalitos* ('little presents') left behind by careless dog owners along the sidewalks of the city. You feel *bronca* towards your national football team, because they just can't win, and towards the Brazilian team, because they can't but always win. Importantly, you feel *bronca* because you have fallen prey to yet another *viveza criolla* (see Ch. 5). You feel *bronca* because of economic crises, double digit inflation, and rising poverty levels, and you feel *bronca* as you take to the streets to join a *cacerolazo* ('pot-banging protest') against political corruption and *inseguridad* ('street crime'). Whether it is everyday personal misfortunes, others' successes, the nature of the Argentine society, or the human condition of being mortal, the word *bronca* gives Porteños an emotional frame to process reality.

The aim of this chapter is to use the NSM approach to capture the meaning of *bronca* —or, as I will propose, the three meanings of that word: *bronca*₁, *bronca*₂, and *bronzas*. Furthermore, I intend to illustrate how *bronca*₁ and *viveza* are associated in Argentine discourse, paving the way for the formulation (in Ch. 7) of cultural scripts capturing this association.

The chapter is structured as follows. In §6.2, I look at outsiders' (travel writers', international journalists', etc.) accounts of *bronca*, arguing that English emotion words such as *rage*, *fury*, and *anger* provide approximations of *bronca*, but they don't precisely capture the Porteño concept. In §6.3, I review *bronca* definitions offered by Spanish dictionaries, highlighting that all these definitions say different things, and that they are imprecise, circular, and obscure. Nevertheless, this dictionary review provides a useful first approximation to the collocational profile of *bronca*. In §6.4, I look at the first meaning of the word: *bronca*₁, capturing a Porteño form of inevitable suffering. In §6.5, I conduct a semantic analysis of *bronca*₂, a chronic form of *bronca* that is felt *towards someone*. In §6.6., I propose a third *bronca* meaning: *bronzas*, unresolved grievances that haunt Porteños. Finally, in §6.7, I offer concluding remarks.

The semantic explications are grounded on detailed examination of *bronca* occurrences in various sources, including dictionaries, newspaper articles, text messaging, and, importantly, the corpus of *tango* lyrics available at <https://www.todotango.com>, which contains approximately 5741 lyrics.

6.2 Outsiders' *bronca*

Bronca is so deeply entrenched in the Porteño psychology, that many Porteños may assume that *bronca* constitutes an essential part of what it means to be human: everyone in Buenos Aires feels *bronca*, ergo everyone in the world must feel *bronca*, too. However, as the accounts of travel writers and international journalists can testify, this is far from being the case. When I look at travel writers' and international journalists' descriptions of Porteños and Buenos Aires, one of the things which often strikes them is *bronca*. To them, *bronca* appears as an alien, complex, translation-resistant concept:

There was a word I kept hearing: *bronca*. An Italo-Spanish fusion, like most Argentines themselves, the word implied a fury so dangerously contained as to end in ulcers. People felt *bronca* when they waited for an hour to be served at a bank, and then the service was bad because the cashiers all had *bronca* too (...) Everyone had *bronca*. (...) I had *bronca*, too. (France, 1999, pp. 58-59)

(...) I had yet to come into contact with *la bronca*, the endemic rage that supposedly afflicts so many *porteños*, a rage fuelled by the traffic, by the noise, by crime, by the impossibility of making do without two jobs and by the corruption of politicians and policemen. (Inglis, 2001, Ch. 10, para. 2)

This was the year of *bronca*. *Bronca* is a special porteño phenomenon – a cocktail of urban rage and bad faith. *Bronca* and bankruptcy – this is what greeted us on arrival. (Kassabova, 2011, n/a)

Bronca is currently the word I enjoy hearing most. It means anger, rage, the pissed off feeling you get when dealing with Argentine bureaucracy or when someone cuts you off in traffic. Its [sic] almost an onomatopoeia. Say it: BRONCA. It's a good release. (Rogers, 2010, n/a)

[*B*]ronca [is] a singularly porteño combination of aggravation and frustration; there is no

precise English equivalent, the closest being “wrath” or, in Britain, “aggro” (Bernhardson, 2011, Ch. 12)

[I]n Argentina and across swathes of Latin America, (...) the word refers to an emotion that is a bit of a mix between anger, fury, hatred, resentment and bitter discontent. And anyone who has bronca walks around with a chip on their shoulder, like the whole world is out to get them. No one epitomised that better than Maradona himself. As he explains in his autobiography, it acted as his motivator, his fuel, his driving force. (Menon, 2019, para. 12-13)

It is striking that *bronca* can yield so many different (mis)interpretations: *bronca* is “rage”, but also “fury”, “resentment”, “bitter discontent”, “anger”, “pissed of feeling”, “aggro”, and “wrath”, to name only a few of the emotion words above. But if *bronca* means any of these words, then it cannot mean the other ones at the same time. In fact, as it will become clear throughout this chapter, none of these glosses answer precisely to any of the three Porteño meanings of the word.

6.3 *Bronca* in dictionaries

In this section, I review *bronca* definitions in five Spanish dictionaries: DLE (RAE, 2014), DiAm (ASALE, 2010), NDL (Gobello & Oliveri, 2013), DiLa (AAL, 2019), and the dictionary of Argentine phrases DiFHA (Barcia & Pauer, 2010). Table 6 offers these definitions and their English translations. The English renderings of the Spanish emotion terms are, of course, only approximate:

Table 6: Definitions of *bronca* in Spanish dictionaries

Dictionary	Scope of dictionary	Definition(s) of <i>bronca</i>	Translation
DLE	Peninsular Spanish and, to a lesser extent, Spanish in the Americas	Enojo, enfado, rabia	‘Anger, annoyance, fury’
DiAm	Spanish in the Americas	Sentimiento de ira o enfado de una persona contra alguien	‘Feeling of rage or annoyance of a person against someone’
NDL	<i>lunfardo</i>	Animadversión, enemistad, odio	‘Ill will, enmity, hatred’
		Enojo, movimiento de ira	‘Anger, expression of wrath’

DiLA	Argentine Spanish	Enfado, ira	‘Annoyance, wrath’
DiFHA	Argentine Spanish phrases	con bronca: Enojado, disgustado	‘with bronca: Angrily, bitterly’

As Table 6 illustrates, each definition of *bronca* employs a different combination of emotion words. With so many emotion words across these definitions, and also within each single definition, one is left wondering which of these words best describes *bronca*. It follows that dictionary definitions of *bronca* agree neither with each other, nor with themselves

Furthermore, words like *animadversión* (roughly, ‘ill will’), or expressions like *movimiento de ira* (roughly, ‘expression of wrath’), are obscure and can hardly capture the insider’s perspective. It is rare to hear a Porteño use such expressions, and many Porteños probably haven’t even heard of them. Importantly, like *bronca*, all the emotion words used in these definitions have a complex meaning of their own. This means that, in order to fully grasp *bronca*, one must also look up for definitions of these words.⁵¹ And yet, in doing so, one is sent to yet other complex words, if not back again to the words one intended to look up in the first place. In short, the above *bronca* definitions fail to capture an invariant meaning of *bronca*, falling into the common problems of obscurity, circularity, and imprecision.

Interestingly, some dictionaries also make mention of two *bronca* collocations: *dar bronca* (lit. ‘to give *bronca*’; roughly, ‘to make someone feel *bronca*’) and *tener bronca* (lit. ‘to have *bronca*’; roughly, ‘to feel/hold *bronca*’). As Table 7 illustrates, when dictionaries do make mention of *dar bronca* and/or *tener bronca*, they either don’t provide definitions (as in the case of DiAm), or they do, but not without further obscurity, circularity, and imprecision. With so many different senses for *dar bronca* and *tener bronca*, it is hard to see what the two phrases mean, and what the differences are between them. Differentiating the meanings of these two common *bronca* phrases is not an explicit aim of this chapter. However, in §6.4 and §6.5 I will argue that *bronca*₁ and *bronca*₂ typically occur in the context of *dar bronca* and *tener bronca*, respectively.

⁵¹ It is only in the DLE dictionary that one can look up these other emotion words, as all the other dictionaries are differential.

Table 7: Definitions of *dar bronca* and *tener bronca* in Spanish dictionaries

Dictionary	Collocation	Translation of collocation	Provided definition	Translation of provided definition
DLE	tener bronca a alguien	'to feel/hold bronca towards someone'	tener entre ojos, o sobre ojo, a alguien → ⁵² traer entre ojos a alguien → Aborrecerlo, tenerle mala voluntad	'to have it in for someone → to have it in for someone → To despise someone, to bear someone ill will'
DiAm	dar bronca	'to make someone feel bronca'	-	-
	tener bronca	'to feel/hold bronca'	-	-
NDL	dar bronca	'to make someone feel bronca'	causar enojo	'to cause anger'
	tener bronca a alguien	'to feel/hold bronca towards someone'	profesarle animadversion	'to profess enmity to someone'
DiFHA	algo le da bronca a alguien	'something makes someone feel bronca'	1. Estar enojado.	'1. To be angry/annoyed.'
			2. Tener celos.	'2. To be jealous.'
			3. Impacientarse, irritarse, rabiar.	'3. To lose patience, to get irritated, to rage.'
	tener bronca contra alguien	'to feel/hold bronca against someone'	Sentir una fuerte reacción anímica de molestia o furia <i>por algo</i> .	'To feel a strong reaction of annoyance or fury <i>because of something</i> .'
tener bronca por algo	'to feel/hold bronca because of something'	Sentir una fuerte reacción anímica de animadversión <i>contra alguien</i> .	To feel a strong reaction of enmity <i>against someone</i> .	

A final note on dictionary definitions of *bronca* is that many dictionaries also list two Peninsular Spanish senses of *bronca* which are not widely used in Porteño Spanish today, and which are not the object of study here. One of these senses is defined in DLE (RAE, 2014) as “riña o disputa ruidosa” (‘noisy brawl or argument’). The other sense of *bronca* which will not be studied here is defined in DLE (RAE, 2014) as “repreñión áspera” (‘severe reprimand’), used in Peninsular Spanish within the expression “ *echar la bronca*”

⁵² The arrows (“→”) represent hypertext links connecting definienda.

(‘to reprimand’). In Porteño, it is used within the expression “*tirar la bronca*” (‘to reprimand’) (though, again, this sense is not widely used these days). According to NDL (Gobello & Oliveri, 2013, p. 53), it is from these Peninsular Spanish senses that Porteño *bronca* (i.e. the emotion word) emerged.

6.4 *Bronca*₁: the inevitable Porteño suffering

In this section I focus on the first identified sense of *bronca*: *bronca*₁. As a starting point, I explore the prototypical scenarios that evoke the feeling of *bronca*₁ (§6.4.1). Then, in §6.4.2., I examine a *dar bronca* construction in which *bronca*₁ commonly occurs, leading me to argue that a person who feels *bronca*₁ construes this experience as an inevitable suffering. Next, in §6.4.3, I explore verbs that commonly collocate with *bronca*₁, which reveal that there is an aggressive-expressive potential embedded in the meaning of *bronca*₁. Lastly, in §6.4.4, I present an NSM semantic explication for *bronca*₁.

6.4.1 Prototypical *bronca*₁ scenarios

I here look at prototypical scenarios that evoke the feeling of *bronca*₁ through an examination of the discourse of *tango* lyrics, as well as a famous protest song from *rock nacional* (‘Argentine rock’), and a poem by a famous Porteño poet. With reference to Ch. 5, I will argue that, quite often, the situations that evoke *bronca*₁ are discursively framed within the logic of *viveza criolla*. This discursive analysis will pave the way for the semantic explication of *bronca*₁ in §6.4.4, and for the formulation of cultural scripts in Ch. 7.

The choice to examine chiefly *tango* lyrics may seem odd to those unfamiliar with Argentina. However, I will argue that this is quite appropriate. As Argentine writer Mempo Giardinelli (1998) wrote, *tango* is “una sublimación de la bronca” (‘a sublimation of bronca’) (as cited in Aguinis, 2002, p. 75), a definition which is indicative of the prominence of *bronca*₁ in *tango* lyrics. It is not merely that the word *bronca* appears frequently in *tango* lyrics; rather, *bronca* constitutes a theme in itself in these lyrics (see also §4.5.2). Indeed, at least nine *tango* songs contain the word *bronca* in their titles.⁵³

⁵³ The songs are: (1) *A las once (Qué bronca)* (‘At eleven (What bronca)’) (circa 1910), (2) *Bronca* (1963), (3) *Bronca rea* (‘Low-class bronca’) (1929), (4) *Con bronca* (‘With bronca’) (circa 1950), (5) *Che cuñado*,

Crucially, the lyrics examined here provide a first-person, insider's perspective of *bronca*₁, capturing the emotion in prototypically Porteño scenarios.⁵⁴

The eight examples that follow reveal that scenarios involving *bronca*₁ typically concern deep-seated, recurrent political and societal issues. These include political corruption, economic crises, crime, poverty, and the lack of moral standards. The link between *bronca*₁, *Porteños*, *Buenos Aires*, and *Argentina* is thus made explicit in many of these lyrics.

Example (1) is from a *tango* called *Bronca* (1963). The narrator feels *bronca*₁ because of the injustices and the lack of moral standards in Argentina. As the logic of *viveza criolla* dictates, it is the people that do bad things—in this example, the *delinquentes* ('delinquents')—who succeed in Argentina:

- (1) Esta es la época moderna
Donde triunfa el delincuente,
(...)Ya no se respetan canas
Ni las leyes, ni el poder.
La decencia la tiraron
En el tacho 'e la basura

¡Pucha, qué bronca me da!
Ver tanta injusticia
De la humanidad.

'These are the modern times
When the delinquent triumphs,
(...) Grey hair is no longer respected
Nor are laws, or power.
Decency was thrown
Into the trash can.

qué bronca da ('Hey, mate, what bronca this makes one feel') (1969), (6) *De pura bronca* ('Out of sheer bronca') (1929), (7) *La bronca del porteño* ('The bronca of the Porteño') (1976), (8) *¡Qué bronca!* ('What bronca!') (1912), and (9) *Soneto con bronca* ('Sonnet with bronca') (1975) (<https://tango.info> and <http://www.todotango.com>).

⁵⁴ NSM researcher Bułat Silva has produced valuable analyses of key words in *tango* (see Bułat Silva, 2011, 2012b, and 2014). According to this author, two key emotion words in *tango* lyrics are *dolor* (roughly, 'emotional pain/sadness') and *amor* ('love').

Jeez, what bronca it makes me feel!
To see so much injustice
Of humanity'

Example (2) is from the *tango* song called *Soneto con bronca* ('Sonnet with bronca') (1975), and (3) is from the famous protest song *Marcha de la bronca* ('The bronca march') (1970), from *rock nacional* ('Argentine rock'). In these songs, *bronca*₁ is triggered in a scenario of political corruption, crime, and decadence. Once again, those who succeed are *malandras* (lunf. 'scoundrels') who don't *laburan* (lunf. 'work'):

(2) Veo un país con palidez de anemia
en manos de malandras y de giles.
(...) Veo un país con hombres agotados,
donde el que no labura es el que grita

'I see a country with the pallor of anemia
in the hands of scoundrels and fools
(...) I see a country with worn out men,
where those who don't work shout [at others]'

(3) No puedo ver
Tanta mentira organizada (...)
Bronca porque matan con descaro
Pero nunca nada queda claro
Bronca porque roba el asaltante
Pero también roba el gobernante

'I can't see
So much of organized lies (...)
Bronca because they kill shamelessly
But nothing is ever clarified
Bronca because the raider steals
But also the ruler steals'

Example (4) is from the *tango* song called *Con bronca* ('With bronca') (circa 1950). Here, the poet feels *bronca*₁ because the Porteño society is morally, economically, and linguaculturally deteriorated:

- (4) La pucha, qué bronca me encajan los años
al ver como todo camina al revés
Quedás Buenos Aires sin "bondis" ni "estaño",
Ha muerto el lunfardo... se parla en inglés.
(...) La gente casi no "morfa"
Porque no tiene un tové

'Gee, what bronca the years throw at me
when I see how everything goes wrong
Buenos Aires, you are left without buses or bars,
Lunfardo is dead...people speak in English.
(...) People barely eat anymore
Because they don't have money'

Example (5) is from the *tango* song called *No te hagas el vivo* ('Don't act like a vivo') (2000). Here, the narrator feels *bronca*₁ in a society plagued by *vivos* who don't work:

- (5) Salen del abismo
y se hacen los vivos
(...) no sirven pa' nada
qué bronca me da.
(...) inmunda basura
andá a trabajar

'They emerge from the depths
and they act like vivos
(...) they are useless
what bronca it makes me feel.
(...) filthy crap
go to work.'

*Bronca*₁ is also triggered when one thinks of a specific event in which one was the victim. In (6), from the poem *Día de Bronca* ('A day of Bronca') (Carriego, 1912, cited in Borges, 2011, p. 106), and in (7), from the *tango* song called *¿Por qué me das dique?* ('Why do you show off for me?') (1951), the narrators feel *bronca*₁ because their lovers betrayed them. Note that in (6) the betrayal is framed according to the logic of *viveza criolla*:

(6) Créame: pese a mi fama
de vivo entré por el cuento...
Cuando mangié el argumento
no sé lo que me pasó:
¡de la bronca que me dio,
compadre, casi reviento!

'Believe me: despite my reputation
for being a vivo, I was fooled...
When I realized what it was all about
I don't know what happened to me:
from the *bronca* it triggered in me,
I nearly burst, my friend!'

(7) Tal vez has pensado que a mí me dio bronca
saber que has vendido tu cuerpo otra vez.

'Perhaps you have thought it made me feel bronca
to know that you have sold your body again.'

In (8), from the famous *tango* *¡Chorra!* (lunf. roughly, 'Thief!') (1928), the narrator feels *bronca*₁ because he has been swindled by his lover, and regards himself a *gil* ('fool'):⁵⁵

(8) Lo que más bronca me da
es haber sido tan gil.

⁵⁵ Recall from Ch. 5 that, along with *boludo*, *gil* is one of the Porteño keywords for designating the victim of *viveza criolla*. Unlike *boludo*, *gil* is frequent in *tango* lyrics.

‘What makes me feel the most bronca
is to have been such a fool.’

In sum, this exploration of *tango* lyrics, Argentine rock lyrics, and Porteño poetry showed that *bronca*₁ exhibits a special affinity with scenarios concerning deep-seated, structural, recurrent issues in the Argentine society, in themes such as political corruption, inequity, economic crises, crime, poverty, and the lack of moral standards. Also, *bronca*₁ lends itself to the theme of “betrayal in love”, which is also common in *tango* (see §4.5.2; Bułat Silva, 2014). Importantly, all these themes are frequently framed under the logics of *viveza criolla* (see Ch. 5).

6.4.2 “Receiving” *bronca*₁: a tragic, inevitable suffering

In my proposed explication of *bronca*₁, to be presented in §6.4.4., I will argue that the person who experiences *bronca*₁ is *compelled* to have this bad feeling. To put it in NSM terms, ‘this someone can’t not feel something bad’. This idea is supported by the fact that *bronca*₁ commonly appears in the construction *algo le da bronca a alguien* (lit. ‘something gives *bronca*₁ to someone’; roughly, ‘something makes someone feel *bronca*₁’). Note that this expression appeared in examples (1), (4), (5), (6), (7), and (8) above.⁵⁶

In the construction *algo le da bronca a alguien*, the verb *dar* (‘to give’; conjugated here as *da*), has a causative meaning (Alonso Ramos, 1997; Cuervo, 2010; Rivas, 2016). Also, in this construction *algo* (‘something’) appears in the subject position “performing the action”, so to speak, of causing *alguien* (‘someone’) to experience *bronca*₁. We saw above that this *algo* is typically a recurrent issue in the Argentine society: the scenario of *viveza*, poverty, injustice, etc. The experiencer of *bronca*₁ takes the indirect object position and passively “receives” this emotion.⁵⁷ Note that this construction is not used for the emotion words *enojo* (‘anger’) and *enfado* (‘anger/annoyance’), and is not common for the construction to be used with *odio*

⁵⁶ Example (4) introduced a novel variation to the construction: *algo le encaja bronca a alguien* (roughly, ‘something throws *bronca*₁ at someone’).

⁵⁷ In this regard, then, the experiencer of *bronca*₁ is “passive” like the experiencer of *miedo* (‘fear’), *vergüenza* (‘shame’), and *lástima* (‘pity’), other emotions which can take part in the same construction.

(‘hatred’) either. Presumably this is because these emotions involve a more “determined” or “active” experiencer, rather than one that is “passive” or “reactive”. This is yet another reason not to equate *bronca*₁ with these other emotion words, as dictionaries often do (see Tables 6 and 7 in §6.3).

I will also propose that the *algo* (‘something’; the scenario) that causes *bronca*₁ manifests itself in an evident, compelling way to the experiencer. This is reflected in the use of the verbs *saber* (‘to know’) and *ver* (‘to see’) often used to introduce that scenario, as illustrated in (1), (2), (3), (4), and (7) above (§6.4.1), and also in (13) below. In the eyes of the experiencer, the described scenario plainly *is* the case; the situation is *known* or *seen* by the experiencer. In NSM terms, ‘it is like this, I know it, I see it’.⁵⁸

Furthermore, all the experiencer can do is remain as a passive “onlooker” because, even though the scenario is bad (‘this is bad’), and the experiencer rejects it (‘I don’t want it to be like this’), there is a conviction that it is also inexorable or inalterable: ‘I know that it can’t be not like this’. Perhaps this quality of inexorability or inalterability explains why *bronca*₁ often keeps company with words such as *impotencia* (‘impotence/helplessness’) and *resignación* (‘resignation’), which also involve the idea that something cannot be changed. This collocation can be seen in (9), (10), (11), and (12), which are extracts from major Argentine newspapers.⁵⁹

(9) **Resignación, impotencia, bronca**, pero sobre todo miedo. Ese podría ser el resumen de las sensaciones que tienen los vecinos de Recoleta después de los últimos robos ocurridos en distintos edificios de la zona. (Di Nicola, 2006, para. 1)

‘**Resignation, impotence, bronca**, and, above all, fear. Such could be a summary of the sensations of the neighbours of Recoleta neighborhood after the burglaries that occurred in different buildings in the area.’

(10) También hay lágrimas de tristeza, de **bronca**, de **impotencia**, de **resignación**. (...) Porque el [equipo de fútbol] El Lobo quedó en descenso directo y si hoy Huracán le gana a Vélez, perderá la categoría. (“¡Help!,” 2011, para. 2)

⁵⁸ Cf. Wierzbicka (1999, p. 95), who proposes a similar quality for English *appalled*, on the grounds that this word frequently collocates with the phrases “to see” or “to hear” (“I was appalled to see/hear”).

⁵⁹ In these and remaining examples in this chapter, bold has been added for emphasis.

‘There are also tears of sadness, of **bronca**, of **impotence**, of **resignation**. (...) Because [the football team] El Lobo is now in the relegation zone, and if today Huracán beats Vélez, it will descend.’

(11) Cortes de luz en la Ciudad. Los usuarios, entre la **bronca** y la **resignación**. (“Cortes,” 2012)

‘Power cuts in the City. The clients, between **bronca** and **resignation**.’

(12) Con mezcla de **bronca** y **resignación** recibieron los turistas argentinos en Río de Janeiro las noticias sobre una acentuada devaluación del dólar oficial en la Argentina, que obliga a muchos a cuidar más los gastos con tarjeta (...) “Te da mucha **bronca** e **impotencia**. Teníamos calculado el gasto de las vacaciones y ahora todo lo que pagamos con tarjeta nos va a costar más”, afirmó Flores. (Armendáriz, 2014, para. 1, 5)

‘With a mix of **bronca** and **resignation**, Argentine tourists in Río de Janeiro received the news concerning a steep devaluation of the official US dollar in Argentina, which forces many of them to be more careful with their expenses on card. (...) “It makes you feel a lot of **bronca** and **impotence**. We had calculated our holiday spending, but now everything we’ve paid on card will cost more”, Flores said.’

Now, the perception of inalterability seems to be subtly different in, on the one hand, *impotencia* and *resignación*, and, on the other, *bronca*₁. In the former, the experiencer seems to raise the question of whether he or she can do something to change the scenario, and answers this question in the negative. This could be phrased in NSM terms as follows:

“If I do something, it will be not like this anymore
I can’t do it”

In *bronca*₁, however, the experience of inalterability is subtly different, and it is here where the tragic nature of this emotion comes in. The experiencer of *bronca*₁ does not consider whether the scenario can be changed, as it is already clear that it can’t be otherwise (hence, ‘I know that it can’t be not like this’). This component of the proposed explication may explain why *bronca*₁, more than *impotencia* and *resignación*, may also function as a response to fundamentally tragic or “existential” puzzles, such as the

condition of being mortal or the inexorable passing of time. As in the *tango* song *El último round* ('The last round') (1978):

(13) ¡Qué bronca!

Ver que la vida se apura
en cada cacho de sol
en cada noche de amor,
en cada curda.

¡Qué bronca!

Saber que el tiempo se va
Y abandonar la pelea
Antes del último round.

'What bronca!

To see that life hurries up
in every sunbeam
in every night of love,
in every drinking spree.

What bronca!

To know that time is running out
And to give up the fight
Before the last round.'

6.4.3 The aggressive-expressive potential of *bronca*₁

With *bronca*₁, Porteños skip over the possibility of a desired scenario, and immediately accept the inalterability of the given state of affairs. But this does not mean that they stand idly by as they witness their wretched lives. It is expected that, sooner or later, someone suffering *bronca*₁ will react in a certain characteristic way. Typically, this reaction involves a component of aggression. As the *tango* song *La bronca del Porteño* ('The bronca of the Porteño') (1976) poetically puts it:

(14) Quién no conoce al porteño

cuando se agarra la bronca,
si se embala como un "mionca"
¡nadie lo puede parar!...

La “bronca” es un explosivo,
 es aire dinamitado
 que el porteño se ha insuflado
 y lo tiene que largar.
 Yo no sé por qué la “bronca”
 se pasea en colectivo
 no hay tipo más agresivo
 ¡cuando tiene que viajar!

 ‘Who hasn’t met a Porteño
 when he catches the bronca,
 he gets carried away like a speeding truck
 nobody can stop him!...
 The “bronca” is an explosive,
 it’s dynamited air
 that the Porteño has inhaled
 and has to release.
 I don’t know why the “bronca”
 rides on the bus
 people can’t be more aggressive
 when they have to travel!’

The verbs that tend to collocate with *bronca*₁ reflect the same potential for aggression. Like in the *tango* song above, these collocates metaphorically construe *bronca*₁ as something (often, air) that accumulates inside someone, and which can make this person explode. Some examples of verb collocates that construe the metaphors of ‘accumulation’ and subsequent ‘explosive release’ are listed in (15) and (16), respectively.

(15) *masticar bronca*₁ (‘to chew *bronca*₁’), *mascar bronca*₁ (‘to chew *bronca*’), *juntar bronca*₁ (‘to gather *bronca*₁’), *acumular bronca*₁ (‘to accumulate *bronca*₁’), *no dar más de la bronca*₁ (‘to not stand the *bronca*₁ anymore’)

(16) *descargar la bronca* (‘to release/vent the *bronca*₁’), *sacarse la bronca*₁ (‘to let out/vent the *bronca*₁’), *explotar de (la) bronca*₁ (‘explode due to (the) *bronca*₁’), *estallar de (la) bronca*₁ (‘shatter due to (the) *bronca*₁’), *reventar de (la) bronca*₁ (‘burst due to (the) *bronca*₁’)

Now, the potential reaction of the *bronca*₁ experiencer is not exclusively driven by aggressive tendencies. I will furthermore argue that this reaction is also expected to involve a certain “expressive” dimension, i.e. an inclination from the *bronca*₁ sufferer not only to ‘do something’, but also to ‘say something’. This aggressive-expressive potential of *bronca*₁ can be captured as follows:

this someone can do something because of this, this someone can
say something because of this, this can be bad for other people

The need for these semantic components in the explication of Porteño *bronca*₁ do not come as a surprise if one thinks that both aggression and expression are inherent in the two Peninsular Spanish senses that preceded it: *bronca* as “noisy brawl or argument”, and *bronca* as “severe reprimand” (see §6.3). One could say that the potential for aggression and expression in Porteño *bronca*₁ is a semantic remnant of these two Peninsular senses.

Some examples of *bronca*₁-driven reactions as they manifest in Porteño discourse are in order. Perhaps the most paradigmatic examples of *bronca*₁’s aggressive-expressive potential are to be found in two manifestations of Porteños’ active culture of social protest: *voto bronca* (‘*bronca* vote’) and *cacerolazo* (‘pot-banging protest’). *Voto bronca* designates a situation when the electorate casts a vote that is intended to “punish” rather than choose a candidate.⁶⁰ For example, in the 2019 presidential primary election, the then Argentinean president Mauricio Macri interpreted his defeat as a *voto bronca* caused by the electorate’s “accumulated” *bronca*. In his own words:

(17) Los votos que no nos acompañaron representan una **bronca acumulada** del duro proceso económico que tuvimos que recorrer estos tres años y medio. (...). Acá hay un **voto bronca que se expresó en las urnas** contra el devenir de una economía muy dura, y lo lamento en el alma. (“Hay un voto,” 2019, para. 3)

‘The votes that did not accompany us represent an **accumulated bronca** after the hard economic process that we had to go through in these three and a half years. (...) This is a

⁶⁰ On *voto bronca*, NDL (Gobello & Oliveri, 2013, p. 53) notes: “En el año 2000 comenzó a llamarse voto bronca al sufragio emitido en blanco como repudio a los partidos políticos” (‘In the year 2000, blank votes cast as a way of repudiating the political parties began to be called voto bronca’).

voto bronca that was expressed at the ballot box, against the unfolding of a harsh economy, and it eats my heart out.’

Cacerolazo designates a popular form of urban protest where people—often, thousands—take to the streets, or simply step out onto their apartment balconies, and bang their *cacerolas* (‘casserole dishes’) for hours on end against issues such as political corruption, *inseguridad* (‘street crime’), rising poverty, double digit inflation, and the massive power cuts that always come with the Porteño summer. Importantly, the *cacerolazo* protest is often construed as an expression, or explosion, of *bronca*₁. For example, consider this Whatsapp (text message) exchange between two Porteño friends of mine:

(18) A: Fuiste al **cacerolazo** ayer?

B: Sí, por el barrio. Estaba re caliente y necesitaba **descargar la bronca**.

‘A: Did you go to the **cacerolazo**?’

B: Yes, in my neighborhood. I was mad and I needed to **release the bronca**.’

Bronca’s aggressive-expressive potential does not manifest via *voto bronca* and *cacerolazo* only. In the text message in (19), another Porteño friend’s accumulated *bronca*₁ resolves with an insult directed at his neighbours:

(19) No sé si la del 4^{to} o 3^{er} piso estuvo el lunes ensayando con guitarra y bombos y cantando un tema de Fito Páez hasta las 4 a.m. Tipo 3.30 **ya no daba más de bronca, salí al patio y le grité pará de cantar la concha de tu hermana. Lo grité con todo.**

‘I don’t know if it was the woman on the 4th or 3rd floor, she was rehearsing on Monday with guitar and drums and singing a song by Fito Páez until 4 a.m. Around 3.30 **I couldn’t stand the bronca anymore, I went out to the patio and shouted stop singing you mother fucker. I shouted it at the top of my lungs**.’

Similarly, the news excerpts in (20) and (21) capture the reactions of football players who have “accumulated” and “chewed” *bronca*₁ during a game:

(20) El delantero sintió una fuerte molestia en su muslo derecho y automáticamente se tiró al césped para pedir el cambio. **Masticando bronca y, con un insulto al aire**, salió reemplazado por [el jugador] Rogelio Funes Mori. (“Trezeguet y Schiavi,” 2012, para. 1)

‘The forward felt a strong discomfort in his right thigh and automatically threw himself to the ground to ask for a substitution. **Chewing bronca, and with an insult hurled into the air**, he went out, replaced by [the player] Rogelio Funes Mori.’

(21) [El jugador] Chilavert **acumuló bronca, pero se desquitó** a los 45 minutos de la primera etapa, cuando [el referí] Daniel Giménez sancionó un penal (...). **Disparo seco, gol y festejo prolongado [de Chilavert] en la cara del rival**. (“Chilavert,” 1998, para. 6)

[The player] Chilavert **accumulated bronca, but he got his own back** at minute 45 of the first half, when [the referee] Daniel Giménez awarded a penalty kick (...). **A sharp shot, goal and a prolonged celebration [by Chilavert] in the rival’s face**.

6.4.4 Semantic explication of *bronca*₁

To capture the meaning of *bronca*₁, and drawing upon all that which has been presented in §6.4 thus far, I propose the following semantic explication:

[A] **Someone feels *bronca*₁ (e.g. “Algo le da *bronca*₁ a alguien”)**

a. someone thinks about something like this:

b. “it is like this, I know it, I see it

c. this is bad, I don't want it to be like this

d. at the same time, I know that it can't be not like this”

e. because this someone thinks like this, this someone can't not feel something bad

f. this someone can do something because of this, this someone can

say something because of this, this can be bad for other people

Component (a) introduces the person (‘someone’) that experiences *bronca*₁ and the scenario (‘something’) which makes this person have this emotion (e.g. widespread *viveza criolla*, a lover’s betrayal, a lost football game, frequent power cuts, the inexorable passing of time, etc.). Whatever the scenario is, it is invariantly construed by this person according to the thought (b)-(d).

In (b), the scenario manifests itself in an evident, compelling way, such that the person knows or “sees” that *it is the case* (‘it is like this, I know it, I see it’). In (c), the situation is considered bad (‘this is bad’) and it is rejected (‘I don’t want it to be like this’); however, in (d), the person succumbs to the tragic, “existential” conviction that the situation is inalterable or inexorable.

Component (e) captures the bad feeling that is at the center of the experience of *bronca*₁. Note here that the person is regarded as compelled to have this feeling: ‘this someone *can’t not* feel something bad’. Component (f) captures the aggressive-expressive reaction that is expected of someone who feels like this.

6.5 *Bronca*₂: a chronic bad feeling towards someone

Here I propose a second sense of the Porteño word *bronca*: *bronca*₂. *Bronca*₂ can be thought of as an evolved form of *bronca*₁. It takes place when the bad feeling has become somewhat “chronic”, and when the scenario—i.e. that ‘something’—that caused it has remained associated with a specific person (someone) known to the experiencer. *Bronca*₂ is thus not caused by ‘something’, as is *bronca*₁, but felt towards ‘someone else’ about whom the experiencer knows ‘something’. Furthermore, as opposed to the case of *bronca*₁, where there is something that compels the experiencer to feel it, in *bronca*₂ there is an experiencer who is actively engaged in the task of having the emotion.

6.5.1 Syntax and aspectual properties of *bronca*₂

The above traits of *bronca*₂ are reflected in the constructions in which it typically occurs: *alguien le tiene bronca*₂ *a alguien* (roughly, ‘someone feels/holds *bronca*₂ towards someone’); alternatively, *alguien tiene bronca*₂ *contra alguien* (roughly, ‘someone feels/holds *bronca*₂ against someone’), and *alguien le guarda bronca*₂ *a alguien* (roughly, ‘someone holds/harbors *bronca*₂ towards someone’). In all these constructions, the experiencer appears in the subject position and “performs” the action of *tener/guardar bronca*₂ (lit. ‘have/hold *bronca*₂’) towards or against the other person. Furthermore, unlike the verb *dar* (‘give’), typically used with *bronca*₁, the verbs *tener* (‘have’) and *guardar* (‘hold’) imply an action that is recurrently performed. This is why I can feel *bronca*₁ immediately after a person does something, as in (22), but it would be odd if I felt *bronca*₂ towards this person immediately after he’s done it, as in (23). Put another

way, to feel *bronca*₂ towards someone, some time must pass so that one has the opportunity to recurrently think about this someone in relation to a certain scenario (my own examples):

(22) A mí me dio *bronca*₁ lo que Juan acaba de hacer.

‘It made me feel *bronca*₁ what Juan has done just now.’

(23) ? Yo le tengo bronca a Juan por lo que acaba de hacer.

? ‘I hold *bronca*₂ towards Juan because of what he has done just now.’

6.5.2 Semantic explication of *bronca*₂

Example (24) is from a recent interview (Soriano, 2019) with Ezequiel Martel Barcia, a person whose father was killed in the 1982 *Guerra de Malvinas* (in English, *Falklands war*) between Argentina and the United Kingdom. Ezequiel feels *bronca*₂ towards Galtieri, the *de facto* president of Argentina during the war:

(24) [S]i me preguntás a quién le tengo bronca, no es a los ingleses, yo le tengo bronca a Galtieri, que se quedó mirando la guerra por la tele, que dijo “si [los ingleses] quieren venir que vengan” y los tipos vinieron. (para. 19)

‘[I]f you ask me who I feel bronca towards, it is not the English people, I feel bronca towards Galtieri, who stayed watching the war on TV, and who said “if [the English] want to come, they can come”, and the blokes came.’

The line quoted by Ezequiel is from one of Galtieri’s speeches in the period leading up to the war.⁶¹ It is infamously remembered by generations of Argentines, as it synthesizes the dictator’s irresponsible behavior during that period, and the consequent irreparable damage caused by the war. For Ezequiel, this scenario was doubly damaging, as it involved the loss of his father. What does Ezequiel mean, then, when he says that he feels

⁶¹ Galtieri’s complete line is: “Si quieren venir, que vengan, ¡les presentaremos batalla!” (‘If they want to come, they can come, we will present them a battle!’). The full speech in video format is available at: <http://www.archivorta.com.ar/asset/cadena-nacional-discurso-de-galtieri-en-plaza-de-mayo>.

*bronca*₂ towards Galtieri? First, Ezequiel is stating that he often thinks about Galtieri in relation to that scenario. This first part of the explication may be captured with the following components (a) and (b):

- a. I often think about this someone like this:
- b. “I know something about this someone”

Note that, thus stated, the components do not specify the precise nature of the scenario that is linked to the person towards whom *bronca*₂ is felt. This is because this scenario can vary from case to case, and is thus is not something that the meaning of *bronca*₂ predicts. However, as I shall argue, context often offers sufficient clues for the hearer to infer the nature of the link. For example, Ezequiel’s *bronca*₂ falls into a typical case in which the inferable link can be paraphrased via the following component: ‘this someone did something, it was bad for me’. As said, this component is not invariably present in the meaning of *bronca*₂; but for the clarity of argument only, I will include it in the explication below.

Second, Ezequiel’s recurrent thought involves an awareness of a bad feeling and thought associated with the figure of Galtieri (components ‘c’ and ‘d’). *Bronca*₂ is thus the bad feeling (‘e’) that Ezequiel has when he engages in this recurrent complex thought (‘b-d’):

[B] I feel *bronca*₂ towards Galtieri (“Yo le tengo *bronca*₂ a Galtieri”)

- a. I often think about this someone like this:
- b. “I know something about this someone,
(i.e. *I know that this someone did something, it was bad for me*)
- c. because of it, I feel something bad towards this someone
- d. because of it, I think something bad about this someone”
- e. when I think like this, I feel something bad towards this someone

Note that the feelings and thoughts in (c) and (d) are not specified in the explication. In cases like Ezequiel’s, where (b) can be further specified as ‘this someone did something, it was bad for me’, the specific nature of the feelings and thoughts in (c) and (d) are

likewise retrievable from context. Often, the words *resentimiento* (roughly, ‘resentfulness’) and *rencor* (roughly, ‘rancour/grudge’) collocate with this subtype of *bronca*₂. This is exemplified in (25) and (26) from separate newspaper articles:

(25) “Yo no tengo **bronca** ni **resentimiento** contra esta chica”, dijo el hombre. Pero agregó que está “dolido y con **bronca**” por lo que “**me hizo la Policía**”. (“Preso,” 2009, para. 1)

“I do not feel **bronca** or **resentfulness** against this girl”, said the man. But he added that he is “hurt and with **bronca**” because of what “**the Police did to me**”.’

(26) Nunca creí que iba a pasar por una situación así. Tenía la idea de abandonar de inmediato el club donde estuviese si **agredían a un compañero**. Y me terminó pasando a mí. De inmediato agarré mis cosas y dejé el club. Primero está la familia. No puedo soportar estas cosas. **No guardo rencor, ni bronca**, pero no podía continuar. (“Gerry,” 2009, para. 1)

‘It never thought I would go through a situation like this. I always thought I would immediately abandon a club if any **team-mate was mistreated**. And it ended up happening to me. I took my things and left the club immediately. Family comes first. I can’t stand these things. **I don’t harbor a grudge, or bronca**, but I just couldn’t continue there.’

The excerpt in (27), from a classic play of Porteño theater (Gorostiza, 2009 [1949], pp-100-101), concerns a different subtype of *bronca*₂, i.e. *bronca*₂ is here grounded in a different motivation:

(27) *Pato*: ¡[Rodolfo] tiene guita!

Pichín: ¿Alguna vez lo viste manejar?

Pato: Sí.

Pichín: ¿Viste? Parece que se quiere llevar el mundo por delante.

Pato: Le tengo una bronca...

Ronco: ¿Qué te hizo?

Pato: Nada...

Ronco: ¿Y entonces? ¿Por qué le tenés bronca?

Pato: ¿No le viste la cara que tiene?

Ronco: ¿Y por eso le tenés que tener bronca?

Pichín: ¿No viste que es un pituco?

‘*Pato*: [Rodolfo] has money!

Pichín: Have you ever seen him drive his car?

Pato: Yes.

Pichín: He is so arrogant, isn't he?

Pato: I feel such bronca towards him.

Ronco: What did he do to you?

Pato: Nothing...

Ronco: So? Why do you feel bronca towards him?

Pato: Did you see his face?

Ronco: Is that why you feel bronca towards him?

Pichín: Don't you see that he is a dandy?

It is important to take note of Ronco's question: "¿Qué te hizo?" ('What did he do to you?'). It reveals that, until this point of the exchange, Ronco has inferred that Pato and Pichín's *bronca*₂ towards Rodolfo is motivated by the thought 'this someone did something bad, it was bad for me'. However, it soon becomes clear that their *bronca*₂ relates to the fact that Rodolfo can afford expensive things. The inferable scenario is thus 'many good things happen to this someone', and/or 'many people can think good things about this someone'. In scenarios like these, the words *envidia* ('envy') and *celos* ('jealousy') tend to co-occur with *bronca*₂, providing further cues about the precise nature of the emotion. As in (28), from a novel, and (29) and (30), from news websites:

(28) **Siempre te tuve bronca**, más que **envidia**, **bronca**, por eso invariablemente quise matarte. Me jodiste ante mis padres con tu aspecto de intelectual y, con tu pinta de pulcro caballero, antes las chicas. (Grieco, 2014, p. 360)

'I have always felt bronca towards you, bronca rather than **envy**, that's why I wanted to kill you, that never changed. You messed me about in front of my parents with your intellectual appearance, and in front of girls with your smart gentleman look.'

(29) [talking about a competitor in a boxing competition] Ella habla boludeces. **Me tiene bronca y envidia** porque nunca logró lo que hice yo. Cada vez que salió afuera del país la desfiguraron y le ganaron por knock out. Nunca pudo ganar afuera. ("Alejandra," n.d., para. 4)

[talking about a competitor in a boxing competition] She talks bullshit. **She has bronca and envy towards me** because she never achieved what I have. Each time she went to fight abroad, they disfigured her and defeated her by knockout. She never won a fight abroad.'

(30) Realmente lo hablo como mujer porque de verdad me molesta. (...) **[E]s como que tengo una bronca, pero es como celos de mujer** (...) [E]s una bomba sexual, y ella lo llama, como mínimo, dos veces por semana. ("Los celos," 2019, para. 5, 7)

'I say this as the woman I am, because this really bothers me. (...) **[I]t's like I have a bronca, but it's like a woman's jealousy** (...) She's a sex bomb, and she calls him at least two times a week.'

To conclude this examination of *bronca*₂, the explication for *bronca*₂ in [B] is now presented again in [C], including various possible specific scenarios:

[C] I feel *bronca*₂ towards Carlos ("Yo le tengo *bronca*₂ a Carlos")

a. I often think about this someone like this:

b. "I know something about this someone,

(i.e. *I know that this someone did something, it was bad for me*)

(i.e. *I know that many good things happen to this someone*)

(i.e. *I know that many people can think good things about this someone*)

c. because of it, I feel something bad towards this someone

d. because of it, I think something bad about this someone"

e. when I think like this, I feel something bad towards this someone

6.6 *Broncas*: the unresolved grievances that haunt us

In this section, I propose a third *bronca* meaning that is not contemplated (or at least to my knowledge; see §6.3) by dictionaries: *broncas*.

6.6.1 Preliminary observations

Broncas designates a complex scenario which may be summed up as follows: a person, whom I shall henceforth call the "victim", has some bad experiences as a result of someone else's actions. After this, a long time goes by—usually, years—in which this victim doesn't reach a sense of "closure", as it were, in relation to these past experiences.

However, something now has brought the attention back to the experiences, reawakening emotions linked to them and a desire for retaliation.

It is important to note that *broncas* is not a feeling word in the same way as *bronca*₁ and *bronca*₂. It does not designate “raw” feeling, as do the mass nouns *bronca*₁ and *bronca*₂; rather, *broncas* is a plural count noun that designates a discrete, complex scenario comprised of multiple bad experiences, along with thought, feeling, and desire. One can say *yo siento bronca*₁/*bronca*₂ (‘I feel *bronca*₁/*bronca*₂’), but it would sound odd if one said *yo siento broncas* (‘I feel *broncas*’). Instead, one can say about *broncas* that they *quedan* (‘remain’), *se destapan* (roughly, ‘rear their ugly heads’), or *aparecen* (‘appear’). *Broncas* can also take the direct object, e.g. when the victim is said to *saldar viejas broncas*. This expression, comparable to English *to settle an old score*, profiles the role as avenger of wrongs that the victim of *broncas* takes.

6.6.2 Examples of *broncas*

In (31), the protagonist of a novel (Rocca, 2016) has got an appointment with a psychoanalyst because she needs to “*contar mis broncas*” (‘tell my *broncas*’):⁶²

(31) **Necesitaba hablar del tema, contar** otras cosas que me habían pasado en la vida, mis miedos, mis inseguridades, **mis broncas**, mi separación... qué elegir contar primero. Me hizo sentar en un sillón y mis primeras palabras fueron:

— **Tuve un hermano al que asesinaron.**

— ¿Cuándo?

— **Hace treinta años.** (p. 78)

‘**I needed to talk about the topic, tell** about other things that had happened in my life, my fears, my insecurities, **my broncas**, my separation...what should I choose to tell first. He made me sit on a couch and my first words were:

— **I had a brother who was killed.**

— When?

— **Thirty years ago.’**

⁶² It’s very common in Argentina to see a psychologist—or rather, a psychoanalyst—and to talk openly about it. Argentina is the country with the highest number of psychologists per capital in the world (198 per 100.000 inhabitants); nearly half of these therapists are based in Buenos Aires (Goldhill, 2016).

The killing of the protagonist's brother is a bad experience which motivates her use of the word *broncas*: it is an event that occurred a long time ago in her life, and it occurred as a result of someone else's actions. Furthermore, as we can infer from her need to bring the topic to the psychoanalyst, she has not achieved a sense of closure in relation to it.

What other bad experiences motivate her use of the word *broncas* (as opposed to singular *bronca*)? As is usually the case with occurrences of *broncas*, the context does not reveal it to us, and, perhaps, there are no other such experiences that the victim could recount. This is precisely the semantic "magic" of the word *broncas*: it construes a past involving a plurality of bad experiences, irrespective of how many of these experiences the victim knows to be the case "in fact". With *broncas*, then, the victim's past seems to take on a more tragic tone.

In the short story in (32) (Sacheri, 2007), the narrator is responsible for the *broncas* of the character that he is addressing:

(32) **Me agarraste casi por el cuello**, haciendo un guiñapo con mi camisa y mi corbata, y miraste a fondo de mis ojos, como buscando que lo que ibas a decirme me quedara absolutamente claro. Tu cara se había transformado. Era una máscara **iracunda, orgullosa**, llena de **broncas** y **rencores**. Y tan viva que daba miedo. Ya no quedaban en tu piel rastros de las lágrimas. Sólo tenías lugar para la **furia**. En ese momento me acordé. Te juro que hacía **veinte años** por lo menos que aquello ni se me pasaba por la cabeza. (pp. 73-74)

'**You took me almost by the neck**, leaving my shirt and tie in tatters, and gazed into the back of my eyes, so as to make sure that I understood what you were about to say to me. Your face was transformed. It was an **ireful, proud** mask, full of **broncas** and **resentments**. And so full of life that it was scary. There were no more traces of tears in your skin. You only had a place for **fury**. In that moment I remembered. I swear that for at least **20 years** that hadn't crossed my mind.'

The example suggests the same scenario: there is a victim ("you"), and there is someone ("I") who caused the bad experience far back in time ("at least 20 years" ago). Furthermore, the victim's violent attitude suggests her desire for revenge, as do also her feelings: *ira* ('wrath'), *orgullo* ('pride'), *rencores* ('resentments'), and *furia* ('fury').

In (33), the interviewee is a person whose parents were kidnapped during the Argentine military dictatorship of 1976-1983. She recounts that her *broncas* “*aparecieron*” (‘appeared’) during the writing of an autobiographical novel more than thirty years after the experience (Ciosescu, 2017). Note again how, with the *broncas*, feelings such as *resentimientos* (‘resentments’) and *rencor* (‘rancours’) also emerge:

(33) Y así me fui metiendo en esas partes de mí misma que una no quiere reconocer y así **aparecieron** en el personaje de Andrea **los resentimientos, broncas y rencores**.

‘And that is how I began to delve into those parts of myself that one doesn’t want to acknowledge, and that’s how **the resentments, broncas, and grudges appeared** in the protagonist Andrea.’

It must be noted at this point that the experiences *broncas* relates to do not need to be of such extremely terrible nature as in the examples so far presented (the killing of a brother, the kidnapping of one’s parents, etc.), nor do these experiences need to have factually occurred so far back in the victim’s life (decades). It is perhaps due to the terrible nature of these experiences that their emergence as *broncas* was so long postponed: most probably, the victims had psychologically “repressed”—i.e. pushed into the unconscious—the memory of these experiences, such that people may also refer to them as *experiencias traumáticas* (‘traumatic experiences’).⁶³

This said, I will nonetheless argue that *broncas* does construe the experiences as having occurred (subjectively) ‘a long time ago’. This is an important semantic component, as it conveys a sense that, given the great prolongation, the *broncas* now call for immediate retaliation. The collocation *viejas broncas* (‘old broncas’) is often used to profile this temporal dimension. The following newspaper headlines illustrate this:

(34) Selección: trapitos al sol, **viejas broncas** que se destapan entre técnicos y jugadores (Leblebidjian, 2017)

‘National soccer team: dirty laundry aired, **old broncas** rear their ugly heads among staff and players’

⁶³ For an NSM analysis of English *trauma*, see Goddard and Wierzbicka (2014, pp. 212-216).

(35) Creen que el joven asesinado en Godoy Cruz fue atacado por “**viejas broncas**” (“Creen,” 2018)

‘It is suspected that the youngster murdered in Godoy Cruz was attacked due to “**old broncas**”’

(36) Adolescente preso por matar para saldar **viejas broncas** (“Adolescente,” 2018)

‘Teenager in prison for killing to settle **old broncas**’

The news article corresponding to the headline in (36) provides an interesting case. As it turns out in the article, the teenager’s *broncas* relate to one single event in the past, here referred to with the singular “*una vieja bronca*” (‘one old bronca’). This supports my hypothesis that the prototypically plural *broncas* is used irrespective of what speakers know to be the case, to construe a past involving not “one” but “some” bad experiences.

6.6.3 Semantic explication of *broncas*

I suggest that *broncas* can be explicated as follows:

[D] *broncas* (e.g. “*Aparecieron viejas broncas*” (‘Old broncas appeared’))

a. something

people can say what this something is with the word *broncas*

someone can say something about something with this word when this someone thinks like this:

b. “a long time ago, it was like this:

- some bad things happened to me

- these things happened because someone else did something

- I felt something very bad because of this

c. a short time ago, something happened

d. because of this, now I can think like this:

e. “for a long time after these bad things happened, I didn’t do something

f. now I often think about this someone, now I often think about these things

g. I can’t not feel something bad because of this,

I can’t not feel something bad because I didn’t do something for a long time

h. I want to do something bad to this someone now,

it will be good for me if I do it”

The opening component of *broncas* (identified as ‘a’) is based on the template proposed by Goddard and Wierzbicka (2014, pp. 205–237) for the explication of “abstract” nouns. The component indicates that speakers say something *with the word broncas*, i.e. *broncas* functions here as a lexical and discursive tool with which speakers can construe a particular complex scenario—namely components (b) to (h)—as ‘something’.

Component (b) captures the idea that some bad things happened to someone (the “victim”) in a distant past and as a result of someone else’s actions. It also states that, as a result, this victim experienced very bad feelings—e.g. *bronca*₁, *bronca*₂, *ira* (‘wrath’), *rencor* (‘rancour’), *furia* (‘fury’), *tristeza* (‘sadness’), etc.

Component (c) captures the “trigger” event or situation which has recently brought the attention back to the bad experiences. Component (d) presents (e)-(h) as the victim’s present stance. In component (e), the victim entertains the idea that a sense of closure is lacking in relation to the experiences. In component (f), the victim is occupied thinking about the events and the person responsible, and, in component (g), associated bad feelings are reawakened, now with added intensity given the long-standing, unresolved status of the situation. Component (h) captures an urgent desire for retaliation, and the sense that this retaliation will resolve or “settle” the *broncas*.

6.7 Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have offered a discursive and semantic analysis of Porteño *bronca*, a unique (set of) emotion(s) with no precise equivalent(s) in other languages. I have shown that neither outsiders—travel writers, international journalists, etc.—, nor Spanish dictionaries have been able to capture the precise meanings of *bronca*, due to issues of conceptual inaccuracy, ethnocentric framing, obscurity, and circularity.

The analysis revealed that there are three distinct meanings of *bronca*, identified here as *bronca*₁, *bronca*₂, and *broncas*. *Bronca*₁ is the prototypical, most frequent form of *bronca*. *Bronca*₁ is also perhaps the most enlightening one within the context of this thesis, as its meaning affords a discursive affinity with deep-seated, structural, recurrent issues in the Argentine society (in themes such as political corruption, inequity, economic crises, crime, poverty, and the lack of moral standards), issues which locals frequently frame within the logics of *viveza criolla*.

Key differences between the three meanings of Porteño *bronca* can be further summarized as follows. *Bronca*₁ is the emotional key with which Porteños process, or try to process, the inevitable, unfortunate “reality” in which they live. It places people in the position of passive “onlookers” of unwanted scenarios that unfold in front of their eyes in a compelling way. With *bronca*₁, then, Argentines confirm that the societal issues mentioned above (corruption, inequity, economic crises, etc.) are the tragic destiny to which Argentina is doomed. Also, the experiencer of *bronca*₁ is attributed a potential aggressive-expressive reaction which can serve to release the bad feeling.

*Bronca*₂ is an evolved form of *bronca*₁ in which the bad feeling remains associated to a specific person. It pertains to the domain of “sociality of emotions”, as it designates a way of emotionally relating to people; most typically, people who did something bad to us, who have something we don’t, or who are liked by others.

Finally, *bronzas* is a way of making emotional sense of one’s past. It construes this past as hard, unresolved, and calling for closure. It pertains to the domain of “autobiographical thinking”, that is, it concerns the personal life narrative that we construe for ourselves and for others.

Chapter 7. Performing *argentinidad* (‘Argentineity’)

7.1 Introduction

We have now arrived at the penultimate chapter of this thesis, and at its last chapter involving analysis proper. Up to this point, the targets of analysis have been Porteño key words or expressions: *Los argentinos descienden de los barcos*, *Buenos Aires es la París de Sudamérica*, *lunfardo*, *viveza criolla*, *vivo*, *boludo*, and *bronca*. In each case, the semantic explications of these key words and expressions (and the analyses which led to their formulation) revealed that their culture-specific meanings are inextricably linked to Argentina, its history, its people, and the society in which these people live.

This chapter shifts the focus away from any particular key word or expression to instead examine some Porteño discourses. Thus, rather than semantic explications, this chapter proposes a set of cultural scripts. Specifically, the discursive practices under the spotlight here are those through which Porteños (and Argentines, more broadly) make sense of Argentina or, to put it in another way, perform *argentinidad* (“the quality or condition of being Argentine” (RAE, 2014), translated hereafter as ‘Argentineity’).⁶⁴ In total, twenty-five cultural scripts will be proposed and discussed, all of which seek to describe cultural norms, attitudes, assumptions, and themes that guide Argentines’ expression of Argentineity. To provide some idea of where we are headed, all scripts are listed in Table 8 (their organization into “good” and “bad” scripts will be explained shortly, in §7.1.1). I will argue that, by enacting these scripts, Argentines construct and reaffirm their Argentine identity via specific ways of thinking, feeling, and speaking about the country.

⁶⁴ Original Spanish: “Carácter o condición de argentino”. DiLA (AAL, 2019, p. 41) defines *argentinidad* as “Calidad de lo que es peculiar de la República Argentina” (‘The quality/nature of that which is peculiar to the Argentine Republic’).

Table 8: Twenty-five cultural scripts for performing *Argentinity*

The “good” scripts	The “bad” scripts
[A] Seeing places in Buenos Aires	[N] Argentina’s golden past and present failure
[B] The Europeanness of Argentines	[O] Argentina’s infinitely recurring crises
[C] The European descent of Argentines	[P] “¡ <i>Qué país de mierda!</i> ” (‘What a shithole country!’)
[D ₁] Argentines’ Euro-Italian lexicon	[Q] Comparing Argentina unfavourably against other countries
[D ₂] Argentines’ Italian accent	[R] The widespread <i>vivo</i> ’s mindset
[D ₃] Argentines’ Italian gesturing	[S] Attitudes towards <i>laburo</i> (‘work’) and <i>guita</i> (‘money’)
[E] Expressing how good Argentina is	[T] Construing oneself as a <i>boludo</i>
[F] Great Argentine talents	[U] Expressing <i>bronca</i> ₁ when reflecting on Argentina
[G] Great Argentine inventions	[V] Argentina has no solution
[H] Great Argentine pleasures	[W] The only way out of Argentina
[I] Argentina’s impressive places	
[J] Argentina’s records	
[K] Argentina is a rich country	
[L] The Argentine ego	
[M] Construing oneself as a <i>laborante</i> (‘hard-working person’)	

The proposed scripts span many different themes, including, for example, Argentine personalities, accent, achievements, and history and future trajectory of Argentine economy. Indeed, many of these themes may correspond, at least partially, with what authors in different fields have variously called Argentina’s “myths”, “guiding fictions”, “*zonceras*” (‘fooleries’), “national narratives”, and “national imaginaries” (Bulat, 2015; Giardinelli, 1998; Grimson, 2012; Jauretche, 1968; Kaminsky, 2008; Pons & Soria, 2005; Pigna, 2005; Shumway, 1991; Svampa, 2006). What makes my analysis of these discursive practices an original contribution is my use of NSM-based cultural scripts as the tool for analysis (Goddard, 2006a; Goddard & Ye, 2014; Levisen & Waters, 2017).

“Spelling out” the twenty-five scripts in simple, cross-translatable terms is the first aim of this chapter. But there is a second, more exploratory aim, too. Recall—if you can, and if not, refer back to §2.2.1.2—Levisen & Waters’s (2017) third “keyword canon”: *keywords create discursive contexts*. This canon states that, like a magnet, a keyword attracts discourses recurrently associated to it. I argue that, likewise, when a discourse is

invoked, it is likely that an associated (set of) keyword(s) will be recruited, too. As we move through each script and the language samples that led to their formulation, we will see that many of these discourses recruit and/or are invoked by the keywords and expressions already explicated in Ch 3 to 6. Therefore, the second aim of this chapter is to show various ways in which these scripts and the cultural keywords of Ch. 3 to 6 interact, maintain, and legitimize each other in language use. To address these two aims, I explore natural language samples from a range of diverse sources—such as stand-up comedy performances, short stories, radio and T.V. programmes.

Before getting started, this introduction has two remaining sections. In §7.1.1, I explain the basis for organizing the scripts into two groups: “good” scripts and “bad” scripts. Then, in §7.1.2, I list five important caveats about the proposed scripts and their construction. The rest of the chapter is organized as follows: §7.2 lays out fifteen good scripts, and §7.3 (“Scripts in action, part one”) looks at four examples where these various scripts are discursively enacted. Next, §7.4 proposes ten bad scripts, and §7.5 (“Scripts in action, part two”) offers a further four examples where both bad and good scripts are discursively enacted. Finally, §7.7 contains some concluding remarks.

7.1.1 The division of scripts into “good” and “bad”

In 2004, Porteño alt-rock band *Bersuit Vergarabat* released a song which would become immensely popular in the country: *La argentinidad al palo* (‘Argentineity with a boner/with great intensity’) (Cordera, 2004).⁶⁵ The song, which I shall later explore in this chapter, is a catalogue of oft-repeated phrases and discourses with which Argentines enact Argentineity. In the final lines, the song concludes that there are two sides or poles of Argentineity, a very good one and a very bad one:

Del éxtasis a la agonía oscila nuestro historial.
Podemos ser lo mejor o también lo peor
con la misma facilidad.

⁶⁵ The full song is on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pE54NigJDEw> (posted on 20 September 2012).

‘Between ecstasy and agony oscillates our history.
We can be the best and also the worst
with the greatest ease.’

Following the song’s dictum, I shall organize the stock of scripts for construing Argentineity into two large subgroups: the “good” scripts and “bad” scripts. The good scripts are “on good terms” with Argentineity: with them, Porteños construe a positive, valued Argentineity. These scripts all rely on semantic components that use the semantic prime GOOD to that end, such as ‘this is good’ and ‘I feel something good because of this’. The bad scripts are “on bad terms” with Argentineity: with the bad scripts, Porteños construe a negative, deprecated Argentineity. They all rely on semantic components that use the prime BAD for that purpose, such as ‘this is bad’ and ‘I feel something bad because of this’. As a Porteño myself, the division of Argentineity-related scripts into often-competing and often-contradictory “good” and “bad” scripts makes intuitive sense to me. I acknowledge that my insider-intuition and the presented song lyrics alone might at first seem to be a lightweight justification for dividing scripts into good and bad, but I am confident that the usefulness of this division will become apparent as we progress through the chapter.

7.1.2 Some caveats

Before presenting the scripts, five observations are in order. First, it is worth repeating that although these scripts articulate ideas that project onto all Argentines, or onto all of Argentina, they embody, by and large, a Porteñocentric perspective. Nevertheless, because the scripts are also widely practised in the *interior* (i.e. the Argentine provinces), it is also valid to think of them as *Argentine* scripts.

Second, I want to note that the twenty-five scripts presented here are not intended to represent the full Porteño stock of Argentineity scripts, i.e. there are many more ways in which Porteños discursively perform what they view as distinctively Argentine. My intention is to begin to track down some of these scripts, with a particular emphasis on those which discursively interact with the keywords presented in Ch. 3 to 6, i.e. *Los argentinos descenden de los barcos*, *Buenos Aires es la París de Sudamérica*, *lunfardo*, *viveza criolla*, *vivo*, *boludo*, and *bronca*.

Third, I would like to remind the reader that I am not positing that most Argentines necessarily adhere to or “believe in” these scripts, or that they necessarily or habitually enact them. Rather, the claim is simply that a majority of Argentines are in some degree familiar with their contents, and that, even if they do not enact them “to the letter”, much of their own behavior and expectations are guided by this familiarity (See §2.2.3.4).

Fourth, like Ch. 3, this chapter is methodologically exploratory. It is so because I am applying the cultural scripts technique in a new way, namely, as a disciplined form of “discourse analysis”. Along with offering various individual scripts, I want to propose a way for exploring how various scripts are woven together in larger samples of discourse.

As a result, my complex scripts were constructed with intelligibility in mind, and, occasionally, this was at the expense of well-formedness (see §2.2.3.3), i.e. full cross-translatability. The NSM mini-language was the medium employed, but some scripts are rich in exemplars and in some widespread but not entirely universal molecules, and may sometimes not strictly adhere to NSM grammar. The metalanguage used may more adequately be described as being something between NSM and the newly emerged *Minimal English* (Goddard, 2018b, to appear/2021; Sadow, Peeters, & Mullan, 2020). Minimal English is an application and extension of the NSM metalanguage. It is a highly reduced version of English designed to ensure maximum translatability without compromising intelligibility, and aimed at fostering intercultural communication and cross-linguistic understanding. The tool is intended for use by specialists and non-specialists alike, and is already being applied in a wide range of fields, such as diplomacy (Maley, 2018), language teaching (Sadow, 2019), language revival (Machin, to appear/2021), science communication (Wierzbicka, 2018), health care (Marini, 2019), development training (Caffery & Hill, 2018), development of communication skills for people with autism (Jordan, 2017), and in various other areas where more clear and accessible communication is needed.

Lastly, the reader will no doubt find that, compared to examples in other chapters of the thesis, the examples presented here are relatively long. This is because, as noted, there is a second, exploratory aim in this chapter, namely, to illustrate various ways in which all 25 scripts and the cultural keywords of Ch. 3 to 6 are woven together in discourse. Shorter samples of discourse would therefore not have sufficed. I would ask the reader to bear with me in this, and to accept that the length of the examples obeys these reasons.

7.2 The “good” scripts

In this section I will propose fifteen different “good” scripts, that is, scripts with which Porteños construe a positive, valued Argentineity. I begin by identifying some “European” scripts, a subclass of good scripts in which Argentineity is valued for certain white, European aspects attributed to it, and which typically employ the molecules ‘Europe’ and ‘Italy’ to this end.

7.2.1 The European scripts

7.2.1.1 Europeanized people, Europeanized places

In Ch. 3, I began to explore the stock of European scripts via two scripts, reproduced in [A] and [B] below. Script [A] is a “place script” that invites people to a visually and affectively “Parisian experience” of places in the Argentine capital:

[A] Seeing places in Buenos Aires

a. when people see many places in Buenos Aires [m], they can’t not think like this:

“these places are like places in Paris [m]”

b. at the same time, they can feel something good,

like people can feel something good when they see places like this in Paris [m]

Script [B] (labelled [G] in Ch. 3) is a high-level, “people script” that celebrates an analogy between Argentines and Europeans, most prominently, Italians:

[B] The Europeanness of Argentines

a. in Argentina [m], many people can think like this:

b. “people in Argentina [m] are like people in Europe [m],

c. many of them are like people in Italy [m]

d. this is good”

Recall the argument in Ch. 3 that the expressions *Buenos Aires es la París de Sudamérica* and *Los argentinos descienden de los barcos* can be conceived as evolved forms of scripts

[A] and [B], respectively. With the first expression, speakers construct a fictive, blended scenario where Buenos Aires, rather than being *like* Paris (as the script dictates), *is* Paris; with the second expression, Argentines, rather than being *like* European people (as the script dictates), *are* European people.⁶⁶

7.2.1.2 Europeans by descent

Script [C] below captures a discourse whereby Argentines are able to claim European biological descent. Recall from Ch. 3 that this discourse stands in contrast with genetic research which indicates that 56% of Argentines have at least one Amerindian ancestor (Corach et al., 2010).

[C] A script about the European descent of Argentines

- a. in Argentina [m], many people can think like this:
- b. “my grandfather [m] was born [m] in a country [m] in Europe [m]”
- c. many of them can think like this:
- d. “my grandfather [m] was born [m] in Italy [m]”
- e. it is not like this in countries [m] near Argentina [m]
- f. this is good

Note the use of the semantic molecule ‘Italy’, which accounts for the knowledge that the vast majority of European immigrants came from that country. The molecule ‘grandfather’ reflects the common knowledge that most of these immigrants were male. It also aims to capture the prototypical Argentine of European descent as someone of a second generation.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ As explained in Ch. 3, speakers are aware of the fictive status of the blends in the two expressions. In a sense, no one is actually “fooled” by these blends, as Fauconnier and Turner have put it (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p. 63). Nevertheless, the blends contribute to the illusion of a successful Europeanization of Argentine places and people.

⁶⁷ I can use my personal case to clarify these points. I am biologically descended from a man who literally came on a ship to Buenos Aires. But this man is my father (not my grandfather), who is Danish (not Italian), and who migrated to Argentina in 1944 (not during the great immigration). Thus, I don't fit with the prototypical Euro-Argentine that the script imposes. However, when I look into my mother's genealogy through the lens of the script, I think of my great-great-grandfather, Francesco D'Esposito, coming on a ship from Sorrento (Italy) to Buenos Aires in the late 19th century, and, for a moment, I feel quintessentially “Argentine”.

7.2.1.3 Ethnometapragmatic scripts: Euro-Italian speech and gestures

With scripts [D₁], [D₂], and [D₃], Porteños celebrate the Euro-Italian nature of Argentine words, speech sounds, and gesturing, respectively. The expression “*Los argentinos son italianos que hablan español*” (‘Argentines are Italians who speak Spanish’) is often invoked as “evidence” of this Euro-Italianness.

Script [D₁] celebrates the Euro-Italian nature of Argentine speech as it manifests in the lexicon of Argentines. It concerns the use of various words borrowed from Italian and other European languages.

[D₁] Argentines’ Euro-Italian lexicon

- a. in Argentina [m], people often say something like this:
 - b. “when people in this country [m] say something with words,
 - b. they often say it with words people say in countries [m] in Europe [m],
 - c. they often say it with words people say in Italy [m]
 - d. this is good”

As illustrated by the conversations in the TV show *Almorzando con Mirtha Legrand* (El Trece, 2018) treated in Ch. 4, it is a common Porteño practice to indulge in talk about the Italian and other European origins of words used in Argentina, and the keyword *lunfardo* has the power to guide conversations in this direction.

Script [D₂] celebrates the Italianization of Argentine speech that manifests in the Argentine *acento* (‘accent’). According to this script, in Argentine Spanish—in contrast to other Spanish varieties—one can hear the traces left by the Italian languages in speech sounds:

[D₂] Argentines’ Italian accent

- a. in Argentina [m], many people can think like this:
 - b. “when people in this country [m] say something with words,
 - c. they often say it like people in Italy [m] say something with words
 - d. it is like this because of this:
 - e. - when people hear these words, they can hear something else at the same time

- f. - they can think about it like this:
- g. “I can hear the same when people in Italy [m] say things with words,
- h. it is like music [m]”
- i. this is good”

To some extent, empirical research supports the view that the accent of Porteño has been influenced by the late 19th century Spanish-Italian contact (e.g. Benet et al., 2012; Colantoni & Gurlekian, 2004; Pešková et al., 2011, 2012). However, linguists are generally careful not to generalize the Italian accent to the whole country, as the Porteños are prone to do via script [D₂].

Like Porteño words and speech sounds, Porteño hand gesturing is another highly celebrated, integral aspect of the Porteño communicative style. The variety and frequency of gestures reflect the expressive character of Porteño communication, and the value Porteños place in non-verbal communication and expression of feelings.⁶⁸ It is thus common to find gesture translations in Porteño Spanish-English dictionaries and cultural guides (e.g. Aguirre et al., 2007; Barrón, 2014; Bracken, 2005; Indij, 2011). Importantly, gestures in Porteño communication are also seen as a trace of the Italian contact. A review article of the cultural guide *Speak Porteño: Gestures, Language Tips and Porteño Slang* (Indij, 2011) puts it clearly:

- (1) [U]na guía práctica para quienes se encontraran con esos gestos, palabras y frases que han nacido en Buenos Aires, culpa del tango, del cocoliche de la inmigración (...) (“Speak Porteño,” 2013, para. 2).

‘[A] practical guide for those who come across those gestures, words and phrases that originated in Buenos Aires because of tango, and because of the cocoliche of immigration (...)’

Script [D₃] can be captured as follows:

⁶⁸ The communicative style of “interpersonal closeness” commonly attributed to the Spanish-speaking world places value in the expression of one’s feelings in both verbal and non-verbal communication. For an NSM approximation to this, see Fernández and Goddard (2020) and Bułat Silva (2020).

[D₃] Argentines' Italian gesturing

- a. in Argentina [m], many people can think like this:
- b. “when people in Argentina [m] say something with words,
- c. they often move their hands [m] a lot at the same time
- d. they do this because they want to say something with their hands [m],
- e. often they do this because they want other people to know what they feel
- f. if someone sees this, this someone can think like this:
- g. “people in Italy [m] do the same when they want to say something with words”
- h. this is good”

7.2.2 Argentina, best country in the world

Script [E] is a high-level script whereby speakers proudly position Argentina as “far above” other, usually nearby, countries. As the examples in §7.3 (“Scripts in action, part one”) shall illustrate, Argentines often have a desire to express this, for example by exclaiming *¡Argentina es el mejor país del mundo!* (‘Argentina is the best country in the world!’).

[E] Expressing how good Argentina is

- a. in Argentina [m], people often think like this:
- b. “this country [m] is very very good, it is far above other countries [m],
- c. I feel something very good because of this”
- d. when they think like this, they often want to say it to other people

7.2.3 The “good lists”

Scripts [F], [G], [H], [I], and [J] (presented across §§7.2.3.1-7.2.3.5) pertain to five domains of “national achievements” in which Argentines claim to stand out: talents, inventions, pleasures, places, and records. The habitual discursive practice consists in enumerating various exemplars (i.e. widely known examples) of national achievements in these domains. To capture this, these scripts commence with the component ‘in Argentina [m], people often say something like this’, and they all involve a list of exemplars of achievements in the relevant domain. When enumerating, Argentines typically claim “ownership” over the exemplars by employing the verb “tener” (‘have’)

in the 1st person plural conjugation. For example, “*Tenemos a Messi, a Maradona...*” ([We] have Messi, Maradona...’).

7.2.3.1 Great Argentine talents

With script [F], speakers offer a list of talented, world-renowned personalities who they consider to be indisputably the best on earth in their respective fields, and who they describe as Argentine. Common figures in the lists include: football stars Diego Armando Maradona (1960-)—aka “*Dios*” (‘God’)—and Lionel Messi (1987-), writers Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) and Julio Cortázar (1914-1984), and *el Papa* (‘the Pope’) (1936-). Other oft-invoked Argentine talents include basketball player Emanuel Ginóbili (1977-), Marxist revolutionary Ernesto “Che” Guevara (1928-1967), Formula One driver Juan Manuel Fangio (1911-1995), cardiac surgeon René Favaloro (1923-2000), and *tango* icons Carlos Gardel (1890-1935) and Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992).

As the script postulates, Argentines assume that everyone around the world knows of these outstanding personalities, and, importantly, that everyone knows of their Argentine provenance. However, I should note that, after years of experiences abroad with non-Argentines, I know these assumptions to be false: people in other countries don't know many of these personalities, or they do without knowing that they are Argentines.

[F] Great Argentine talents

- a. in Argentina [m], people often say something like this:
- b. “some people born [m] in this country [m] are not like anyone else on earth [m]
- c. one of them is *Maradona**, another one is *Borges**,
- d. another one is *Papa** ‘Pope’, there are more people like them
- e. they can do things of some kinds very well,
very few people on earth [m] can do these things so well
- f. they are very very good, they are people far above all other people
- g. all people on earth [m] know all these things about them
- h. I feel something very good when I think about them”

7.2.3.2 Great Argentine inventions

Speakers are ready to proudly enumerate what they consider to be important inventions of “indisputably” Argentine authorship. Table 9 below provides the names of these inventions and their English translations.

Table 9: Great Argentine inventions

Invention	English translation
<i>el baipás</i>	‘the bypass (heart operation)’
<i>el dibujo animado</i>	‘the animated cartoon’
<i>el colectivo</i>	‘the bus’
<i>la identificación por huellas digitales</i>	‘the fingerprinting technique’
<i>el sifón de soda</i>	‘the siphon seltzer bottle’
<i>la birome</i>	‘the ballpoint pen’
<i>el helicóptero</i>	‘the helicopter’
<i>la jeringa descartable</i>	‘the disposable syringe’
<i>el dulce de leche</i>	‘the milk confection’
<i>el alfajor</i>	‘the sweet biscuit with filling’
<i>las alpargatas</i>	‘the espadrilles (shoes)’

Before offering the script, some relevant notes about these achievements are in order. I have come across many Argentines who incorrectly think that the achievement was the “discovery of fingerprints” (rather than the invention of the fingerprinting technique), or who think that Argentines invented sparkling water (rather than the siphon seltzer bottle). As for the ballpoint pen, the Argentine word *birome* is a portmanteau of Biró and Meyne, the inventors’ surnames. As for the helicopter, Argentines credit inventor Raúl P. Pescara with the invention, but what this person in fact did was to contribute in the early design of helicopters. *Dulce de leche* is a very popular caramel-like spread, found in pastries, snacks, ice-cream, desserts, and in the famous *alfajor*.

[G] Great Argentine inventions

- a. in Argentina [m], people often say something like this:
- b. “people born [m] in this country [m] made [m] very good things of many kinds
before all other people on earth [m]”

- c. because of this, afterwards people in other countries [m]
could make [m] things of these kinds
- d. one of these things is called [m] *birome** ‘ballpoint’, another one
is called [m] *colectivo** ‘bus’, another one is called [m] *baipás** ‘bypass’,
there are many more things like this
- e. all people on earth [m] know that these things are very good
- f. I feel something good because of this”

7.2.3.3 Great Argentine pleasures

Script [H] concerns things which are meant to be consumed and enjoyed and which provide pleasure to the senses. The excelling quality of these things has to do with the quality of its natural components. After all, as put in the song *La Argentinidad al palo*, “the charm sprouts from the Argentine soil” (Cordera, 2004). Two of these pleasures are central ingredients in the Argentine diet: *vino* (‘wine’), the speciality being the Malbec variety, and *carne* (‘cattle meat’).⁶⁹

As the examples will illustrate, this script is typically put to use by an Argentine macho who does not hesitate to include Argentine women in the list of great Argentine “things” that please the senses. Argentine women are, under this script, another “thing” to be proudly possessed and enjoyed, and to boast about by saying “*Tenemos las mejores minas*” (‘[We] have the best women’). Recall from Ch. 4 that the word *mina* (‘woman’) is a paradigmatic example of a *lunfardo* word, and I used it as exemplar in the semantic explication of *lunfardo*. To this, I will add that the word *mina* is characteristic of male heteronormative discourse, and that its semantics involves an eroticization of women. Not surprisingly, its original meanings were ‘prostitute’ and ‘beautiful woman’ (Iribarren Castilla, 2009, pp. 1932-1936).

[H] Great Argentine pleasures

- a. in Argentina [m], men [m] often say something like this:

⁶⁹ The importance of cattle meat in the Argentine diet is such that the main sense of the word *carne* is not ‘meat’ as in most Spanish varieties, but ‘cattle meat’.

- b. “in this country [m], things of some kinds are very very good,
- c. they are far above things of these kinds in all other countries [m]
- d. one of these things is *vino** ‘wine’, another of these things is *mina** ‘woman’,
- e. another one is *carne** ‘cattle meat’, there are many other things like this
- f. people can feel something very good in their bodies
- g. when they do something with these things”

7.2.3.4 Impressive Argentine places

Script [I] celebrates some places considered to be uniquely impressive. The list typically includes certain Argentine natural wonders which are praised for their beauty and colossal size. These include *Cataratas del Iguazú* (‘Iguazú Waterfalls’), *Glaciar Perito Moreno* (‘Perito Moreno Glacier’), *Aconcagua* mountain, *Valle de la Luna* (‘Valley of the Moon’), and *Cerro de los Siete Colores* (‘The Hill of Seven Colours’). However, the script also accounts for urban or human-made spaces, such as those configured in parks, buildings, or streets.

[I] Argentina’s impressive places

- a. in Argentina [m], people often say something like this:
- b. “in this country [m], some places are very very good, like very few places on earth [m]
- c. one of these places is called [m] *Cataratas**, another one is called [m] *Perito Moreno**,
 another one is called [m] *Aconcagua**, there are other places like this
- d. people can’t not feel something good when they see something in these places,
 like people feel something good sometimes when they see something very big
- e. I feel something good because these places are in this country [m]”

7.2.3.5 Argentine records

Argentines claim for themselves a list of records concerning the size of certain natural and human-made things. The most common examples include: *9 de Julio*, “the widest street in the world”, *Avenida Rivadavia*, “the longest street in the world”, *Río de la Plata*, “the widest river in the world”, *Aconcagua*, “the highest mountain outside of Asia”, and *Cataratas del Iguazú* (‘Iguazú Waterfalls’), sometimes referred to as “(one of) the largest waterfall system(s) in the world”.

[J] A script celebrating Argentina's records

- a. in Argentina [m], people often say something like this:
- b. "in this country [m], some things of some kinds are very very big,
- c. like very few things of these kinds in other countries [m]
- d. one of these things is a street [m] called *9 de Julio**,
another one is a river [m] called *Río de la Plata**,
another one is a mountain [m] called *Aconcagua**,
there are other things like this in this country [m]
- e. this is very good"

7.2.4 "We are a rich country"

As noted already in the beginning of the thesis (§1.2), thinking of Argentina as a rich country is a well-entrenched habit, even if, at the time of writing, over 40 % of Argentines are living below the poverty line (Bonfiglio, 2020). It was noted also that this habit can be traced back to the discourse of the first Spanish settlers in the area, a discourse which gave origin to the word *Río de la Plata* and, later, to the word *Argentina*.

The expression "*Somos un país rico*" ('We are a rich country') can often be heard in Argentine discourse, the idea being that the country is rich insofar as it is capable of supplying the world with various raw materials that are essential but scarce in many other countries. This idea is followed with the corollary that, given the "right" economic and political decisions, Argentines should become wealthy people too.

[K] Argentina is a rich country

- a. in Argentina [m], many people think like this:
- b. "there is a lot of some things in this country [m]
- c. it is not like this in many other countries [m] on earth [m]
- d. people on earth [m] can't live if they don't do something with these things
- e. because of this, many people in many countries [m] want to buy [m] these things
- f. if they buy [m] these things, people in Argentina [m] can have [m] a lot of [m] money
- g. this is good"

The above script is often legitimized by a historical discourse (see Script [N] in §7.4.1.1), stating that, indeed, late 19th and early 20th century “Argentines”—in fact, Argentine elites—enjoyed a golden economic era based largely on beef, hides, and grains exports to Great Britain. In this era, Argentines would boast that “*Somos el granero del mundo*” (‘We are the granary of the world’) (Grimson, 2012, pp. 199-206; Jauretche, 1968, pp. 224-228; Pigna, 2005).

7.2.5 Personality traits (part 1)

With the following two scripts, Argentines celebrate two Argentine personality traits. One of them concerns the Argentine self-importance and egotism; the other one, the Argentine hard-working spirit.

7.2.5.1 The Argentine ego

In Latin America, Argentines have a long-standing reputation for being self-important and egotistic (Grimson, 2012; Kaminsky, 2008). Not surprisingly, in D.F. Sarmiento’s *Civilización y Barbarie* (‘Civilization and Barbarism’) (Sarmiento, 1999 [1845]), the work which laid the intellectual foundations of Argentina’s 19th century “civilizing” project, we read:

Los argentinos, de cualquier clase que sean, civilizados o ignorantes, tienen una alta conciencia de su valer como nación; todos los demás pueblos americanos les echan en cara esta vanidad, y se muestran ofendidos de su presunción y arrogancia. Creo que el cargo no es del todo infundado, y no me pesa de ello. ¡Ay del pueblo que no tiene fe en sí mismo! ¡Para ése no se han hecho las grandes cosas! (pp. 35-36)

‘The Argentine people of every class, civilized and ignorant alike, have a high opinion of their national importance. All the other people of South America throw this vanity of theirs in their teeth, and take offense at their presumption and arrogance. I believe the charge not to be wholly unfounded, but I do not object to the trait. Alas for the nation without faith in itself! Great things were not made for such a people.’ (Sarmiento, 1998 [1845], pp. 25-26).

Argentines joke about this aspect of the Argentine personality, and, in doing so, they stroke their own ego too. As did for example the Argentine Pope when the then-

Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa visited him in the Vatican in 2015. As retold by Correa (2015) in his Twitter account:

(2) Me contó un chiste. A todos sorprendió que escogiera llamarse “Francisco”, porque siendo argentino, esperaban que se llame “Jesús II”...

‘He told me joke. It surprised everyone that he would choose to call himself “Francis”, because, being Argentine, they expected that he would call himself “Jesus II”...’

Below are some widely circulated jokes about the Argentine ego. Argentines assume these jokes are known to other Latin Americans as well (Kaminsky, 2008, pp. 17-29):

(3) How does an Argentine commit suicide?

He climbs to the top of his ego, and then jumps.

(4) How do you make a lot of money quickly?

You buy an Argentine for what he’s worth, and sell him for what he thinks he’s worth.

(5) Why don’t Argentineans bathe in hot water?

Because they don’t want the mirror to get fogged up.

(6) What is pride?

Pride is the little Argentine we all carry around inside us.

Script [L] articulates the perception that Argentines have about their own self-importance, and their positioning “above” people in other Latin American countries. At the same time, it captures an awareness of a negative perception of Argentines by people in other Latin American countries.

[L] The Argentine ego

a. in Argentina [m], many people often think like this:

b. “many people in this country [m] think like this:

“because I was born in this country [m], I am someone very good,

c. I am someone above people in other countries [m] near this country [m]”

d. because they think like this, they feel something good

- e. because they think like this, people in other countries [m] near this country [m]
feel something bad towards them”

7.2.5.2 *Laburantes* (‘hard-working people’)

In Argentina, there are two salient scripts—a good one, and a bad one—for thinking relations between money and work. In the good script, there is a speaker who professes to be one among many honest, hard-working Argentines who place value on work that demands effort and sacrifice, on work that entails a contribution to the community, and on remuneration that results from such work.

As explained earlier in the thesis (§3.4.1), the Porteño middle class of European descent trace back this hard-working spirit to their immigrant ancestors, and regard it a crucial factor that enabled their upward social mobility. Although in-depth analyses are in order, it is my hypothesis that the word *laburo* (lunf. ‘work’) and *laburantes* (lunf. ‘worker’) are most typically used by these Euro-Porteño middle and upper classes, and that the semantics of both words convey something of the above-described hard-working spirit. In contrast, someone from the Argentine working-classes would most typically use standard Spanish *trabajo* (‘work’), and self-identify as a *trabajador* (‘[working class] worker’), and as a member of the socioeconomic sector of *los trabajadores* (‘the [working-class] workers’).⁷⁰

[M] Construing oneself as a *laburante* (‘hard-working person’)

- a. in Argentina [m], many people often say something like this:
- b. “it is good if someone can think about some *guita* ‘money’ [m] like this:
- c. “it’s mine because I did something good for other people,
- d. it’s mine because I did something good for this country [m],
- e. it’s mine because I did many things for a long time”
- f. many people like me can think like this
- g. I know that many people don’t think like this”

⁷⁰ The new DiLA dictionary fails to capture meaning differences between *laburo* and *trabajo*, and between *laburante* and *trabajador*. However, note that DiLA’s example sentence for *laburante* seems to support my hypothesis: “Soy un triste laburante que se rompe el lomo para darle de comer a mis hijos” (‘I am a sad laburante who breaks his neck to feed his children’) (AAL, 2019, p. 357).

In §7.4.3, I shall present script [S], which is the counterpart “bad” script of script [M]. In script [S], the speaker condemns all those many Argentines—typically, the working- and ruling classes—for being *vagos* (‘lazy people’) and *vivos* who value the opposite of script [M].

7.3 Scripts in action (part one)

So far, I have presented all of the “good” scripts—and fifteen of the total twenty-five Argentineity scripts—that will be proposed in this chapter. Before progressing with the remaining ten “bad” scripts, let’s first look at these fifteen good scripts “in action”. In this section, I will present some language samples which illustrate some ways in which Argentines draw on the proposed good scripts to perform Argentineity. Unavoidably, the examples will also illustrate manifestations of some of the bad scripts, yet to be presented. Specifically, I will discuss four examples: a mockumentary called *Yo, Potro* (‘I, Potro’) (Bucay, 2018), the popular song *La Argentinidad al palo* (Cordera, 2004), and two stand-up performances by Argentine comedians (Sanjiao, Campos, & Suter, 2018; Wainraich, Campos, & Suter, 2018). Except for the song, all examples are Netflix products available not only in Argentina but also in other Latin American countries.

Table 10 contains the scripts’ captions, and the corresponding “pointers” with which I shall identify each of these scripts in the examples.

Table 10: “Good” scripts for performing *Argentineity*

	Script caption	Pointer
European scripts	[A] Seeing places in Buenos Aires	[A ‘Paris’]
	[B] The Europeanness of Argentines	[B ‘Euro-like people’]
	[C] The European descent of Argentines	[C ‘Euro descent’]
	[D ₁] Argentines’ Euro-Italian lexicon	[D ₁ ‘Euro words’]
	[D ₂] Argentines’ Italian accent	[D ₂ ‘Italian accent’]
	[D ₃] Argentines’ Italian gesturing	[D ₃ ‘Italian gest.’]
High-level script	[E] Expressing how good Argentina is	[E ‘good country’]

The “good lists”	[F] The Argentine talents	[F ‘talents’]
	[G] The Argentine inventions	[G ‘inventions’]
	[H] Great Argentine pleasures	[H ‘pleasures’]
	[I] Argentina’s impressive places	[I ‘good places’]
	[J] Argentina’s records	[J ‘records’]
The rich country	[K] Argentina is a rich country	[K ‘rich country’]
Personality traits	[L] The Argentine ego	[L ‘ego’]
	[M] Construing oneself as a <i>laburante</i> (‘hard-working person’)	[M ‘ <i>laburante</i> ’]

By inserting a script pointer before a certain passage within an example, I am stating that, in order to make sense of the *following* passage, and of the situation in which it occurs, Porteños typically recruit the script in question as an “interpretive backdrop” to discourse (Goddard & Wierzbicka 2004, p. 157; see also §2.2.3.4). The script in question is thus not an “NSM translation” or paraphrase of the passage in question. It is only a habitual frame, guideline, or model with which Porteños are familiar and that would typically be invoked in their making-sense of the passage.

7.3.1 *Yo, Potro*, a mockumentary

Yo, Potro (‘I, Potro’) is a 2018 Netflix mockumentary that revolves around fictive Argentine football player Diego Armando Romani, aka “*Potro*” (‘Stallion’). Potro represents the stereotypical self-conceited Euro-Porteño, a *vivo* and a macho who is eager to display to the world, in every one of his actions, all of his Argentineity (not coincidentally, he shares his given name with Maradona’s, and his surname is quintessentially Italian).

Despite his conviction of being a unique football star, Potro has recently been fired from a football club in Mexico City. In the following scene, he has just received the news that his brother (who, unlike him, is indeed a very famous football star) is getting married in Buenos Aires. With great excitement and exaggerated gesticulation, Potro shares the news with the (Mexican) documentary crew members:

[D₃ ‘Italian gest.’] [E ‘good country’] ¡Nos vamos a Argentina! (...) ¿Entendés lo que es eso, vos, que no saliste del DF, imbécil? [H ‘pleasures’] ¡Las minas que hay! ¿Sabés lo que es eso? [I ‘good places’] ¿El paisaje? [L ‘ego’] ¡La conchas te aplauden! ¡Es hermoso, viejo!

‘[D₃ ‘Italian gest.’] [E ‘good country’] We are going to Argentina! (...) Can you grasp that, even if you have never left Mexico City, idiot? [H ‘pleasures’] The women you can find there! Do you know how good that is? [I ‘good places’] The scenery? [L ‘ego’] Pussies applaud at you! It is beautiful, man!’

In the next scene, Potro is packing his suitcase for Buenos Aires. As he shows a wine-colored suit that he intends to wear for his brother’s wedding, the Europeanness inside him is awakened:

Mirá el tragedia⁷¹ que me compré. [Es color] vino. [D₁ ‘Euro words’] Bueno, en Argentina le decimos “*bordó*” [from Bordeaux]. “*Bordó*”. Más francés. [B ‘Euro-like people’] Somos más europeos. No como ustedes, boludo. [C ‘Euro descent’] ¡Manga de indios!

‘Look at the suit I bought. Wine-coloured. [D₁ ‘Euro words’] But in Argentina we call this colour “*bordó*” [from Bordeaux]. “*Bordó*”. It’s more French. [B ‘Euro-like people’] We are more European. Not like you, boludo. [C ‘Euro descent’] Bunch of Indians!’

And in the next scene, Potro shows an Argentine and a Mexican passport (the latter was probably granted to him for his residence in Mexico as a football player):

Mirá. Pasaporte argentino, pasaporte mexicano. Tengo dos nacionalidades. [E ‘good country’] [L ‘ego’] Adivina cuál vale.

‘Look. Argentinean passport, and Mexican passport. I have two nationalities. [E ‘good country’] [L ‘ego’] Guess which one has worth’

Once arrived in Buenos Aires, and picked up from the airport, a euphoric, vain Potro explains to his crew as they look out the car window:

⁷¹ *Tragedia* (lit. ‘tragedy’) is a *lunfardo* word for *traje* (‘suit’).

[I ‘good places’] ¡Mirá, mirá lo que es esto! [E, ‘good country’] ¡Argentina es el mejor país del mundo! [H ‘pleasures’] ¡Tenemos las minas más lindas! [F ‘talents’] ¡Tenemos a Maradona! ¡Al Papa! ¡El cielo y el infierno, papá! [L ‘ego’] ¿Sabés la cantidad de fans que tengo yo acá? ¡No puedo caminar por la calle!

‘[I ‘good places’] Look, look at all this! [E, ‘good country’] Argentina is the best country in the world! [H ‘pleasures’] We have the cutest girls! [F ‘talents’] We have Maradona! We have the Pope! Heaven and Hell, man! [L ‘ego’] Do you know how many fans I have over here [in Argentina]? I can’t walk down the street!’

7.3.2 Scripted stand-up by Fernando Sanjiao

The second example are the opening lines from a stand-up performance by Porteño actor and comedian Fernando Sanjiao distributed by Netflix in 2018 (Sanjiao, Campos, & Suter, 2018):

¡Uuh! Estamos en Netflix, ¡eh! Nos está viendo todo el mundo, Latinoamérica, ¿no? [B ‘Euro-like people’] Y acá en Argentina... en Argentina, no sé por qué, no nos sentimos muy latinos [*audience laughter*]. ¿Viste que no? Decimos: “no, yo soy medio europeo” [*audience laughter*].

‘Whoa! We are on Netflix, right? The whole world is watching us, Latin America [is watching us], right? [B ‘Euro-like people’] And here in Argentina...in Argentina, I don’t know why, but we don’t feel like we are very Latin American [*audience laughter*]. We don’t, we say: “well, I am a bit European” [*audience laughter*].’

Next, Fernando wonders why Argentines may feel they are “a bit European”:

No sé por qué. Somos así. Como que nos sentimos un poco... [L ‘ego’] ¿viste que siempre odian al argentino en todos lados? Pero porque tenemos esto medio inseguro de todo el tiempo hablar bien, ¿viste? [H ‘pleasures’] Decir: “No, tenemos las mejores minas, tenemos las mejores carnes, tenemos el mejor vino. [F ‘talents’] Tenemos el Papa. El Papa es argentino, boludo”. Y el Papa es lo menos argentino que hay: [L ‘ego’] el chabón es re humilde [*audience laughter*].

‘I don’t know why. We are like that. Like, we feel we are a bit... [L ‘ego’] You know how the Argentine is always hated everywhere? It’s because we have this thing of feeling insecure. So we brag about ourselves, right? [H ‘pleasures’] We say: “Look. We have the best women, we have the best meat, we have the best wine. [F ‘talents’] We have the Pope. The Pope is Argentine, mate”. But the Pope couldn’t be less Argentine: [L ‘ego’] the man is super humble [audience laughter].’

Note that, in his explanation for why Argentines may feel they are “a bit *European*”, Fernando does not resort to other *European* good scripts (such as, for example, [C ‘Euro descent’], [D₁ ‘Euro words’], and [D₂, ‘Italian accent’]). Instead, he resorts to the good scripts [L ‘ego’], [F ‘talents’], and [H ‘pleasures’]. In the Argentine “grammar of discourse”, these scripts sufficiently answer the question of why Argentines can feel “a bit European”. It is only towards the end of his argument that another European script is invoked:

Somos bastante de discriminar, somos muy fachos, ¿no? [C ‘Euro descent’] No sé si por esa...sangre europea, ¿no? [audience laughter]. [L ‘ego’] Discriminamos mucho a los países limítrofes, eso pasa mucho.

‘We often discriminate, we are very fascist, aren’t we? [C ‘Euro descent’] I don’t know if it’s because of that... European blood, right? [audience laughter]. [L ‘ego’] We discriminate a lot against our neighboring countries, that happens a lot.’

7.3.3 *La argentinidad al palo*, a song

As mentioned in the chapter’s introduction, the song *La argentinidad al palo* (Cordera, 2004) by Porteño alt-rock band *Bersuit Vergarabat* is immensely popular in Argentina. It is a well-achieved fusion of traditional Argentine folk and *rock nacional* (‘Argentine rock’), with lyrics that offer an acute satire of the “potent” ways in which Argentines—most saliently, Argentine machos, like the song’s narrative persona—perform their *argentinidad*. The Argentine expression “*al palo*”, present in the song’s title and also repeated in the chorus sections, can mean, roughly, ‘with a boner’, and also ‘with great intensity’.

The song begins with the habitual practice of invoking the “good lists”:

[J ‘records’]	La calle más larga, el río más ancho,
[H ‘pleasures’]	las minas más lindas del mundo.
[G ‘inventions’]	El dulce de leche, el gran colectivo, alpargatas, soda y alfajores. Las huellas digitales, los dibujos animados,
[F ‘talents’]	la transfusión sanguínea, el seis a cero a Perú, y muchas otras cosas más.
[J ‘records’]	‘The longest street, the widest river,
[H ‘pleasures’]	the cutest women in the world.
[G ‘inventions’]	The milk confection, the great bus, espadrilles, sparkling water and sweet biscuits. Fingerprints, animated cartoons, the disposable syringe, the ballpoint pen.
[F ‘talents’]	Blood transfusion, the 6-0 [football match victory] against Peru, and many more things.’

Next, the chorus section comes in, repeating the phrase *la argentinidad al palo*. In the following section, the narrator boasts about Argentina’s triumphs in different sports, and lists some notorious Argentine personalities who have committed femicide, or, as the song puts it, “matan por amor” (‘kill for love’).

After this, the European scripts come in. Note in this section that the Argentine *crisol de razas* (‘melting pot’) is largely a fusion of European people. The *indios* (‘Indians/Native Americans’), *negros* (‘negros’), and *cabecitas negras* (‘little black heads’), who would typically be excluded from the Argentine melting pot (see §3.4.1), appear included because, in Argentina, even they must have a refined “French pedigree”:⁷²

⁷² Argentine Spanish racial categories such as *negro*₁ and *cabecita negra* (‘little black head’), employed by the Euro-Porteño middle- and high-classes, are typically applied to people of low socioeconomic status residing in popular neighbourhoods and *villas* (‘slums’); most typically, to *mestizo* (‘of mixed Spanish- and Native-American descent’) and to Bolivian and Paraguayan migrant populations. Instead, racial categories such as *negro*₂, *negro africano*, and *negro mota* (‘Afro-haired negro’) are typically applied to people with African phenotypic traits. The sense of *negro* used in the song cannot be disambiguated by the context. For the use and meanings of racial categories in Buenos Aires, see Frigerio (2006) and Geler (2016a, 2016b).

[C 'Euro descent'] Tanos, gallegos, criollos, judíos, polacos, indios,
negros, cabecitas, pero con pedigré francés.
Somos de un lugar santo y profano a la vez,
mixture de alta combustión.

[C 'Euro descent'] 'Italians, Spanish, creoles, Polish, Indians,
blacks, little-black heads, but with French pedigree.
We are from a place that is at the same time sacred and profane,
we are a mixture from a great combustion.'

The narrator then brags about Argentina's superiority, and, invoking some of the Argentine talents, he puts himself on a pedestal too, underscoring with gratefulness their nationality:

[E 'good country'] Diseminados y en franca expansión
hoy nos espera el mundo entero.
No es para menos, la coronación.
[H 'pleasures'] Brota el encanto del suelo argento.
Y no me vengan con cuentos chinos,
[F 'talents'] que el Che, Gardel y Maradona
[F 'talents'] [L, 'ego'] son los "number one", como también lo soy yo,
¡y argentinos gracias a dios!

[E 'good country'] 'We are spread and in clear expansion,
and the whole world waits for us.
The coronation is deserved.
[H 'pleasures'] The charm sprouts from the Argentine soil.
And don't come to me with that tall tale,
[F 'talents'] cause Che Guevara, Gardel and Maradona
[F 'talents'] [L, 'ego'] are the number ones, as I am too,
and [we are] Argentines, thanks God!'

The following sections of the song are equally a display of *argentinidad al palo*, but in the opposite direction, i.e. the narrator draws on the stock of bad scripts which I explore

in §7.4. However, for reasons of space, the analysis of these sections of the song will not be presented in this chapter; I will instead prioritize other examples.

7.3.4 Scripted stand-up by Sebastián Wainraich

The final example illustrating good scripts in action is from another stand-up comedy routine distributed by Netflix in 2018 (Wainraich, Campos, & Suter, 2018). In this show, Porteño comedian Sebastián Wainraich takes on the task of explaining to the world what Argentina is:

[F ‘talents’] Hay argentinos grosos. [E ‘good country’] Qué país Argentina, ¿no, chicos? [audience: ¡Sí!]. Qué país Argentina. ¿Cómo explicarle al mundo lo que es Argentina?

‘[F ‘talents’] There are lots of great Argentines. [E ‘good country’] What a country, Argentina! What a country, isn’t it? [audience: Yes!]. How do you explain to the world what Argentina is?’

In answering the question, however, Wainraich can’t but first invoke two bad scripts which seem to be in contradiction with the purported greatness of Argentina. I shall look at these two bad scripts in §7.4; as a preview, one of them is script [N], which asserts the narrative that Argentina had a glorious past but then experienced a dramatic decline; the other one is script [S], which posits that, along with the *laburantes* (‘hard-working people’), there are also many *vagos* (‘lazy people’) and *vivos* who don’t want to work. This is Wainraich’s answer:

[K ‘rich country’] [N ‘golden past’] Si el mundo fuera una familia, Argentina sería como el hijo que daba para más, pero no llegó [audience laughter/applause]. Eso, ¿no? Seríamos eso. Eso seríamos. Como el país... como que... teníamos todo para romperla, ¡y no! ¡y no! [S ‘work/money’] El alumno inteligente pero vago, eso seríamos, ¿no? [laughter]. El que fuma, el que hace quilombo, el que jode a los vecinos. Ese seríamos.

‘[K ‘rich country’] [N ‘golden past’] If the world was a family, Argentina would be like the son who had so much to give, but never quite got there [audience laughter/applause]. Right? We would be that. Like, the country... like...we had everything you need to do really well, and we didn’t! We didn’t! [S ‘work/money’] The student that is smart, but lazy, that’s what

we are, right? [*laughter*]. The smoker, the loud one, the one that annoys the neighbors. We are that one.'

Next, Wainraich invokes good script [F] about the Argentine talents. (He also draws on bad script [W]. This bad script will be elaborated on shortly, but for now I will point out that script [W] posits that, in such a problematic country as Argentina, the only solution for Argentines is to leave it). These are Wainraich's lines:

[F '**talents**'] Es raro porque hay tanto argentino que se destaca en el mundo. Y tenemos Ginóbilli, Messi, el Papa, [W '**way out**'] pero todos afuera, ninguno acá, todos afuera, afuera. [F '**talents**'] Y después tenemos otros grosos como Borges, Gardel, qué se yo, San Martín mismo. Pero los tuvimos que traer muertos, [W '**way out**'] porque vivos no querían estar.

'[F '**talents**'] It's weird, because there are so many Argentines that stand out worldwide. We have Ginóbilli, Messi, the Pope, [W '**way out**'] but they are all abroad, none of them is here, all abroad, abroad. [F '**talents**'] And then we have other great ones like Borges, Gardel, San Martín himself. But we had to bring them back dead, [W '**way out**'] because they didn't want to be here alive.'

Why, then, with so many talents, did Argentina "never quite get there"? Wainraich proposes a theory: Argentines descend from the ships, and therefore inherited the immigrants' spirit for hard work and sacrifice, as well as the immigrants' *dolor* (roughly, 'emotional pain/sadness'),⁷³ all qualities that lead to self-sabotage:

Eso es lo raro de ser argentinos. [C '**Euro descent**'] Yo tengo mi teoría: somos un poco... nos autoboicoteamos también porque venimos de los barcos, ¿viste? Somos hijos, nietos, bisnietos de inmigrantes: italianos, españoles, polacos, judíos, todo eso, que vinieron acá [M '**laburante**'] con el sacrificio, con el dolor, a trabajar ochenta horas, y todas esas cosas, ¿no? Sin capacidad para el disfrute, todo es dolor, todo es sacrificio. Y son generaciones que todavía pegan en nosotros.

⁷³ See Bulat Silva's (2011, 2014) semantic explications of Spanish *dolor*.

‘That’s the strange thing about being Argentine. [C ‘Euro descent’] I have my own theory: we are a bit...we self-sabotage, because we come from the ships, right? We are the children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren of immigrants: Italians, Spanish, Polish, Jewish, and all that, who came here [M ‘*laburante*’] with the will to make sacrifices, filled with pain, to work eighty hours a week, and all that, right? With no capacity to enjoy anything, it was all pain, it was all sacrifice. And these were generations that still have an impact on us today.’

7.4 The “bad” scripts

In this section, I propose ten “bad” scripts, that is, scripts with which Porteños construe a negative, deprecated Argentineity. In terms of structure, all these scripts rely on semantic components that use the semantic prime BAD to that end, such as ‘this is bad’ and ‘I feel something bad because of this’.

7.4.1 Argentina’s economy

This section captures two salient scripts with which Argentines make sense of the economic history and future of Argentina.

7.4.1.1 The “Argentine paradox”: golden past and present failure

The first script concerns what is known in the scholarly literature in economics as the “Argentine paradox” or “Argentine puzzle” (Taylor, 2018, p. 2): the exceptional case of a country that, it is argued, had achieved advanced economic development in the late 19th and early 20th century, but then experienced a dramatic decline from which it has never recovered.

With the script (script [N]), Argentines compare their current *país de mierda* (‘shithole country’), as they often call it, against a purported glorious economic past in the beginning of the 20th century. Some classic tropes invoked as “evidence” of this glorious past include:

- (a) Argentina was one of the top countries in income per capita or GDP, richer than most European countries, and comparable only with a few other rich societies such as the United States, Canada, and Australia (see Taylor, 2018).

(b) Argentines (in fact, it was the Argentine upper classes) were so rich that, on their boat trips to Europe, they would bring a cow on board to make sure their children had fresh milk (Kaminsky, 2008, p. 210), and golden cutlery that would be thrown overboard after each meal (Pigna, 2005, p. 357).

(c) In Paris, it is said, the expression “*riche comme un argentin*” (‘rich as an Argentine’) was common among Parisians until the 1930’s (Pigna, 2005, p. 292; Rock, 1985, p. 16).

Laypeople and scholars across the social sciences have produced a wide range of competing explanations for why Argentina’s glorious past came to an end. Cultural historian Nicolas Shumway (1991, p. x) mentions some of them:

Argentina is widely perceived as a national failure, one of the few countries that has moved from first-world to third-world status in only a few short decades. (...) What happened? Why is it that a nation blessed with enviable human and natural resources finds it so difficult to reverse this slow and melancholy decline into pettiness and inconsequence? The explanations are numerous, contradictory, incomplete: colonial economic structures, an irresponsible upper class, messianic demagogues like Perón, a reactionary Catholic hierarchy, power-hungry generals, authoritarian traditions, the Communist conspiracy, omnipotent multinationals, meddling imperial powers such as Great Britain and the United States.

The script can be phrased as follows:

[N] Argentina’s golden past and present failure

- a. in Argentina [m], many people think like this:
- b. “a long time ago, for many years [m], this country [m] was not like any other country [m],
- c. this [m] country was very very good, like very few countries [m]
- d. during this time, many people in this country [m] could do many things as they wanted
because they had a lot of money [m]
- e. after this time, some very bad things happened
- f. because of this, this country [m] is not like this anymore
- g. this country [m] is very bad now”

7.4.1.2 An infinite loop of economic crises

The second script with which Argentines make sense of the economic history and future of Argentina concerns the many deep economic crises that Argentina has suffered through over half a century. This history of crises is invoked as solid evidence that Argentina is forever condemned to infinitely recurring economic crises, as captured in script [O].

[O] Argentina's infinitely recurring crises

- a. in Argentina [m], many people think like this:
- b. "in this country [m], it happened like this before:
- c. - for some years [m], many people lived well [m],
because they could often do some things with money [m]
- d. - after this time, bad things happened in this country [m]
- e. - because of this, for some years [m] after this, this country [m] was very bad,
many people did not live well [m] anymore
- f. it will happen like this at many times for many years [m]
- g. it can't not happen like this in this country [m], this is bad"

7.4.2 The "shithole country" and the comparative disadvantage

This section describes two other well-entrenched scripts that guide Argentines' criticism of Argentina.

7.4.2.1 "*¡Qué país de mierda!*" ('What a shithole country!')

The first of these scripts concerns a common form of critique which involves the use of the expression "*¡Qué país de mierda!*" ('What a shithole country!') (Jauretche, 1968, pp. 114-118). As anthropologist Alejandro Grimson (2012, pp. 64-65) observes:

Los argentinos repetimos una frase, ante las más diversas situaciones, como si fuera un mantra. Si teníamos los ahorros de toda la vida en el banco y vino el corralito, pero también si se atrasó nuestro ómnibus o nuestro avión; cuando matan a un maestro en una protesta, pero también cuando no funciona el cajero automático; cuando se descubre un acto de corrupción de un funcionario y cuando hubo un apagón o nos estafaron con el vuelto; el día

que asaltaron a nuestro hijo, o ese momento en que tuvimos que frenar el auto por la maniobra irresponsable de otro conductor; si de golpe hay huelga en cualquier servicio que necesitábamos: siempre, en cualquiera de estas situaciones o de muchas otras (un funcionario no escucha reclamos razonables, nos maltratan en una institución, un policía nos pidió una coima, el colectivo siguió de largo, un taxista paseó a un amigo que no conoce la ciudad, el plato que pedimos en el restaurante luce bastante mejor en la foto que en la mesa), quizá pensemos, quizás escuchemos, quizá digamos *qué país de mierda*.

‘We Argentines repeat a phrase, in the most diverse situations, as if it were a mantra. If we had our life savings in the bank and the account freezes came, but also if our flight or bus is delayed; when a school teacher is killed in a protest, but also when the ATM doesn’t work; when an act of corruption by a civil servant is discovered, and when there’s been a power cut, or when we are short-changed; the day our son was held up at gunpoint, or that moment when we had to slam on the brakes because of the irresponsible maneuver of another driver; if there was a sudden strike affecting public transport: always, in any of these situations and many others ([if] a civil servant does not address reasonable requests, [if] we are treated badly in an institution, [if] a policeman asked for a bribe, [if] the bus drove straight past us, [if] a taxi-driver drove my friend who doesn’t know the city around in circles, [if] the food we order looks so much better in the photo than in real life), perhaps we’d think, perhaps we’d hear, perhaps we’d say *what a shithole country* [*qué país de mierda*].’

Note that many of Grimson’s example scenarios involve some form of injustice, and, with reference to Ch. 5, these scenarios could perfectly be framed as *vivezas*. With script [P], Argentines recruit the expression “*¡Qué país de mierda!*” (‘What a shithole country!’) to express how bad the country is, and how bad it feels that it should be like this:

[P] “*¡Qué país de mierda!*” (‘What a shithole country!’)

- a. in Argentina [m], many people often say something like this:
- b. “this country [m] is very very bad,
- c. I feel something very bad because of this”
- d. because of this, they often want to say something like this:
- e. “*¡Qué país de mierda!*” (‘What a shithole country!’)

7.4.2.2 Comparative disadvantage

In their critique, speakers often engage in a comparison between Argentina and other countries. In this comparison, they select certain kinds of things which, they are convinced, other countries can do better. Argentine intellectual Arturo Jauretche observed this over half a century ago in his famous *Manual de zonceras argentinas* ('Manual of Argentine fooleries') (Jauretche, 1968, pp. 114, 229):

La autodenigración se vale frecuentemente de una tabla comparativa referida al resto del mundo y en la cual cada cotejo se hace con relación a lo mejor que se ha visto o leído de otro lado, y descartando lo peor. (...) Le han mostrado y ha visto solamente aquello en que la comparación nos deprime. Si se trata de relojes la comparación se hace con Suiza, si de literatura con Francia, si de pintura con Italia, si de técnica con Estados Unidos. Nunca es con los gansters de Chicago o con el problema negro, ni con los sórdidos campesinos franceses o con la miseria del Sur de Italia, ni con el humor de Franz y Fritz o los campos de concentración o con el East End de Londres, porque sólo ha visto el West End. El cotejo está siempre referido a aquello en que nos superan, nunca a aquello en que nosotros superamos.

'Frequently, the self-denigration makes use of a comparative table referring to the rest of the world, and in which each comparison is made with regard to best that someone has seen or read from another place, and where the worst is dismissed. (...) They have been shown and have seen only that which is depressing for us when the comparison is made. If the comparison is about watches, it is made with Switzerland, if it's about literature, it is made with France, if it's painting, it is Italy, if it's technique, it is USA. It is never with the gangsters of Chicago or with the negro problem, with the poor French peasants, or poverty in southern Italy, or the humour of Franz and Fritz, the concentration camps, or the East End of London, because they have only seen the West End. The comparison is always made with regard to that in which they surpass us, never that in which we surpass them.'

Script [Q] is the frame that guides Argentines in their selective comparison:

[Q] Comparing Argentina unfavourably against other countries

- a. in Argentina [m], many people often say something like this:
- b. "in this country [m], things of many kinds are bad
- c. in many other countries [m], things of the same kinds are good
- d. this is bad"

7.4.3 Personality traits (part 2)

Scripts [R], [S], and [T] below are often recruited to explain why Argentina is a *país de mierda* (i.e. they all maintain Script [P] above). In terms of content, scripts [R] and [S] can, to some extent, be thought of as the negative counterparts of script [L] about the Argentine ego, and of script [M] about the *laburantes* ('hard-working people'), respectively.

Script [R] relates to the purported self-centered, socially deviant Argentine mindset, which, as argued in Ch. 5, appears epitomized by the *vivo*. The script attributes this mindset to the larger social group, and acknowledges its negative effect for the country:

[R] The widespread *vivo*'s mindset

- a. in Argentina [m], many people often say something like this:
- b. "in this country [m], many people think like this:
- c. "if I do this, it will be good for me"
- d. they don't think like this:
- e. "if I do this, it will be bad for many other people, it will be bad for this country [m],
 because of this, I will not do it"
- f. this is bad for this country [m]"

Script [S] captures a shared attitude for thinking about *guita* ('money') and *laburo* ('work'). The speaker complains that many Argentines—typically, the working and ruling classes—don't have a value for *laburo* ('work'). Instead, they value *guita* ('money') made with little effort (usually taking advantage of others' efforts). As the common saying goes: "*El vivo vive del zonzo, y el zonzo de su trabajo*" (roughly, 'The *vivo* lives off the fool, and the fool off his job' (see §5.2.3.1).

[S] Attitudes towards *laburo* ('work') and *guita* ('money')

- a. in Argentina [m], many people often say something like this:
- b. "it is bad when people can think about some *guita* 'money' [m] like this:
- c. "it's mine not because I did something good for other people,

- d. it's mine not because I did something good for this country [m],
- e. it's mine not because I did many things for a long time,
- f. it's mine because I did very few things"
- g. people like me don't think like this"

Script [T] concerns the common discourse of the right-minded *boludo* (see §5.3.3). It is the speaker who openly, and sometimes even proudly, self-identifies as being a *boludo*. They view themselves as the victims of a society that lacks a sense for the common good. There is no place in their heads for the idea that they may also sometimes play the *vivo* or perform *vivezas*.

[T] A script for construing oneself as a *boludo* in Argentina

- a. in Argentina [m], people often say something like this:
- b. "I am someone of one kind, someone of this kind is called [m] *boludo*
- c. bad things often happen to someone of this kind because
many other people think like this:
- d. "if I do this, it will be good for me"
- e. these people don't think like this:
- f. "if I do this, it will be bad for other people, it will be bad for this country [m],
- g. because of this, I will not do it"
- h. this is bad"

7.4.4 “¡Qué bronca₁!” (‘What bronca!’)

As argued in the previous chapter (§6.4.1), *bronca₁* often lends itself for the emotional processing of deep-seated political and societal issues affecting the country, in themes such as political corruption, inequity, economic crises, crime, poverty, and the lack of moral standards. Often, these *bronca₁*-inducing issues are framed through the lens of *viveza criolla*. Script [U] captures the discourse through which Argentines express this *bronca₁* verbally, as when people exclaim “¡Qué bronca₁!” (‘What bronca!’):

[U] Expressing *bronca₁* when reflecting on Argentina

- a. in Argentina [m], people often think like this:

- b. “this country [m] is very very bad
- c. I feel something very bad because of this”
- d. when they think like this, they often want to say what they feel with the word *bronca*₁

7.4.5 No solutions

The last two of the bad scripts concern (im)possible solutions to this supposed *país de mierda* that is Argentina. Script [V] captures the widespread conviction that Argentina “has no solution” and is doomed to failure, reflected in common expressions such as “*este país no tiene solución*” (‘this country has no solution’), “*este país no tiene arreglo*” (‘this country is beyond repair’), “*este país se va a la mierda*” (‘this country is going to hell’), and “*estamos condenados/este país está condenado al fracaso*” (‘we are/this country is doomed to failure’) (Grimson, 2012, pp. 19-20, 60-61; Shumway, 1991, p. 167). This pessimistic fatalism has been efficaciously maintained by the work of various Argentine essayists and scholars throughout the 20th century (Grimson, 2012; Shumway, 1991).

[V] Argentina has no solution

- a. in Argentina [m], many people think like this:
 - b. “this country [m] is very very bad
 - c. something like this can’t happen here:
 - d. - people do something
 - e. - because of this, this country [m] is not very bad anymore
 - f. this is bad”

With script [W], Argentines express that they find it extremely hard to continue living in such a bad—corrupt, socially deviant, etc.—society, and express a wish to leave the country and settle somewhere else. While there may be no solution for the country, there may be a solution for them individually: leaving the country. A common pun in this discourse is “*La única salida es Ezeiza*” (‘The only way out is the Ezeiza airport’); i.e. the only *salida* (‘way out/solution’) to the country’s problem is to take the *salida* (‘way out/exit’), which is Buenos Aires’ international airport. Script [W] captures this discourse:

[W] The only “way out” of Argentina

- a. in Argentina [m], many people often think like this:
- b. “this country [m] is very very bad, it can’t be not like this
- c. I can’t live in a country [m] like this anymore
- d. I want to live in another country [m], this will be good for me”

7.5 Scripts in action (part two)

Having now presented all twenty-five of the proposed scripts, we return again to examining some discourse samples. Here, I present examples which illustrate some ways in which Argentines perform their Argentineity by enacting the various bad scripts presented in this chapter, often in combination with the good scripts. I will look at four examples: a song entitled *¡Qué país de mierda!* (‘What a shithole country!’), from a sketch by Argentine comedian Diego Capusotto (Ruperto Dinamita, 2008); a short story with the same name, by Porteño writer Hugo Soriani (Soriani, 2018); an extract from *El Ángel del mediodía*, which is a popular Argentine radio show (Rolón, 2016); and a recent radio interview with Argentine politician Luis Juez (Juez, 2019).

Table 11 presents the bad scripts’ captions, and the corresponding pointers with which I shall identify each of these scripts in the examples. Recall that script pointers are inserted *before* the passages that recruit the scripts in question. Recall also that the inserted pointers indicate a habitual frame, guideline, or model that Argentines would typically invoke in their making-sense of the passage.

Table 11: “Bad” scripts for performing Argentineity

	Script caption	Pointer
Argentina’s economy	[N] Argentina’s golden past and present failure	[N ‘golden past’]
	[O] Argentina’s infinitely recurring crises	[O ‘infinite crises’]
Criticizing Argentina	[P] “ <i>¡Qué país de mierda!</i> ” (‘What a shithole country!’)	[P ‘bad country’]
	[Q] Comparing Argentina unfavourably against other countries	[Q ‘compare’]
Personality traits	[R] A The widespread <i>vivo</i> ’s mindset	[R ‘ <i>vivo</i> ’s mindset’]
	[S] Attitudes towards <i>laburo</i> (‘work’) and <i>guita</i> (‘money’)	[S ‘work/money’]
	[T] Construing oneself as a <i>boludo</i>	[T ‘I am a <i>boludo</i> ’]

Feeling	[U] Expressing <i>bronca</i> ₁ when reflecting on Argentina	[U ‘ <i>bronca</i> ₁ ’]
No	[V] Argentina has no solution	[V ‘no solution’]
solutions	[W] The only way out of Argentina	[W ‘way out’]

7.5.1 *¡Qué país de mierda!*, a comedic song

Diego Capusotto is Argentina’s most successful comedian of recent years. Capusotto’s various sketches tap into Argentine social types and established discourses, providing Argentines a mirror in which they can critically examine themselves. The song *¡Qué país de mierda!* (‘What a shithole country’) (Ruperto Dinamita, 2008), by Capusotto’s fictitious songwriter Carlos Sin Fe (‘Carlos Without Faith’), is a satire of the Porteño that engages in easy, automatized critique of Argentina. Like these Porteños, Carlos Sin Fe can, in very few words, seamlessly combine various bad scripts. There is no solid line of reasoning in his song, but everything claimed in it rings true, and the scripts validate one another by their mere adjacency.⁷⁴

In the first section, Carlos Sin Fe provides a sketch of the Argentine melting pot that includes local *gauchos* (‘rural man’) and European immigrants, suggesting that it is from the former that Argentines have inherited their purported laziness. From this, it follows for Carlos that “this country has no solution”, and thus need to be blown up:

	Descendemos de los gauchos
[S, ‘work/money’]	que eran vagos y matones.
[C ‘Euro descent’]	Llegaron los inmigrantes
	muertos de hambre y de a montones.
[V ‘no solution’]	Este país no tiene solución,
	¡demolé la Patagonia, Japón!
	‘We descend from the gauchos
[S, ‘work/money’]	who were lazy and violent.
[C ‘Euro descent’]	Then the immigrants arrived
	starving hungry, many of them.

⁷⁴ Capusotto’s sketch is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NCu5ku2HgGI> (Posted on 16 July 2008).

[V 'no solution'] This country has no solution,
blow up Patagonia, Japan!'

In the second section, Carlos disengages himself from political discussion, soothing his *bronca*₁ with beer. Nevertheless, he decides to leave the country:

[W 'way out'] Y si bien el comunismo,
el centro, la derecha,
a mí me importa un pomo
porque tengo una chevecha,
yo agarro la maleta y me rajo,
se va todo al carajo
y no me ven más.

'About communism,
center, or right,
I couldn't give a damn,
cuz I got a pint.

[W 'way out'] Still, I will pack up and run away,
fuck everything,
you won't see me again.'

In the remaining, chorus sections, Carlos chants “*¡Qué país de mierda!*”, and reiterates that nobody will fix the country. Also, he expresses his distrust of the ruling class' espousal of the common good:

[P 'bad country'] ¡Qué país de mierda!
¡Qué país de mierda!
No te hagás ilusiones,
[V 'no solution'] que nadie lo va a arreglar.

[P 'bad country'] ¡Qué país de mierda!
¡Qué país de mierda!

[R 'vivo's mindset'] No les creo nada,
¡váyanse a cagar!

[P ‘bad country’] ‘What a shithole country!
 What a shithole country!
 Don’t get your hopes up,
 [V ‘no solution’] because nobody will fix it.

[P ‘bad country’] What a shithole country!
 What a shithole country!

[R ‘vivo’s mindset’] I don’t believe a thing you say,
 go fuck yourself!’

7.5.2 *Qué país de mierda*, a short story

The second example consists of three excerpts from a short story called *Qué país de mierda*, by Porteño writer Hugo Soriani (Soriani, 2018). In this story, all three characters position themselves as being either a *vivo* or a *boludo* in a *país de mierda*. These characters are: a client (Osvaldo), a repairman, and this repairman’s boss.

Osvaldo’s car needs a roadworthy certificate approved, but the fire extinguisher in the car has expired. To solve this, Osvaldo resorts to a common *viveza*: he gives the extinguisher to a repairman that can refill it for little money. When Osvaldo comes to collect it, he rings the doorbell, but there is no answer. After many attempts, he decides to ring the repairman’s boss. On the phone, the boss tells Osvaldo that he is answering the phone call from Miami: he has left the shithole country because people like his employee don’t want to earn their money by working. The boss says:

[S ‘work/money’] Para mí que se raja, o falta, o se duerme, qué sé yo. [W ‘way out’] Por eso me vine a Miami, [P ‘bad country’] en Argentina está todo como el culo [S, work/money] y encima la gente no quiere laburar, [mi empleado] debe cobrar algún plan, así son estos. [P ‘bad country’] ¡Qué país de mierda!

‘[S ‘work/money’] I suspect that he sneaks out, or he is absent, or he falls asleep, I have no idea. [W ‘way out’] That is why I moved to Miami, [P ‘bad country’] in Argentina everything is fucked up, [S, work/money] and on top of that people don’t want to work, [my employee] must be receiving some welfare benefits, these people are like that. [P ‘bad country’] What a shithole country!’

Two days later, the repairman finally comes to the door, and explains that he could not answer the doorbell simply because he was on a toilet break. He is full of *bronca*₁ because Osvaldo has called his boss. He feels like a *boludo* who is always screwed over, and concludes that Argentina is a *país de mierda*:

[T ‘I am a *boludo*’] A uno lo cagan siempre, pero uno no puede cagar tranquilo. [P ‘bad country’] ¡Qué país de mierda! Tomá, tomá tu matafuego y perdete, gil.

‘[T ‘I am a *boludo*’] One is always screwed over [lit. “shat”], but one cannot shit in peace. [P ‘bad country’] What a shithole country! Take your fire extinguisher and get lost, fool.’

In the final scene, Osvaldo can hear the fire extinguisher hitting the lid of his car’s boot with each pothole he hits in the streets of Buenos Aires. He concludes that the roadworthy certificate is a scam, and that so are the potholes, which must be made on purpose to damage cars or to justify more roadwork. Thus, he too concludes that Argentina is a *país de mierda*:

Ahora ando con el matafuego en el baúl buscando quien me lo cargue, y cada pozo que agarro el aparato salta y golpea la chapa. Las calles están llenas de pozos, ¿vivo? [R ‘vivo’s mindset’] [S ‘work/money’] Rompen y tapan todo el tiempo, pero los baches quedan. La VTV [i.e. roadworthy certificate] y los baches, dos curros tremendos ¿sabe? [P ‘bad country’] ¡Qué país de mierda!

‘Now I drive with the fire extinguisher in the boot looking for someone to refill it for me, and each pothole that I hit, the thing jumps and hits the lid of the boot. The streets are full of potholes, you see? [R ‘vivo’s mindset’] [S ‘work/money’] They make them and patch all the time, but the potholes remain. The roadworthy certificate and potholes, two big scams, you know? [P ‘bad country’] What a shithole country!’

7.5.3 “Am I the *boludo* in this movie?”, a radio monologue

Ángel Etchecopar, aka “Baby”, is perhaps the best-known shock jock on Argentine radio. In his radio show *El Ángel del mediodía* (‘Midday’s Angel’), Baby and his cohosts issue

scathing denunciations of corrupt and incompetent politicians, as they indulge in profoundly racist, xenophobic, and sexist discourse.

In the following extract (Rolón, 2016),⁷⁵ Baby sees himself as a *boludo* and expresses his strong desire to leave Argentina:

[W ‘way out’] Tengo unas ganas de irme a la mierda. (...) Es digno de irse del país. [M ‘laburante’] Vos te levantas a la mañana y te vienen las expensas. Y la ves a [nuestra primera dama] Juliana Awada con el Lama tibetano (...) [T ‘I am a boludo’] ¿Pero yo puedo ser tan boludo? [M ‘laburante’] Y la ves a [mi colega] Carbonell que viene a laburar (...), y yo vengo [a laburar], y decís: [T ‘I am a boludo’] ¿Pero podemos ser tan boludos de que estos pibes con esa cara de pelotudos nos garquen siempre? (...) [W ‘way out’] Y te dan ganas de irte a la mierda, la verdad que tengo ganas de irme a la mierda. (...). [R ‘vivo’s mindset’] En un país de hijos de puta, [W ‘way out’] yo no puedo vivir, la verdad, no puedo vivir más.

‘[W ‘way out’] I really want to get the fuck out of here. (...) The country deserves to be left. [M ‘laburante’] You get up in the morning and the bills come at you. And you see [our first lady] Juliana Awada with the Dalai Lama (...) [T ‘I am a boludo’] But can I be such a boludo? [M ‘laburante’] You see [my cohost] Carbonell who comes to work (...), and I come [to work], and you say: [T ‘I am a boludo’] can we be such boludos that these guys, with those moronic faces, always screw us over? (...) [W ‘way out’] And they make you want to get the fuck out of here, truth is I want to get the fuck out of here. (...) [R ‘vivo’s mindset’] In a country of motherfuckers, [T, way out] I cannot live, really, I cannot live anymore.’

To which Baby’s cohostess adds:

[W ‘way out’] Es psicotizante vivir acá. [S ‘work/money’] [M ‘laburante’] Porque llega un momento que decís: ¿el equivocado soy yo, que me levanto todos los días temprano para ir a laburar, que pago los impuestos?

⁷⁵ The extract from *El Ángel* is on Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o9z_JfWukds (Posted on 8 September 2016).

‘[W ‘way out’] It drives you mad living here. [S ‘work/money’] [M ‘*laburante*’] Because you reach a point where you say: am I the one who is wrong, that I get up early every day to go to work, that I pay taxes?’

Perhaps the problem, Baby suggests, is that the *vivo*’s mindset is not peculiar to the Euro-Argentine race:

(...) [C ‘Euro descent’] Hasta los negros mota [R ‘*vivo*’s mindset’] son más vivos que nosotros, ¿viste? Porque los negros te ponen una manta [para vender cosas en la calle], y cuando juntan guita se vuelven [a sus países]. Nosotros somos esclavos de este país. (...) [U ‘*bronca*₁’] Estoy enojado con el país.

‘(...) [C ‘Euro descent’] Even Afro-haired blacks [R ‘*vivo*’s mindset’] are more *vivo* than us, you see? Because blacks throw out a blanket [to sell things on the street], and when they’ve made money they return [to their countries]. We are slaves of this country. (...) [U ‘*bronca*₁’] I am angry with the country.’

Then Baby’s cohost argues that “leaving [the country] is not the solution”. But, for Baby, only leaving it can guarantee that there’ll be no more *boludos* like him:

[W ‘way out’] [T ‘I am a *boludo*’] [R ‘*vivo*’s mindset’] El día que nos vayamos todos, [a los políticos] se les acaban los boludos, no pueden cagar a nadie. [S ‘work/money’] A ver qué hacen [los políticos] con los vagos que van a la plaza a aplaudirlos.

‘[W ‘way out’] [T ‘I am a *boludo*’] [R ‘*vivo*’s mindset’] The day we leave, there’ll be no boludos left for them [politicians] to fuck over. [S ‘work/money’] I’d like to see what they [politicians] do with the scroungers that go to the town square to applaud them.’

And Baby continues:

(...) [P ‘**bad country**’] Es un país de mierda, y acostumbremos, porque ¿sabés cuál fue el slogan para culearnos? [E ‘**good country**’] “Este país tiene los cuatro climas”.⁷⁶ [G ‘**inventions**’] “El dulce de leche”. “[Los Argentinos] somos derechos y humanos”.⁷⁷ [R ‘**vivo’s mindset**’] Es un país de soretas. [P ‘**bad country**’] Es un país de mierda. [R ‘**vivo’s mindset**’] Con gobernantes ladrones, sinvergüenzas, demagogos, capangas, sindicalistas demagogos, sinvergüenzas, capangas. Este es un país con gente de mierda. Y hasta que no nos miremos al espejo, y nos demos cuenta que somos gente de mierda, envidiosos. Nos comemos el culo, como las gallinas: ponen el huevo, les sangra, va otra y le come el culo. [P ‘**bad country**’] Somos una mierda de país.

(...) [P ‘**bad country**’] It’s a shithole country, and let’s get used to it, because, you know what the slogan was to fuck us over? [E ‘**good country**’] “This country has the four climate types”. [G ‘**inventions**’] “It has dulce de leche”. “We [Argentines] are good and humane”. [R ‘**vivo’s mindset**’] It’s a country of evil turds. [P ‘**bad country**’] It’s a shithole country. [R ‘**vivo’s mindset**’] With thieving politicians, scoundrels, demagogues, henchmen, demagogic trade unionists, scoundrels, henchmen. This is a country with rotten people. And until we look at ourselves in the mirror, and realize that we are evil turds, envious people. We eat each other’s arses, like hens, they lay the egg, they bleed, another hen comes and eats her bleeding ass. [P ‘**bad country**’] We are a shit of a country.’

And then:

[M ‘**laburante**’] Siempre remando y remando. [O ‘**infinite crises**’] [Y escuchás a la gente decir:] “Y ahora voy a probar con esto”. “Me fundí y me levanté”. “Mirá qué bien, se cayó veinte veces y se levantó veinticinco”. “Se fundió con [el Presidente] Alfonsín, se fundió con [el Presidente] Illia, se fundió con [el Presidente] Frondizi, [M ‘**laburante**’] pero ahora mirá cómo levantó”. [R ‘**vivo’s mindset**’] [S ‘**work/money**’] Sí, porque estaba afanando con los [Presidentes] Kirchner. Estoy harto esos slogans, estoy cansado. [Q ‘**compare**’] Hay otros

⁷⁶ Argentines often celebrate the country’s climate, arguing that “*Este país tiene/Tememos los cuatro climas*” (‘This country has/We have all four climate types’). That is to say, in one and the same country, there is *clima cálido* (‘warm climate’), *clima templado* (‘temperate climate’), *clima árido* (‘desert climate’), and *clima frío* (‘cold climate’).

⁷⁷ This is a reference to the political slogan “*Los argentinos somos derechos y humanos*” (‘We Argentines are good and humane’), used by the military dictatorship that ruled Argentina from 1976 to 1983. It is a play on words of “*derechos humanos*” (‘human rights’).

países donde el tipo empieza a fabricar una remera y termina siendo dueño de Hering.⁷⁸ [O ‘infinite crises’] Acá, empezás siendo el dueño de Hering y terminás vendiendo remeras en [el barrio porteño de] Retiro, de manero.⁷⁹ [S ‘work/money’] Y ves que los hijos de los presidentes, los nietos, los primos (...) nadan en guita.

[M ‘laburante’] Always toiling and toiling. [O ‘infinite crises’] [And you hear people say:] “And now I will try this”. “I went broke and I stood up again”. “Good on them, they went broke with [President] Alfonsín, they went broke with [President] Illia, they went broke with [President] Frondizi, [M ‘laburante’] but look now how they got up again”. [R ‘vivo’s mindset’] [S ‘work/money’] Of course, because they were stealing with the Kirchner [Presidents]. I am fed up of these slogans, I am tired. [Q ‘compare’] There are other countries where a guy begins by making a T-shirt and then he ends up being the CEO of Hering. [O ‘infinite crises’] Here, you begin by being the CEO of Hering and you end up selling T-shirts in [the Porteño neighbourhood] Retiro, as a hawker. [S ‘work/money’] And you see how the presidents’ children, grandchildren, cousins (...) swim in money.’

Finally, to the yuppies who want to explain to him why the country is bad, he says:

(...) Callate, culo sucio, si vos en la vida pasaste hambre, pelotudo. [M ‘laburante’] ¿Qué sabés lo que es agacharte a laburar? [U ‘bronca₁’] Eso me da bronca, entendés, [R ‘vivo’s mindset’] porque son todos caraduras. A la otra vieja [Presidente Cristina Fernández de Kirchner] también. [Ella tiene] hotel acá, hotel allá, hotel allá. [Y los justifica diciendo:] “Sí, porque tengo la herencia” (...) [T ‘I am a boludo’] ¿Yo qué soy? ¿El boludo de la película?

(...) Shut up, shitty ass, never in your life have you gone hungry, idiot. [M ‘laburante’] What do you know about putting your head down to work? [U ‘bronca₁’] That makes me feel bronca₁, you see, [R ‘vivo’s mindset’] because they all have no shame. And then there’s that old woman [Presidente Cristina Fernández de Kirchner]. [She has] a hotel here, another hotel there, and another one there. [And she justifies them saying:] “It’s because I got an inheritance”. (...) [T ‘I am a boludo’] Who am I? Am I the *boludo* in this movie?

⁷⁸ Hering is a successful clothing textile company from Brazil, leading in Latin America.

⁷⁹ Compare with the *vivo*’s discourse in Ch. 5, example 6: “[B]eing *vivo*, and having that *viveza criolla*, I can survive if I go to live in the USA, I can survive in France. That *viveza criolla* enables me to, er, I start a job as a toilet cleaner and end up as CEO of Coca-Cola if I go to the USA.”

7.5.4 *País de mierda* by an Argentine politician

The final example is from a recent radio interview to Luis Juez, an Argentine politician (Juez, 2019).⁸⁰ In the interview Luis Juez declared:

[S ‘work/money’] [R ‘vivo’s mindset’] No reconocer que el problema de este país es la corrupción (...), es ser un necio. [O ‘infinite crises’] Cuando nosotros los argentinos nos preguntamos por qué siempre estamos como estamos, y por qué siempre estamos empezando de vuelta, y por qué siempre empezamos de cero, [K ‘rich country’] y por qué siempre somos un país que tiene todo para crecer [P ‘bad country’] y somos un país bananero del África meridional... [R ‘vivo’s mindset’] y, es por la corrupción. (...)

‘[S ‘work/money’] [R ‘vivo’s mindset’] To not recognize that the problem of this country is corruption, is to be a fool. [O ‘infinite crises’] When we Argentines ask ourselves why we are always in this situation, and why we always start from zero again, [K ‘rich country’] and why we’ve always been a country that has everything it needs to grow, [P ‘bad country’] and we are a banana republic from Southern Africa... [R ‘vivo’s mindset’] well, it’s because of the corruption. (...)’

The radio hostess asks “why does this happen to us Argentines?”, to which Juez replies:

[L ‘ego’] Y, porque somos unos soberbios de mierda, porque somos agrandados, [K ‘rich country’] porque creemos que somos un país rico, y no somos un país rico. Podemos tener cuestiones naturales de riqueza, [P ‘bad country’] pero somos un país de mierda. [R ‘vivo’s mindset’] Nuestra clase dirigente es de cuarta. Cuando digo nuestra clase dirigente, digo la política, la sindical, la eclesiástica, la religiosa, la empresaria. Somos ventajistas, somos jodidos. [K ‘rich country’] Como acá nos sobra de todo, y como nada nos cuesta nada, porque, en definitiva, [O ‘infinite crises’] cada diez años estamos siempre en el fondo del mar, y salimos, y volvemos a salir (...). Vos me preguntás por qué. Es por eso. [L ‘ego’] Porque somos así. Somos vanidosos. [S ‘work/money’] Nos da lo mismo. Nos da lo mismo que vos hayas amasado una pequeña fortuna con el esfuerzo y el trabajo propio levantándote todos los días temprano a las cinco de la mañana, que la hubieses hecho choreando. Da lo

⁸⁰ The radio interview to Luis Juez is available on Radiocut: <https://radiocut.fm/audiocut/luis-juez-somos-un-pais-mierda> (Posted on 6 October 2019).

mismo, da lo mismo. Nos da lo mimo. El argentino es un tipo que valora, pondera, y beatifica el éxito, no el sacrificio y el esfuerzo. Y entonces da lo mismo. [V ‘no solution’] Yo, la verdad, me resigno.

[L ‘ego’] Well, because we are arrogant shits, because we are self-important, [K ‘rich country’] because we believe that we are a rich country, and we are not a rich country. We may have the wealth of natural assets, [P ‘bad country’] but we are a shithole country. [R ‘vivo’s mindset’] Our ruling class is rubbish. When I say ruling class, I mean politicians, unionists, the clergy, the religious class, businesses. We are opportunists, we are bloody difficult. [K ‘rich country’] Since we have an excess of everything here, and since nothing costs us a thing, because, in the end, [O ‘infinite crises’] every ten years we sink to the bottom of the sea, but we find a way out each time (...) You ask me why, that’s why. [L ‘ego’] Because we are like that. We are vain. [S ‘work/money’] To us it’s the same. To us it’s the same whether you earn a small fortune with effort, through your own work, getting up every day early at five in the morning, or whether you earn it by stealing. It’s the same, it’s the same. It’s the same to us. The Argentine is a guy who values, speaks highly of, and venerates success, not sacrifice and effort. So it’s the same. [V ‘no solution’] Honestly, I give up.

Luis Juez’s declarations were picked up by other media. The popular talk show *Intratables* (‘Intractables’) conducted a Twitter survey to find out what percentage of Argentines think Argentina is *un país de mierda*, and 67 % answered “yes” (*Intratables*, 2019). To explain the survey’s results, the panelists of *Intratables* invoked a diversity of scripts (América TV, 2019):⁸¹

Guest panelist: [N ‘golden past’] En términos de PBI, recuerdo que en el año que nací, que es el año 67, la Argentina estaba en el sexto PBI del mundo.

Host: ¿Y hoy?

Guest panelist: Y hoy está cerca del 70.

Host: [U ‘bronca₁’] Bue... (...) También supongo (...) que también esta encuesta puede traslucir el voto bronca. Esta encuesta está desnudando el voto bronca (...). La frase del 2019 es “bronca”. “Bronca”.

⁸¹ The panellists’ exchange is available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTorimXdL_0 (posted on 7 October 2019).

‘Guest panelist: [N ‘golden past’] In terms of GDP, I remember that in the year that I was born, which was the year ’67, Argentina was ranked sixth in the world.

Host: and today?

Guest panelist: Today is close to seventieth.

Host: [U ‘bronca₁’] Exactly... (...) Also, I suppose (...) that this survey may be reflecting the *voto bronca* (‘bronca vote’). This survey is revealing the *voto bronca*. (...). The word of 2019 is “*bronca*”. “*Bronca*”.’

For another panelist, however, it was all about the Argentine mindset, which, compared to that of other countries, leaves much to be desired.

[Q ‘compare’] [R ‘vivo’s mindset’] Pero hay un aspecto que no estamos teniendo en cuenta, que es la justicia, el cumplimiento de la ley. Mirá, un día vino acá a *Intratables* un señor que estaba como de paso, que venía de Australia, ¿se acuerdan?, un argentino que estaba viviendo hace años en Australia. Y de pronto se sentó. Y le empezamos a preguntar por su vida. El contaba lo que es la cotidianidad de un tipo que vive en una sociedad donde la ley hay que cumplirla. Entonces, si vos subís a un colectivo, suponte, no sé, y no tenés cargada, en nuestro caso, la SUBE [i.e. travel card]—lo que fuese, para pagar el pasaje—, te bajan, y no subís nunca más. Si vos dejás mal el auto en un lugar prohibido, te quedás sin auto, sin registro. O sea, la ley se cumple. A nadie se le ocurre infringir la ley. En la Argentina, nadie cumple ninguna ley, primero porque de arriba para abajo, todo queda impune, es gratis, es gratis.

[Q ‘compare’] [R ‘vivo’s mindset’] But there is an aspect that we are not taking into account, which is justice, the obedience of the law. Look, one day a man came here to *Intratables*, he was just passing by, he had come from Australia, do you remember? An Argentine that had been living in Australia for some years. And suddenly he sat. And we started to ask him about his life. He was telling us of the everyday life of a guy that lives in a society where the law has to be obeyed. So, if you get on a bus, for example, I don’t know, and you haven’t topped up your travel card—or whatever it is, to pay the trip—they make you get off, and you don’t board a bus ever again. If you leave your car in a prohibited place, you’re left without a car, without a license. So, the law is obeyed. Nobody even considers breaking the law. In Argentina, nobody obeys any law, mainly because from the top to the bottom, everything goes unpunished, there’s no consequence, no consequence.’

Incidentally, I took the panelist's words as a personal invitation to reflect on my experience living in Brisbane (Australia), "a society where the law has to be obeyed". I am a user of the Australian public transport, and, I must admit, I have got on buses with insufficient credit on my travel card, and I have seen many others in the same accidental situation. Far from making me get off, or banning me from boarding buses ever again, drivers have always, with an understanding smile, let me on the bus.

7.6 Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have spelled out a diversity of "Argentineity scripts", that is to say, salient discursive practices through which Porteños (and Argentines across the country) make sense of Argentina or perform *argentinidad* (the quality or condition of being Argentine). I organized these scripts into two main groups, the "good" scripts and "bad" scripts, corresponding to two poles of Argentine national self-perception: extreme self-celebration and extreme self-criticism. Although the twenty-five Argentineity scripts presented here are performed by today's Argentines, and with today's words, their content seems to actualize the foundational discourse of 19th century Argentina, inscribed in the binary dichotomy of "civilization" and "barbarism".

With linguistic examples from various genres, I have also illustrated some ways in which the Argentineity scripts manifest themselves in actual language use, triggered by and triggering the cultural keywords explored throughout the thesis. Porteño keywords and scripts are woven together—legitimizing, maintaining, and recruiting each other—in discourse, and together they constitute a larger meaning network that is unique to Argentine culture. If I may indulge in metaphor, I visualize this weaving together of cultural scripts and cultural keywords as a firm cultural fabric, something akin to a woven basket. Sewed and used by generations of Argentines, a basket capable of carrying the historical weight of Argentineity.

This chapter thus represents the first step in laying the foundations for studying the Porteño-specific "grammar" (i.e. combinatorial possibilities) of scripts. Methodologically, this required the application of the cultural scripts technique in a new way (the text-tagging or "pointers" system) which proved to be useful for the organization and analysis of larger samples of discourse.

Chapter 8. Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, I begin with a brief reflection on what motivated the research reported in this thesis and the process that has determined its contents (§8.1). Then, I summarize its key findings (§8.2), and outline its contributions to the contemporary linguistics scene (§8.3). In §8.4, I discuss two methodological innovations offered in this thesis: the integration of NSM and Conceptual Blending Theory for the analysis of expressions involving blended scenarios, and the “pointers” system used for discourse analysis. In §8.5, I address some limitations of this project that may serve to inform future research: the extensive use of ‘place’ molecules in the proposed semantic explications and cultural scripts (§8.5.1), the need to analyze more *lunfardo* words (§8.5.2), and the existence of other key words, expressions, and discursive practices linked with dimensions of Argentine language and culture that have been not covered in this thesis (§8.5.3).

8.1 A brief reflection

In the opening lines of Ch. 1, I recounted the initial spark of motivation for this thesis: stumbling upon a Porteño Spanish-English dictionary whose prologue argued that “the overwhelming majority of words used in Spanish have an exact translation in English”, and that “Spanish-speaking, English-speaking, and other Western societies (...) think about and interpret the world in identical ways” (Persico, 2016, p. 1). I doubted the validity of these claims, not because I was formally trained in culturally sensitive linguistics (at that time, I wasn’t), but on account of my multilingual life experience. My strong intuition was that many words used by Porteños do not have *exact* equivalents in English (nor indeed in other languages, not even in many varieties of Spanish).

Wanting to investigate the accuracy of this intuition, I immersed myself into linguistic research. I came to understand that the belief expressed in Persico’s dictionary echoed the views that underpin mainstream branches in linguistics, and learned that ethnopragnmatics offered a toolkit to counter such views. Thanks to Argentine NSM researcher Susana Fernández, I discovered the work of Australia-based NSM originators Anna Wierzbicka and Cliff Goddard (in particular, Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014; and

Wierzbicka, 1997), and also Carsten Levisen's (2012) illuminating NSM study of the Danish universe of meaning, from which I drew much inspiration.

I thus arrived at two aims for this thesis: first, to analyze the meanings of a selection of Porteño words and expressions, and, second, to analyze the meanings of discourses that Porteños (and Argentines across the country) collectively perform with these words. I hypothesized that these words and discourses do not have *exact* equivalents in other cultures and languages, and predicted that, if their precise meanings were captured, we would also learn something about the Porteño worldview encoded in them.

In the early stages of the research, it was hard to know which keywords should be selected for analysis in this thesis. Each potential target, I believed, and still do, encodes with great sensitivity a different aspect of Porteños' interpretation and everyday navigation of the world. As the project advanced, however, the "keyword canons" of Levisen & Waters (2017) began to offer guidance (in particular: "*keywords came from discourse*", "*keywords create discursive contexts*", "*keywords maintain discursive fixities*", and "*keywords reflect cultural values*"). It became clear that, among various Porteño keywords I had begun to explore, some were *culturally significant to people across the whole country*, and, moreover, have *historically guided speakers* in their interpretation of the world. It became clear that some of these words and expressions (*lunfardo*, *Buenos Aires es la París...*, *Los argentinos descienden...*) perpetuated Argentina's foundational ideology which had aimed to "civilize" the country with European values and people, and that some of these words (*lunfardo*, *viveza*, *vivo*, *boludo*, *bronca*) reflected the inequities and tensions that the "civilizing" project had exacerbated. These words, I resolved, would be my targets.

8.2 Key findings

To address the first aim of this thesis (i.e. to analyze the meanings of a selection of Porteño words), I formulated semantic explications for the following keywords: *Buenos Aires es la París...*, *Los argentinos descienden...*, *lunfardo*, *viveza*, *vivo*, *boludo*, and *bronca*. In doing so, I was able to articulate the culture-internal perspective embedded in each target expression, replacing "a less intelligible complexity by one which is more so" (Levi-Strauss, 1966, p. 248), thereby offering fresh ethnopragmatic insights to both the cultural outsider *and* to the Argentine reader.

In Ch. 3, I used the cultural scripts technique to capture two well established discourses connected to the multiword expressions *Buenos Aires es la París...* and *Los argentinos descienden...*. One of these is a “place discourse” that invites people into a “Parisian” experience in the Argentine capital. The corresponding script, I argued, serves to background the many “un-European” places in Buenos Aires, such as *villas* (‘urban slums’) and other informal settlements, i.e. places that defy the idealized image of a European metropolis. The script also backgrounds “un-European” people, i.e. *villeros* (‘slum dwellers’) and *mestizo* (‘of mixed Spanish- and Native-American descent’) populations of low socioeconomic status. I also showed how Argentines employ this “place script” in the service of a “people script” that celebrates an analogy between Argentines and Europeans (most prominently, Italians).

The semantic analysis of the two multiword expressions revealed a high compression of culture-specific knowledges and narratives, and showed that blending operations do more than merely background un-European places and people: they erase them altogether. When Argentines use these expressions, then, the fictional blended meanings embedded in the expressions contribute to the illusion of a complete Europeanization of Argentine places and people, thereby (re)affirming the success of Argentina’s “civilizing” project.

In Ch. 4, I looked into a Porteño keyword about words: *lunfardo*. A review revealed that there have been various technical, obscure, changing, and, at times, contradictory descriptions of *lunfardo* in the literature. Even so, the word seems to have a contemporary meaning that is shared by most speakers, and that can be paraphrased in NSM terms. An important finding was that the concept of *lunfardo* tells us not only something about the way Porteños construe the Argentine linguistic world, but also something about how they construe people and places that they associate with that linguistic world. This was captured across the four sections of the explication, which I now summarize.

In the first of these sections, *lunfardo* is described as a vast, expressive vocabulary used primarily in Buenos Aires. I hypothesized that these qualities of *lunfardo* invite speakers to think of it as being like a language, in spite of academic objections to this understanding. The second section of the explication compressed a historical narrative involving European migration to and language contact in Argentina. This narrative concludes with a semantic component expressing that many *lunfardo* words are like

words from Italian and other European languages which came with the immigration. With the concept *lunfardo*, then, people are invited to think of most *lunfardo* (and, by extension, Argentine) words as being essentially “descended from the ships” (despite evidence to the contrary). In other words, *lunfardo* performs with Argentine ‘words’ a Europeanizing function that is analogous to that one performed by *Buenos Aires es la París...* and *Los argentinos descienden...* with Argentine ‘places’ and ‘people’, respectively. In the third section of the explication, *lunfardo* is conceptualized as a vocabulary which is characteristic of, and preserved in, *tango* music, and which consists largely of words that people don't know/use anymore (even if the majority of *lunfardo* words are of current use). These components also invite speakers to think of *lunfardo* as words which “voice” the poetry of historical *tango* songs. The fourth and final section of the explication encoded metapragmatic knowledge: speakers can deem the use of *lunfardo* words as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’. To a great extent, these attitudes reflect two historical currents of discourse around *lunfardo*: an early one, which disparaged it, and a later one, which valued it as an offspring of the European immigration wave, and as an expressive, culture-rich repertoire of words.

In Ch. 5 and 6, I looked at *viveza*, *vivo*, *boludo*, and *bronca*, all found to be word-meanings that emerged in response to the inequities and social tensions engendered by the Argentine “civilizing” project. Following Mafud (1965), I noted that the concept of *viveza* emerged as an expression of local “*criollo*” sociality (i.e. “ways of doing things with others”), in opposition to the culture of the newly-arrived immigrants. Before long, however, immigrants who sought to thrive in the city of Buenos Aires also began to learn and practise this form of sociality. I proposed that Argentine *viveza* involves a person with a self-centered plan, and no contemplation of potential bad consequences for other people. Crucially, I showed that, by labelling an action or way of thinking as *viveza*, the speaker is issuing a claim about Argentine sociality in particular, i.e. about “how people in Argentina do things with others” (thus the requirement to include ‘Argentina [m]’ in the semantic explication).

Vivo and *boludo*, I showed, are culture-specific words which serve to categorize and evaluate someone as one of two kinds of people with radically opposite ways of thinking and acting. Briefly, the word *vivo* designates a man whose actions are prompted by self-serving thinking, which is justified by the “maxim” that “If I don’t do it, someone else will do it”. Furthermore, *vivo* describes a man as being convinced of his superior

cognition and as desiring others' recognition. When someone is said to be a *boludo*, on the other hand, he is being assigned to a category with two identifying traits: (a) bad things often happening to them due to other people's (typically, the *vivos*'s) self-serving behaviour, and (b) "missing out" on good things happening to them because they don't behave self-servingly.

The analysis in Ch. 6 revealed three senses of the word *bronca*. *Bronca*₁, the prototypical and most frequent form, provides an emotional frame to process deep-seated issues in the Argentine society—political corruption, inequity, economic crises, crime, poverty, the lack of moral standards, etc. It is discursively associated to words such as *viveza*, *vivo*, *gil* and *boludo*, given that speakers often resort to the logics of *viveza criolla* to explain all these issues. The semantic explication of *bronca*₁ proposed that the word offers Porteños an interpretation of reality as being inevitably tragic. It places people in the position of passive "onlookers" of the abovementioned issues as they unfold in front of their eyes. With *bronca*₁, then, Argentines confirm that these societal issues are the inevitable destiny to which Argentina is doomed. Also, the experiencer of *bronca*₁ is attributed a potential aggressive-expressive reaction which can serve to release the bad feeling. *Bronca*₂ is an evolved form of *bronca*₁ in which the bad feeling remains associated to a specific person. The third proposed sense, *bronzas*, is a way of making emotional sense of unresolved issues that haunt people's autobiographical memories.

Having concluded the analyses summarized above, it was apparent that, taken together, all these keywords constitute a larger meaning network that is unique to Argentine culture. To further explore this network, Ch. 7 looked into some of the discourses which Porteños (and Argentines across the country) collectively perform together with the aid of these words (thus addressing the second aim of this thesis). Inspired by the work of sociologists, anthropologists, cultural researchers, and historians, and having examined discourse samples from various genres, I proposed that speakers often recruit the selected keywords when they wish to make sense of Argentina or, to put it in another way, perform *argentinidad* (the quality or condition of being Argentine). This led to the formulation of twenty-five "Argentineity" cultural scripts, organized into "good" scripts and "bad" scripts, representing the two poles of Argentine national self-perception: extreme self-celebration and extreme self-criticism. By and large, the content of these twenty-five scripts appears to actualize the foundational discourse of Argentina, inscribed in the dichotomous tropes of "civilization" and "barbarism".

8.3 Contributions

Though focused on Porteño Spanish, this thesis at the same time makes a contribution to the study of World Spanishes. Spanish is the main language of communication in 21 countries, and it is second by number of native speakers in the world (Instituto Cervantes, 2019). Along with a shared colonial history, a shared material, geographical, and ethnic world, there is a universe of words, meanings, and discourses that are held in common in this vast Spanish-speaking world. Equally however, Spanish-speaking communities are shaped by their own local histories, geographies, economies, etc., and each constitutes a unique ethnopragmatic universe in its own right. A small yet vibrant and growing community of NSM researches has begun to take a closer look at these Spanish-speaking communities, revealing the diversity of culture-specific meanings encoded in their respective keywords and discourses (Aragón, 2017; Aznárez-Mauleón, 2020; Aznárez Mauleón & González Ruiz, 2006a, 2006b; Barrios Rodríguez & Goddard, 2013; Bartens & Sandström, 2006; Bulat-Silva, 2002, 2011, 2012b, 2014, 2020; Fernández, 2020a; Fernández & Goddard, 2020; Gladkova & Romero-Trillo, 2014; González Ruiz & Aznárez Mauleón, 2005; Hein, 2020a, 2020b; Osmann, 2015; Travis, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006). As the most extensive NSM study of Porteño Spanish to date, this thesis delineates one more piece in the jigsaw of ethnopragmatic research on World Spanishes.

Another key contribution of thesis is to the emerging fields of postcolonial pragmatics and postcolonial linguistics (Anchimbe, 2018; Anchimbe & Janney, 2011; Janney, 2009; Levisen, 2019, 2020; Levisen & Fernández, to appear; Levisen & Jogie, 2015; Levisen & Sippola, 2019). Researchers in these fields propose that we must critically rethink the ways in which to analyze, represent, and discuss words and discourses enacted in postcolonial contexts. To a large extent, Argentina presents itself to itself as a monoglossic, monocultural white nation, but the close examination of current Porteño words and discourses undertaken in this thesis reveals the great role played by intensive culture and language contact and by hybridic discourse practices in shaping these words and discourses. Furthermore, Argentina may present itself as an “independent” nation, but the analysis in this thesis has revealed that many words and discourses that are of fundamental importance to Argentines construe Europe and the Global North as the yardstick against which to measure Argentina.

The final contribution of this thesis that I wish to highlight here is its pedagogical contribution. Research in the humanities does not always translate immediately into “tangible” practical applications (Jaivin, 2013, p. 21). Fortunately, in the NSM arena, there is a growing body of research that is taking ethnopragmatic insights “out of the lab”, making concrete contributions to the “common good” through applications in a wide range of areas where more clear and accessible communication is needed (see e.g. the discussion of Minimal English in §7.1.2). One area in which part of the research presented in this thesis has already found application is Spanish language teaching and intercultural communication. The papers corresponding to Ch. 3 and Ch. 5 of this thesis (i.e. Hein, 2020a, 2020b) are being used as study material for the course “Intercultural Communication and Competence” in the Master’s Degree in Intercultural Studies (track Latin America and Spain) offered at Aarhus University, Denmark (S. Fernández, personal communication, January 26, 2020). The course is run by Prof. Susana Fernández, who is at the forefront of pedagogical applications of ethnopragmatics in language teaching and intercultural competence development (Fernández, 2016a, 2016b, 2020a, 2020b; Fernández & Goddard, 2020). While the semantic and discursive analyses presented in this thesis were not produced with these applications in mind, this outcome is indicative of their practical utility.

8.4 Methodological innovations

This thesis has explored two new methodological avenues for doing NSM analysis. Firstly, in Ch. 3, I integrated NSM and Conceptual Blending Theory to formulate semantic explications of two expressions that involve a blend of scenarios: *Buenos Aires es la París...* and *Los argentinos descienden...* My innovative integration of these two methods provided a heuristic technique for determining precisely which semantic primes and molecules were required in the semantic explications, and precisely how these should be arranged into the components of the explications.

Looking back at Ch. 3, I note that there were two motivations for my decision to blend the two methods. The first one is that multiword expressions are still an under-researched terrain in NSM semantics (but see Goddard, 2009); therefore, input from a theory such as Conceptual Blending, which has greatly focused on such expressions, was welcome. The second motivation for integrating the two theories in Ch. 3 was a desire to

look at meaning from a different perspective. Conceptual Blending Theory offers a “dynamic” perspective on meaning, i.e. it is concerned with meaning-making or meaning-construction proper. It seeks to explain cognitive “online” operations that involve recruitment and combination of meanings; in particular, operations which derive novel or highly creative concepts. In contrast, NSM is not concerned with capturing dynamic meaning-making operations, but with representing insider’s understandings of invariant meanings encoded in words and discursive practices. By combining these two perspectives, I was able to think of complex meaning-making as a process driven by operations conducted on simpler molecules and primes. With its compositional picture of the lexicon, and its theoretical apparatus understood via chemical and architectural metaphors (“molecules” are “composed of” or “constructed by” primes; primes are “atoms of meaning” or “building blocks”, etc.), NSM may have a lot to offer to the study of dynamic meaning-construction.

The other new methodological avenue for doing NSM analysis explored in this thesis was the text-tagging or “pointers” system used in Ch. 7, which served to extract and organize cultural scripts in larger samples of discourse. Of course, corpus annotation is a well-trodden path in linguistics, and annotation techniques are increasingly important in contemporary discourse analysis, semantics, and pragmatics. However, to my knowledge, this is the first attempt to apply the cultural scripts technique to analyze large samples of discourse. Perhaps the main benefit of this new technique is that it allows one to analyze discourse without relying on technical categories or labels: the pointers direct the analyst to discursive paraphrases which are framed in maximally clear and cross-translatable terms. This disciplined form of discourse analysis represents a first step towards the study of culture-specific “discourse grammars”, i.e. mapping out the combinatorial possibilities of scripts in discourse.

8.5 Unexplored areas and future directions

8.5.1 ‘Place’ molecules

One important discovery of my research is that many of the analyzed keyword- and discourse-meanings encapsulate culture-specific views of people and places in the world. They articulate “cultural geographies” with precise geopolitical orientations, and, to

capture these orientations, my explications and scripts required the use of the semantic prime PLACE, and of various ‘place’ molecules (i.e. meaning elaborations based on the prime PLACE).

One of these ‘place’ molecules is ‘(the) Earth’, which is a proposed universal (Goddard, 2018a, 2020). The other required ‘place’ molecules are non-universal concepts that can be assigned into two groups. The first group comprises two molecules: ‘country’ and ‘city’. These two molecules have approximate equivalents across many of the world’s languages, but were used in my analyses according to their English-specific senses. While English ‘country’ has been previously explicated (Goddard, 2020), there is, to my knowledge, no available explication for English ‘city’. Neither are there explications for the Spanish counterparts ‘país’ and ‘ciudad’. There may be minor or no semantic differences between these English and Spanish molecules, but they need to be explicated nonetheless, in order to secure a better understanding of many areas of the lexicon that are based on them.

The second group of non-universal ‘place’ molecules that were required in my explications and scripts comprises ‘country’- and ‘city’-based toponyms (i.e. place names): ‘Europe’, ‘Argentina’, ‘Italy’, ‘Spain’, ‘Buenos Aires’, and ‘Paris’ (the Spanish counterparts are: ‘Europa’, ‘Argentina’, ‘Italia’, ‘España’, ‘Buenos Aires’, and ‘París’). Toponyms are indispensable to people’s everyday communication, and to the study of linguistically embedded geopolitical assumptions (Levisen, 2020), and yet the semantics of toponyms is still an under-researched area in ethnopragmatics. As toponyms, these words perform a referential function, i.e. they point to unique geographical spaces “out there”. The same can be said about related hydronyms (e.g. *Río de la Plata*) and demonyms (e.g. *porteños*), which index specific bodies of water or specific communities (see Roberts, 2017). Because of the primacy of the referential function, it may appear that such names are not rich in meaning. Furthermore, these names tend to be formally similar or the same across many languages, which may perhaps create an illusion that they lack culture-specific meaning. Or, as Levisen would put it, they are “cryptodiverse” terms (Levisen, 2018), i.e. different meanings are concealed in formally similar-looking constructs across languages. As my historical accounts (§1.2.) of the names *Argentina*, *Buenos Aires*, *porteños*, and *Río de la Plata* has suggested, toponyms, demonyms, and hydronyms are products of historical and geopolitical discourse. In line with Levisen (2020), it seems safe to hypothesize that the meanings of these words may condense

‘people’ and ‘place’ narratives, viewpoints, and ideologies of those who created the names. This thesis has not proposed any breaking down of the toponymic molecules required in my analyses. This task awaits. Doing so would offer a more nuanced understanding of the cultural geographies embedded in Porteño words and discourses.

8.5.2 *Lunfardo* words

Many of the language examples presented in this thesis contained culturally important *lunfardo* words, but their precise meanings were somewhat lost in my translations of the passages. As explained in §4.6.2, *lunfardo* words afford various functions: speakers can be playful and transgressive, they can signal intimacy and trust, convey a shared sense of identity, etc. The capacity of these words to perform these functions presumably depends on the meanings encoded in them, which are not identical to their so-called “equivalents” in standard Porteño. *Lunfardo* lexicography has traditionally overlooked subtle semantic differences between *lunfardo* words and their counterparts in standard Spanish. Ethnopragmatics can provide an adequate methodology for future research to capture these subtle differences, and perhaps better explain the role of *lunfardo* semantics in facilitating the abovementioned functions.

8.5.3 Other dimensions of Argentine culture

Before bringing this thesis to a close, one final point is necessary. It goes without saying, but nevertheless must be said: this thesis does not give a complete picture of all dimensions of Argentine culture. The picture that it does offer is a significant and original contribution, but it is skewed by a focus on Argentine keywords and scripts that cast an admiring gaze towards Europe. It is also skewed by its focus on keywords (*viveza*, *vivo*, *boludo*, and *bronca*) and associated scripts which revealed a “dark” side of Argentine sociality and a gloomy picture of Argentines’ sense of community.

Had this thesis focused on other Porteño key words, expressions, and cultural scripts, it might have offered insights into entirely different dimensions of Argentine culture. As a Porteño myself, I know there to be a “healthier” dimension of Argentine national discourse, as well as more “cooperative” dimension of Argentine sociality. I also know (or rather, it is my intuition that future research would discover) that there are many keywords and scripts that reflect such dimensions. For example, every day, people across

Argentina perform *mateada*, a *criollo* ('local') drinking ritual centered around the indigenous herbal infusion *mate*. As any Argentine will agree, and as specialists on the language of *mate* have suggested (e.g. Barcia, 2007; Bayo, 1910; Giacconi, 2004; Villanueva, 1995), there is a wealth of words, formulaic expressions, and modes of interaction that are part of this everyday ritual, and which represent local forms of what an English speaker may describe as "cooperation", "affection", "solidarity", "participation", "equality", "closeness", "trust", etc. My prediction is that an ethnopragmatic study of these words and modes of interaction would shed light on the cooperative aspects of Argentine sociality which are rooted in local traditions. Such a study would also add to an area of interest to NSM researchers, namely, the communicative style of *cercanía interpersonal* ("interpersonal closeness") and *confianza* ('trust') that characterizes the Spanish speaking world (e.g. Bulat-Silva, 2002, 2020, Fernández & Goddard, 2020; Osmann, 2015; Travis, 2004, 2006).

8.6 Closing words

This thesis has offered original, culturally sensitive insights into locals' construal of Argentine places, people, language, and emotions. In clear, cross-translatable terms, the analyses have articulated the culture-internal logics embedded in Porteño words and discourses, capturing how Argentines visualize their country's past, imagine its future, and also how they navigate their everyday lives, making sense of feelings, behaviors, interactions, and expectations. I hope not only to have described, but also have explained, some important and distinctive aspects of Porteño and Argentine language and culture, thus contributing to the study of World Spanishes. I see my thesis also as a postcolonial-linguistic contribution to the field of ethnopragmatics, offering new knowledge and methodological innovations to NSM inquiry, and sketching new domains for future research.

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