

# **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 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> 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*<sub>1</sub>, 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*<sub>1</sub> 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.

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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 <sup>st</sup> 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 <sub>1</sub> (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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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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(Signed) \_\_\_\_\_ (Date) 4 March 2020  
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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, Perisco'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.<sup>1</sup>

‘We are Argentina, the furthest country in the southeast of South America. Since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> 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.’<sup>2</sup>

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).

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

<sup>2</sup> 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 km<sup>2</sup> (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 CABA<sup>3</sup>), 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.

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<sup>3</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 preconsonantal /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*<sup>4</sup> 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

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<sup>4</sup> 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) <sup>5</sup>	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

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<sup>5</sup> 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.