

¡A MI NO ME MANDA NADIE!¹
INDIVIDUALISM AND IDENTITY IN MEXICAN
RANCHERO SPEECH

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Abstract

Rancheros are presented as a distinct subgroup of Mexican *campesinos* ‘peasants’ who enact a liberal individualist ideology that centrally values private property, especially land, and hard work as the legitimate route to *el progreso* ‘progress’. Both male and female *rancheros* are tough and independent “ranch” people who construct their identities in contrast to *indigenas* ‘Indians’ on the one hand (whom *rancheros* view as communally-oriented), and *catrines* ‘city people’ (whom *rancheros* see as fancily-dressed, and acting, “dandies”) on the other. A history of frontier isolation and mobility in *la sociedad ranchera* ‘ranchero society’ facilitated the development of both autonomy and strong ties of reciprocity for mutual support in hostile conditions, as well as common ways of living, dressing, and speaking. This valuing of both autonomy and affiliation undermines the often-invoked dichotomy between “Mexicans” and “North Americans” as being communal, or group-oriented, and individualistic, or self-oriented, respectively. Rather than predominantly one or the other, *rancheros* value **both** autonomy and affiliation. This historically constructed identity is enacted in a particular way of speaking, *franqueza* ‘frankness’, direct, straightforward, candid language that goes directly to a point. Informal verbal performances by members of these families within their homes, both in Chicago and Mexico, are analyzed for their construction of *ranchero* identity through *franqueza*.

Keywords: Mexican, verbal performance, identity, transnational, way of speaking, franqueza

1. Introduction²

Only recently have a few Mexican researchers (González 1974; Barragán López 1990, 1997) begun to distinguish *rancheros* from other Mexican *campesinos* ‘peasants’; most research literature in both the United States and Mexico has long ignored the differences **among** *campesinos*, either assuming “peasant” to be the significant category, or

¹ A *dicho* (saying) that means “No one orders me around!”

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distinguishing only between *indigena* ‘Indian’ and *mestizo* ‘racially mixed’³ peasants. All *mestizo* peasants, however, are not alike. *Rancheros* own (or wish to own) their own land individually, even relatively small parcels, and it is the **valuing** of such private property that is central to their identity. They do not own land communally, as do Indian communities, or as do *ejidatarios* (co-owners of agricultural cooperatives that resulted from land reform after the Mexican Revolution of 1910-20). *Rancheros*, in fact, disdain both Indians and *ejidatarios*, and the *agraristas* ‘agrarian reformers’ who worked to create the *ejidos*, or communal properties, and have been known to refuse, out of pride, government offers of free land (Gledhill 1991). Private property is highly valued, but it must be earned through one’s own efforts.

A liberal individualist ideology is the central underpinning of *ranchero* identity. This ideology is generally shared by both men and women, although both age and gender affect the cultural practices in which it is embedded. *Rancheros* are “ranch” people, able to control horses, shoot guns, kill chickens, and, in their view, create their own destinies through hard work. In defining themselves this way, *rancheros* distinguish themselves from those who identify as *indigenas* (indigenous Indian Mexicans) on the one hand (whom *rancheros* view as communally-oriented), and from *catrines* (city people whom *rancheros* see as fancily-dressed, and acting, “dandies”) on the other. *Rancheros* view Indians as working hard, but not progressing, and they view many city people as not really working, since “real” work involves manual labor. In contrast to these other identities, *rancheros* espouse an individualist, upwardly mobile ideology that is constructed in a verbal style, or “way of speaking” (Hymes 1974b), that could be called *franqueza* ‘frankness’.⁴

The history of the origins and development of *rancheros* in western Mexico after the Spanish conquest describes the socioeconomic conditions in which this way of life, and its ways of speaking, developed (Farr forthcoming). Briefly, *rancheros* originated from the lower ranks of Spaniards who mixed with some Indians and Africans and who handled the cattle, imported from Spain, on large haciendas. They were the original cowboys of the western hemisphere who were always on the frontier of the colony, domesticating land (smaller *ranchos* based on less desirable land not part of, but often surrounding, large *haciendas* ‘plantations’) and dominating indigenous populations. They are known as *hombres de a caballo* ‘men on horseback’, because the land on which they lived (and on which some still live) could only be traversed on horses (González 1991). This history of isolation and geographical movement made their housing perennially provisional and developed a culture in which mobility (both geographic and socioeconomic) was valued and achieved through hard work, autonomy, and toughness, particularly for men but also for women. In light of this tradition of mobility, migration to the United States can be seen as only the latest chapter in their history, part of their continuing strategy to progress, or move “up” in the world.

³ Usually *mestizo* refers to mixed Native American and European ancestry, although in recent years scholars have identified African ancestry as the “third root” of Mexico (Chávez Carbajal 1995). Indeed, this region of Michoacán did have Africans working on sugar plantations and elsewhere several centuries ago. Now, however, African ancestry is not generally acknowledged, and this “third root” has blended in with the general *mestizo* population.

⁴ Although this term is one coined by me, and did not emerge from the *rancheros* themselves, I asked a number of different people about it. Everyone I spoke with immediately liked the term and its characterization of themselves as frank and candid.

A history of frontier isolation and mobility also facilitated the development of strong ties of reciprocity for mutual support in hostile conditions, and common ways of living, dressing, and speaking. Although self-reliance was, and is, of utmost importance, so were, and are, ties of kinship, both real and fictive (*compadrazgo*). This valuing of both autonomy and affiliation undermines the often-invoked dichotomy between “Mexicans” and “North Americans” as being communal, or group-oriented, and individualistic, or self-oriented, respectively. Rather than being only one or the other, *rancheros* evidence both orientations, as will be discussed more fully below.

In traditional *ranchero* society, an anti-government attitude co-existed along with a social system based on honor which depended on one’s word (*la palabra*), and the legitimation of violence to settle conflicts. *Franqueza* as a way of speaking is particularly emblematic of the *ranchero* identity that developed under these material conditions. *Franqueza* is direct, straightforward, candid language that goes directly to a point: *Rancheros no se andan con rodeos* ‘don’t beat around the bush’, and their language can be blunt and rude (in the sense of uncultured), sometimes peppered with obscenities. An example of *franqueza* follows, an excerpt of a tape-recorded conversation between a mother and her daughter at home when I was not present.⁵ This family is headed by the mother, who was widowed when her youngest of six daughters was one year old; the family had migrated to Chicago partly because the father wanted a better education and future for his children, yet at the father’s death the mother was stranded in a new land and devastated that her husband (whom she still talks of as the love of her life) had suddenly developed stomach cancer and died (possibly linked to his years as a supervisor in industrial agriculture back in Michoacán). To make a long and painful yet inspiring story short, she pulled herself together, went to the city of Chicago to obtain a permit to sell food on the street and found herself being interviewed for a city construction job. Her first paycheck (based, of course, on male salaries) seemed so large to her that she thought it was a mistake. Eventually, through her hard work and perseverance (and the mentoring of a Puerto Rican man on the job), she bought first one house, then another (located in a better neighborhood further south in the city), constructed one back in the *rancho* (and is now retired there), and helped to support various of her daughters through high school, college, and even graduate school. The upwardly mobile “progress” (*el progreso*) of this family illustrates the importance of these values to *rancheros*, both male and female.

In this particular conversation, the mother is criticizing some young Mexican American acquaintances who aren’t direct and straightforward in their speech, nor candid in how they represent themselves or their relationships with others. Specifically, the mother objects when *novias* ‘girlfriends’ (traditionally considered engaged to be married) of many years are introduced as *amigas* ‘friends’, even when the young people in question are presumably (these days in Chicago) intimates. The daughter, born and raised in Chicago,

⁵ The original Spanish is in italics, followed by an English translation (my own). Unclear segments that were not transcribed are indicated by a question mark placed within slanted lines. Reported speech, or constructed dialogue, is enclosed within quotation marks. Words in all capital letters indicate increased stress. Square brackets are used for nonverbal cues like pauses and marked intonation patterns. Curly brackets are used for comments intended to clarify meaning for the reader. *Sic* following a word indicates a Mexican Spanish rural dialect feature.

points out that people are certainly not going to introduce their girlfriends as lovers, since that is not her mother's business. The mother denies that she is interested in knowing their "business," saying that knowing about her own love life would be sufficient. The daughter quickly picks up on this and says, "what love life?" (the mother is a widow), to which her mother replies, "well, you beat me to it" (saying it before I could). At this point the mother recycles her claim that it is insincere and false not to be frank about one's relationships and oneself. Here she criticizes some Mexican Americans, especially those who look very Mexican,⁶ for Anglicizing their names (e.g., Chon into Shawn). In her view, one should be honest and candid about one's identity, as well as one's relationships in life.

1	DAUGHTER:	<i>Ma !?/. O eso de que tú</i>	Ma !?/. Or like when you {say}, "Ah, now they
2		<i>{dices} "Ah ya se le</i>	change—now they changed the names of the
3		<i>cambia---ya le cambiaron</i>	girlfriends !?/."
4		<i>los nombres a las novias</i>	
5		<i>!?!."</i>	
6	MOTHER:	<i>Pos sí.</i>	Well, of course.
7	DAUGHTER:	<i>Te van a andar diciendo</i>	They're going to go around saying, "Look, this is
8		<i>"Mira, este es mi</i>	my lover"[sarcastic tone].
9		<i>amante"[sarcastic tone].</i>	
10	MOTHER:	<i>Pos sí ¿qué tenía eso?</i>	Well, yes, what's wrong with that?
11	DAUGHTER:	[Laughing] <i>Ay ¿qué te</i>	[Laughing] Well, what business is that of yours?
12		<i>interesa a ti eso?</i>	
13	MOTHER:	<i>¿Pa' qué les cambian de</i>	Why do they change the name?
14		<i>nombre?</i>	
15	DAUGHTER:	<i>La vida amorosa de otra</i>	The love life of another person !?/.
16		<i>persona !?/.</i>	
17	MOTHER:	<i>No-o-o, ¿yo para qué</i>	No-o-o, why would I want to know about someone
18		<i>qu'ero saber la vida</i>	else's love life?
19		<i>amorosa de otra gente?</i>	
20	DAUGHTER:	<i>Pero sí, pero estás</i>	But yes, but you're saying—
21		<i>diciendo—</i>	
22	MOTHER:	<i>Con que me die--supiera</i>	As long as—knowing my own {love life} would be
23		<i>la mía era lo suficiente.</i>	sufficient.
24	DAUGHTER:	<i>¿A cuál ya?</i>	What {love life} now?
25	MOTHER:	<i>Pero--me ganates [sic]. Si</i>	But—you beat me {to it}. Had this been a
26		<i>hubiera sido una torta te</i>	sandwich---you would have eaten it and I would
27		<i>la des--- {hubieras}</i>	have had pure shit.
28		<i>comido tú y yo pura</i>	

⁶ A popular expression, *con el nopal en la frente* 'with a nopal, a Mexican cactus, on the forehead' means looking very Mexican, presumably with Indian features.

- 29 *chingada.* [Laugh]
- 30 DAUGHTER: [Laugh] That's right. Well, why do they go around "beating around the bush," when they could go directly?
- 31 MOTHER: *Pos sí. A ver ¿pa' qué* "Oh, her friend"..bah, now they changed the name.
- 32 *andan ahí con medias* After all these years..with the same name and now,
- 33 *copas, pudiendo ir* now they changed them to make them shorter and
- 34 *directamente? "Ay, su* more decent. Wealthy is what they are acting like.
- 35 *amigo"..bah, ya les*
- 36 *cambiaron de nombre.*
- 37 *Después de tantos*
- 38 *años..con el mismo*
- 39 *nombre y ya 'ora ya les*
- 40 *cambiaron pa'..hacerlos*
- 41 *más cortitos y más*
- 42 *decentes. De centavos*
- 43 *'b'ían de ser.* Decent.
- 44 DAUGHTER: *Decentes.* I tell you, man. [Pause] Right away they change
- 45 MOTHER: *Te digo hombre.[Pause]* titles. They are like those Indian cactus-faced kids
- 46 *Luego luego cambian de* who are named Chon and then "Shaawwn"
- 47 *título. 'Tan como esos,* [mocking intonation].
- 48 *muchachos indios*
- 49 *nopalones que les ponen*
- 50 *Chon y luego "Shaawwn"*
- 51 [mocking intonation]. Like that guy, what's his name?
- 52 DAUGHTER: *Como ese, ¿cómo se llama?* Damned snotty Indian kid and "Shawn."
- 53 MOTHER: *Pinchi [sic] muchacho*
- 54 *indio mocoso y "Shawn."*
- 55

As this excerpt shows, the mother, a woman in her fifties, uses and claims to prefer a direct, "no bull" approach to communication. This style, of course, is not the only style in which *rancheros*, including this woman, speak. But it is a predominant style, and in use it evokes a deeply held ideology of *rancheros* that is tied historically to the ecology of *ranchos*, rural hamlets traditionally isolated from large urban centers of sophistication and schooling. In these rural hamlets, men and women have coped for centuries in Mexico, creating their own housing, growing their own food, raising their own livestock, and making their own cheese, clothing, and many other items of necessity. Now, of course, many *rancheros*, like those in this study, are producing food for commercial purposes (and/or working for wage labor both in the U.S. and Mexico), and buying their own food at nearby markets. Nevertheless, the deeply engrained *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977) of the independent rancher persists, and this *habitus* includes a propensity to use direct, frank language. This style of language, here called *franqueza*, constructs an identity for *rancheros* that contrasts sharply with other identities in their region of Mexico.

Primarily, *ranchero franqueza* contrasts sharply with the stereotyped image of the *humilde peón* 'humble peon', standing with head bowed and hat in hand before a powerful landowner/boss, in many popular representations of Mexican peasants. In contrast to this

humble image, which is found in both popular fiction and research literature, *rancheros* enact a proud stance, with heads held high and gazes direct, even when interacting with those who are more powerful than they. The directness of this verbal style also serves to contrast *rancheros* with more educated and “cultured” urbanites, who consider people rude whose language doesn’t conform to *cortesía*, an elaborate and often indirect verbal politeness style (Haverkate 1994). *Cortesía* in polite society requires verbally elaborate greetings and leave-takings, for example, whereas the *franqueza* of *rancheros* is usually much more concise, allowing people to (appropriately) leave with a simple *Ya me voy* ‘I’m leaving now’.

In what follows I explore the construction of *ranchero* identity in informal verbal performances within the homes of the performers. Performances “stand out” in the flow of ordinary conversation because the audience orients attentively to the performer, who is often telling a story or joke (Hymes 1975/1981; Bauman 1977). Such verbal performances are especially important sites for constructions and interpretations of identity, since they are instances of heightened aesthetic experience, and since they are intended for display. Instances of *ranchero* direct verbal style, or *franqueza*, in such performative talk from a large corpus of tape recorded discourse are analyzed below to illustrate how language and ideology are intertwined in the construction of individualist *ranchero* identity.

2. Background of study

The *rancheros* in this study are a transnational network of Mexican families who live both in Chicago and in their village of origin in Michoacán, Mexico with whom I have become close during a ten year ethnographic study. The focus of this study has been on culturally embedded ways of using oral and written language (Farr 1993, 1994a, b, c, 1998, in press; Farr and Guerra 1995; Guerra 1999; Guerra and Farr in press) within the framework of the ethnography of communication (Hymes 1974a; Bauman and Sherzer 1989). Members of these families first migrated to Chicago in 1964; first men came, then their wives and children, and, eventually, single women. In Chicago they work in factories and construction; most of the women work in food preparation, glass painting, and other factories, and almost all of the men work in railroad construction. Chicago is, as one woman put it, *para mejorar* ‘to improve {our lives}’. They are part of a transnational community (Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 1992) because they regularly return to and communicate continuously with people in their village, and because they maintain social, emotional, economic, and political ties with network members on both sides of the U.S. - Mexican border. Many families live for years in Chicago, then move back to Mexico, either to retire or to raise children through the teenaged years; some then move again to Chicago. Especially for the adults in this network, it can be said that they form the fabric of each other’s lives; that is, they form a dense and multiplex social network (Milroy 1980), since not only are they related by kinship and *compadrazgo* ‘co-parenting fictive kinship’, but they also work, live, and socialize together. True to their beliefs, most of these families have used the money they have earned in Chicago to buy houses in Chicago, and to buy land (and construct or improve houses) back in Mexico. On the land bought in Mexico, they have planted avocados and sell them commercially.

A note on methodology is in order here. I am fortunate to have been accepted and included within this network of families during the last ten years. Our acquaintance, which began with this ethnographic study, grew into deep friendship, starting in Chicago and soon including their *rancho* in Michoacán (which has become my “home away from home”). I am especially close with the women in these families, both those my own age and those with young families, although I also count several men as close friends. My participant-observation with these families has been, then, intense and long-term. In Chicago it has of necessity involved more visiting than “living with,” but in the *rancho* I stay with families, sharing bedrooms, and even beds when space is tight, with other women and children. I spent a year there (1995-96) as a Fulbright scholar, and I have visited for a few weeks or a month on many other occasions, often during fiestas. I have carried items and papers back and forth for others in the network, like everyone else, and a number of the women have helped me in my research, and been paid for this through my research grants. Their work has included recording discourse for me, transcribing tapes, making maps, and carrying out interviews. In short, it has been a very collaborative and satisfying endeavor at the human level. It is important to note that this depth and quality of participant-observation is essential for understanding the discourse style I discuss here, since it occurs in the interstices of everyday life, which I have shared with them.

3. *Ranchero* identity

Identities are clearest in their contrast with “others;” in fact, they are constructed against these others: “We” are not “them.” The region, northwest Michoacán, in which the *rancho* is located, has a large indigenous (Indian) population, and the *rancho* is nestled up against the edge of the *meseta tarasca* ‘Tarascan tableland’. Being *ranchero* is an important identity in these families, and this is frequently expressed as a primarily non-indigenous (non-Indian) ethnic identity. Within northwest Michoacán *rancheros* and *indigenas* ‘indigenous or Indian Mexicans’ distinguish themselves from each other, sometimes fiercely. Although the *rancheros* have some indigenous “blood,” they continuously construct a non-indigenous identity, although not without some ambivalence. As Barth noted, it is “the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses” (Barth 1969: 15). Otherwise, over time ethnic groups in interaction, as *rancheros* and *indigenas* have been for centuries in Mexico (Barragán 1998), would tend to exchange “cultural stuff.” In fact, such exchange has occurred here in both directions, including the movement of individual people, and yet the boundary between these two groups has remained distinct. So whereas *rancheros* can be distinguished for their deeply held beliefs in individualism, private property, and progress, it is how these beliefs **contrast** with their perceptions of their indigenous neighbors that lends them salience.

Talk about such ethnic identity is frequent within these families, in both Mexico and Chicago, and this talk makes it abundantly clear that a primarily non-indigenous identity is central to their self-definition, especially among the older generation. Among the younger, formally schooled generation, such talk entails more ambivalence and acknowledgment of their own (partial) indigenous heritage, since they are taught in school that *todos somos indios* ‘we are all Indians’. Yet in practice, comments about the indigenous, whether positive or negative, always make it clear that they are **different**, and usually relegate them to lower status. My field notes and tapes are full of comments like

the following, comments made by different men and women across a range of contexts:

"You see, I'm so healthy because I have some Indian blood." (The reverse comment is never made, indicating that the assumed "default" mode is Spanish/European.)

"The indigenous are very intelligent! They can make textiles, pottery, many things!"

"In our family, two brothers were sent over by the King of Spain to retrieve the bones of a dead priest. They looked around, saw how rich the land was, and decided to stay. Of course, then they mixed the bloods."

"Yes, there are people with darker skin '*morenos*' here in the *rancho*, but they're not indigenous."

"With the indigenous, one can't have *confianza* 'trust'; they change on you, and they are very closed."

"The indigenous, they don't progress" (unspoken: As we do, in going to Chicago, making money, buying land, and planting avocados as an entrepreneurial enterprise).

Rancheros, however, not only distinguish themselves from indigenous Mexicans; they also distinguish themselves from other (non-*ranchero*) *mestizos* who are seen as "more" *mestizo*. Comments refer to such *mestizos* as people, basically indigenous, who have acculturated to Spanish ways of living, e.g., by wearing "regular" clothes, in contrast to the indigenous Tarascan or, in their own language, *purhépecha* people in this region. In nearby *purhépecha* villages, many women (and even young girls) still wear distinctive blouses, skirts, belts, and shawls to indicate their ethnic identity, although most men no longer wear the traditional male Indian peasant garb of white pants and shirt. A local joke in the *rancho* tells of people in a nearby (heavily indigenous) *mestizo* town who are said to have learned to dance with their arms around each other, European style, and then announced, ok, now we're Spanish.

The *rancho* that the *rancheros* in this study are from is situated in a micro-region in which there never have been large landowners with *haciendas* 'plantations', unlike other regions in the state and nation. In regions in which *haciendas* long existed, relations of domination and subordination are presumably more deeply established, and ruling families expect and receive verbal and bodily deference from their workers and other landless peasants dependent on them for material resources. The land in this particular micro-region, comprised of rolling hills on a high plateau, was apparently not conducive to the large scale agriculture of *haciendas*, which were located in flatter, and more easily exploitable, expanses of land. The shape of the land in this micro-region, then, may have contributed to the predominance of *ranchos* here. It has always been *ranchero* territory, i.e., the province of small landowners rather than *hacendados* 'plantation owners'. Thus the micro-region does not have an entrenched tradition of a *patrón* 'boss', usually from a dominant family, to whom workers owe deference, a fact that may partly explain why these *rancheros* do not publically assume a humble, deferential stance toward more powerful others, especially not on their own turf. In contrast, an interview with an older man living one half hour's drive away, over the hills to the west in the flat expanse of land that had been part of an *hacienda*, contains the frequent deferential use of *el patron* and

la patrona to refer to male and female family members who owned the hacienda until the revolution.

In the status hierarchy of this region of northwest Michoacán, the indigenous Tarascan or *purhépecha* Indians are at the bottom, *rancheros* are in the middle, and the urban elite are at the top. Yet except when doing business (e.g., receiving medical services) in cities that have an urban elite population, *rancheros* can avoid most contacts with those “above them” in the regional status hierarchy with whom they might feel uncomfortable. (Even in interactions with the urban elite, however, I have observed these *rancheros* enacting self-assertion and *franqueza*.) Most of the time, nevertheless, their interactions are with other *rancheros* or with *indigenas*. When interacting with other *rancheros*, their demeanor and language is egalitarian. In interactions with the indigenous, in contrast, *rancheros* expect, and often receive, deference, at least publically. Friedrich (1977) notes the extreme hostility toward these *mestizos* on the part of the indigenous *purhépecha* of this region, which supports an interpretation of the public deference as a form of resistance, a “weapon of the weak” (Scott 1990). An interview of the indigenous woman who sells bread and other corn and wheat products daily in the *rancho*, walking door to door, confirms the resentment of the indigenous toward the *rancheros*, who are seen as “the same” as the indigenous themselves, except for the fact that “they look down on us.”

Rancheros, then, distinguish themselves from other rural peasants by the importance they give to private property, especially land ownership, and to an upwardly mobile notion of *progreso* ‘progress’. In the popular imagination in Mexico, they have played an important role in this regard, as *rancheros* were valorized as epitomizing *lo mexicano* (true Mexicanness) in the Golden Age of Mexican cinema during the 1940's and 50's. Some contemporary scholars view this use of *rancheros* rather critically as a conservative promotion of capitalism and nationalism, but there is no doubt that the film stars who portrayed *rancheros* (e.g., Jorge Negrete in *Allá en el Rancho Grande* ‘Over on the Big Ranch’ still represent the values and demeanor, and the status, that many contemporary *rancheros* hold dear. For in spite of the historical (and contemporary) positive image of *rancheros* in both film and music, the term *ranchero* also evokes negative connotations in some parts of contemporary Mexico, as well as among some members of Mexican communities in the United States (Cintron 1997). As rural Mexicans, *rancheros* are stereotyped as backward (not “modern”), shy, and uneducated. This is epitomized in the expression, *No seas ranchera!* ‘Don’t be so backward/ungracious!’ used in social situations among the cultured elite in urban areas of Mexico. Moreover, there is a long tradition within Mexico of equating “rural” with “Indian” and “urban” with “Spanish” (e.g., Bonfil Batalla 1996), especially since during the colonial period and after many Spanish *hacienda* owners lived in cities while lower status Spanish and *mestizo rancheros* lived on *haciendas* as administrators (Barragán 1997). *Rancheros* in this study quickly acknowledge the higher education of people in the cities, and when in a city, are quite aware of their own difference. On their own turf in the *rancho*, however, they don’t hesitate to ridicule “citified” people, especially men, who, if they don’t work with their hands, don’t really **work**. Clearly, then, these two identities are sharply differentiated by both the urban elite and *rancheros*. Linguistically the difference between the two is captured by contrasting *franqueza* and *cortesía* as verbal styles. Whereas *franqueza* is frank and direct, even blunt and rude at times, *cortesía* is

cultured, elaborate, and indirect (Haverkate 1994). Below I explain in more detail the ideology that *franqueza* both expresses and constructs.

4. Liberal individualist ideology

Studies of Mexicans within the United States have characterized them as being “collectivist” (Delgado-Gaitan 1993) or “deeply familistic” (Valdés 1996) and thus more committed to family and other reciprocal relationships than are many members of the dominant Anglo “individualist” culture that, according to LeVine and White (1986), has been inculcated by mass schooling. While encapsulating some truth, these contrasting characterizations of “collectivist/familistic” vs. “individualist,” too often are perceived as a simple dichotomy. In my ethnographic experience with *ranchero* Mexicans, however, such a dichotomy dissolves into a “both,” rather than an “either/or.” *Ranchero* Mexicans generally evidence a very individualist orientation, even though they do so within a context of familism and networks based on reciprocity. That is, although the family, and human relationships, are of central importance in social life, individuality is also highly valued, both within and beyond the family. It is possible, then, to be both “individualistic” and “collectivist/familistic,” autonomous without being isolated. What is significant, then, may be the differences between U.S. Anglo and Mexican *ranchero* individualism, the latter coexisting with an emphasis on familism. *Rancheros* see themselves as differing from other Mexicans in terms of such individualism, crucially those who identify as indigenous or Indian Mexicans.

A variety of recent studies indicate that even though *rancheros* across Mexico vary in their relative wealth, they share cultural practices, beliefs, and the frequent use of a frank verbal style. They can be rich or poor, dominant or “middle class,” i.e., sandwiched between an elite dominant class and those on the bottom of the status hierarchy (Jacobs 1982; Lomnitz-Adler 1992). Yet no matter the size of their land holdings, and thus their relative wealth and influence, they share certain cultural values (Brading 1994), including the overriding importance of hard work and autonomy, ideally living off their own land on livestock and other food products, and being their own bosses (Barragán López et al 1994). A popular *ranchero dicho* ‘saying’ expresses this: *¡A mí no me manda nadie!* ‘No one orders me around!’. *Rancheros* historically are frontiersmen and women: The “ranch” men and women of Mexico, though many Mexicans who no longer live in isolated *ranchos* in Mexico, and now live in cities either in Mexico or the United States, still retain *ranchero* values. In addition to pride in hard work, individual efforts at entrepreneurship are highly valued and practiced by both men and women: E.g., in Chicago men fix up and rent apartments in the backs of the houses they own, and women sell Tupperware and other commodities, apart from their regular factory or construction jobs. One teenager recently airbrushed and sold tee shirts while still in high school in Chicago, a fact that was proudly announced by aunts and other family members, who reported that he was “doing really well” at this endeavor. Another teenager worked part-time in a candy store throughout high school in order to buy a used car so she could drive her mother and siblings around, as well as drive herself to community college.

Social order in the *ranchito*, then, is based on a liberal individualist ideology (Cosío Villegas et al 1995: 114-15) in which people are believed to be equally free and able to

work their way up in the world through their own hard labor and enterprise, rather than having their social status be determined at birth. Lomnitz-Adler (1992) traces the *ranchero* discourse which constructs this ideology to liberal individualism from late 19th century Mexico. Barragán (1998), in contrast, claims that *rancheros* have been socially, economically, and geographically mobile for centuries within Mexico, from soon after the conquest to the contemporary migration to the United States. Whatever its origins, however, upward mobility and a belief in progress are centrally important to these *rancheros*, and Chicago has figured significantly in this drive toward progress. As indicated above, this belief in progress and upward mobility provides the basis upon which the *rancheros* in this study distinguish themselves from others. Many *ranchero* families from this area, in fact, trace their ancestry back to Spain (and one prosperous family in the *rancho*, with professional members in Guadalajara, has a Spanish coat of arms on the wall of their architect-designed house), although most people readily acknowledge that their ancestors (and those only a few generations back, after the Revolution of 1910-20) “mixed the blood” with indigenous Mexicans. Genetically, although they presumably are *mestizo*, many individuals and even entire families in this *rancho* are quite “white,” that is, many people have blue or green eyes, blond or light brown hair, and light skin with freckles that turns red, not brown, in the sun. Others look more evidently *mestizo*, with tan skin and some indigenous features. In spite of their acknowledgment of *mestizaje* (the mixture of “races”), however, these *rancheros*, especially the older generation, maintain clear distinctions between themselves and the indigenous, whom they say “don’t progress.” This discourse thus creates clear ethnic boundaries that separate the *rancheros* in the present study from nearby lower-status indigenous Mexicans, with whom, at least in the recent past, they have shared extreme poverty.

A final note on *ranchero* individualist ideology is in order here. An important aspect of the social order in *la sociedad ranchera* ‘*ranchero* society’ is that it is patriarchal. De la Peña (1984) describes kinship ideology in traditional *ranchero* society in this region of Mexico as extremely patriarchal, with a “bearded patriarch” an unquestioned authority heading a multi-generational cattle raising and agricultural “organization.” Although this ideology is changing due to changing social and economic circumstances, “*el hombre ranchero*” ‘a *ranchero* man’, as one of the women in these families said to me, still wants a *serviente* ‘servant’ for a wife. Men, as heads of families, see themselves as maintaining order through a code of *respeto*, literally ‘respect,’ but connoting more than the English word, as is explained below. Uses of *tú* ‘familiar you’ and *usted* ‘formal you’ generally reflect this system of *respeto* that organizes relations by gender and age: Women use *tú* with each other, as do men, but *usted* is used from one gender to another, and (in many contexts) from children to parents. Outside the family, *usted* is generally reserved for strangers and respected people like priests and teachers, but within the egalitarian ethos of the *rancho*, within gender at least, *tú* is frequently used. Valdés (1996) defines *respeto* as “a set of attitudes toward individuals and/or the roles they occupy,” adding that, while important in relations among strangers, it is especially important for guiding relations within the family. For example, children (even adult children) are expected to show respect for their parents by obeying them. Among equal adults within *ranchero* society, the social order, and *respeto*, is explicitly described as egalitarian: *Todos somos iguales* ‘We are all equal’ and *Respeto es vivir en paz* ‘Respect is living in peace’. The latter saying echoes the often-quoted words of Benito Juárez, a

famous late 19th century President of Mexico, and means that, if everyone is treated as an individual with rights, then there will be peace. Within this *rancho*, *respeto* is described by virtually everyone as consisting of two primary aspects: Respecting the private property of others (not stealing) and not committing adultery with someone else's wife or husband (perhaps also a kind of property).

In spite of all the explicit egalitarian talk, however, several factors differentiate members of this community. Although there are economic differences among various families, these differences are not organized into a rigid status hierarchy. That is, because people deeply believe in an egalitarian ethic, they behave accordingly, at least within same-gender and same-age interactions, and they do not draw attention to economic differences in these interactions. Gender and age, however, do organize relations hierarchically. Women ideally owe public deference to their fathers and then husbands, and younger men owe deference to older men. Official discourse such as that found in church sermons affirms this gender and age-based system of *respeto*, but, even so, this ideal is not always enacted in everyday practices, and tensions in this social code allow for variation and hence change. For example, although wives and daughters traditionally serve food to fathers and brothers, in families in which it is the daughters who are working and thus paying for the *mandado* 'weekly groceries', men have been known to heat their own tortillas in their wives' and daughters' presence (and been teased by other men for allowing this). Chávez (1994) argues that because *ranchera* women traditionally work not only in "female" domains such as the kitchen, but also help out in "male" domains such as the fields, they are "part of everything" and thus have much control over the entire household. Similarly, as Rogers (1975) argues for French peasant women, since the significant economic unit at the level of a village is the household, this gives women in such settings a significant degree of power, and, while they publically defer to their men, privately they often control everything. Moreover, within the transnational community that is the focus of this study, women work outside the home, in factories in Chicago and in packing plants near the *rancho*. For all these reasons, then, there is substantial "room" for them to assert themselves, even in a traditionally patriarchal system.

It's important to note in this regard that *franqueza* as a verbal style indexes qualities that are publically associated with masculinity. It is, then, primarily a male style of talk. *Ranchera* women, however, far from fitting the public stereotype of (good) Mexican women as self-abnegating, docile, and subservient to men (Melhuus 1996), sometimes appropriate this verbal style to assert their own toughness and individualism, as do younger men on occasion, asserting their own selfhood vis a vis older men. Frequently, such appropriation occurs within the verbal play frame of *relajo* 'joking around' (Farr 1994, 1998). Usually, however, *respeto* calls for verbal strategies of respect, entailing 1) an egalitarian *franqueza* between men (and between adult women) that is frank and direct, indicating candor and integrity in social relations, and 2) a more formal verbal deference (e.g., the use of a formal second person singular pronoun, *usted*, rather than the informal *tú*) based on an age and gender hierarchy, within both the family and the community. In this article, I focus on the former, an egalitarian *franqueza* used by both men and women.

5. *Franqueza* as a verbal style

I have argued that the distinctness of *ranchero* identity rests centrally on the importance they attribute to individual land ownership and thus autonomy. As land owners they enact a proud, authoritative stance that is performed in a predominant verbal style of *franqueza*. Such performative talk constructs a *ranchero* identity that emphasizes independence and self-assertion. As a verbal style it is direct, powerful, and at times even rude, and as such it invokes an individualist, egalitarian, and often entrepreneurial ideology. Lomnitz-Adler, who studied *rancheros* in another Mexican state (although there they dominated the region politically and economically), describes this rough talk as “bold, frank, and open,” full of “regional sayings and down-to-earth obscenities” (Lomnitz-Adler 1992: 199–200). Its very frankness, he argues, created a populist and egalitarian stance for these *rancheros*, who used this verbal style and stance quite effectively in gaining political dominance in their region. In my own study, unlike Lomnitz-Adler’s, the *rancheros* are not regionally dominant, nor are they rich. Yet they nevertheless evidence the same ideology and verbal style as the more powerful *rancheros* of Lomnitz-Adler’s study, and of other studies of *rancheros* (González 1974; Barragán 1990, 1997). González traces this stance of authority and pride on the part of *rancheros* to their Spanish heritage:

They inherited from their Spanish parentage a practice of arrogance. They never owe anything to anyone, and they are very sensitive to humiliation. Being haughty they are individualists and disrespectful of authority. They regard honor highly and look down on the humility of the indigenous, as well as on the shame of the *ejidatarios* ‘co-owners of communally owned land’. (González 1991: 7; my translation)

Thus *rancheros* disdain those who are not autonomous “self-made men (and women).” They look down on both communal Indians and *ejidatarios*, who were given land by the government instead of earning it themselves through their own hard labor. (Of course, from the indigenous point of view, this land was stolen from them when the Spanish arrived.)

The authoritative, even haughty, stance of *rancheros* lends itself to a frank verbal style. It is “bald on record” in the terms of politeness theory (Brown and Levinson 1987). This theory is based on Goffman’s notion of face, defined as “the public self-image that every member [of a group] wants to claim for himself” (1987: 61). Depending on various aspects of the context (such as power relationships, distance or closeness, and cultural values), certain linguistic acts on the part of a speaker are considered “face threats” to a hearer. In Brown and Levinson’s scheme,

Doing an act **baldly, without redress**, involves doing it in the most direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way possible (for example, for a request, saying ‘Do X!’)...Normally, an FTA [face threatening act] will be done in this way only if the speaker does not fear retribution from the addressee, for example in circumstances where (a) S and H both tacitly agree that the relevance of face demands may be suspended in the interests of urgency or efficiency; (b) where the danger to H’s face is *very* small, as in offers, requests, suggestions that are clearly in H’s interest and do not require great sacrifices of S (e.g., ‘Come in’ or ‘Do sit down’); and (c) where S is vastly superior in power to H, or can enlist audience support to destroy H’s face without losing his own...

By going *on record* [baldly], a speaker can potentially get any of the following advantages: He can enlist public pressure against the addressee or in support of himself;

he can get credit for honesty, for indicating that he trusts the addressee; [and] he can get credit for outspokenness, avoiding the danger of being seen to be a manipulator...(1987: 69-71)

When these circumstances do not obtain, and when the speaker wishes to avoid threatening the hearer's face, s/he will either speak "off record" (very indirectly) or, "on record," s/he will use "redressive action" which "gives face" to the addressee, either through what Brown and Levinson call "positive" or "negative" politeness. Without going into all the details of this theory and its critiques, Spanish address terms such as *tú* and *usted*, as well as other linguistic devices, can be used strategically to emphasize either positive (solidarity-oriented) or negative (deference-oriented) politeness. Bald on record, in contrast, is communication that is stripped of conventional linguistic politeness devices that serve to reduce the face threat to the hearer by humbling the speaker. For example, a directive, *¡Venga, apague esa luz!* 'Come, turn out that light!' is bald on record communication. In contrast, a request, *Apaga esa luz, ¿quieres?* 'Turn out that light, would you?', with the added "would you?," includes redressive action in order to be polite, that is, to reduce the face threat to, or be more respectful of, the hearer (Haverkate, 1994: 167).

The *rancheros* in this study frequently use direct, bald on record directives that do not humble the speaker. Such directives support a stance of independence and toughness, indexing their individualist ideology. Men, women, and children all use such directives frequently, often, but not always (e.g., I have heard daughters use such directives to mothers), to someone lower in the family hierarchy. In one instance of the general pattern, a young girl in the *rancho* who was attending to a cut on her slightly younger brother's arm said to him as he grimaced from the pain, "*¡Aguantate, si eres hombre!*" 'Handle it, if you're a man!'

Theoretically, such bald on record communication is used in two situations: First, when there is little distance (much intimacy) between speakers, and second, when there is a hierarchical relationship between the interactants in which the speaker has more power than the hearer. In other words, it is used between intimates (where there is by definition little distance between speakers), or it is used by a higher status speaker to a lower status speaker. Although the young girl and her brother were family intimates, in this case she was asserting her (slightly) older sister status by ordering him to "handle it like a man!" Of course, bald on record language not only **expresses** status and power differentials, it also attempts to **create** them on the spot. An incident from my field notes provides another example of this pattern.

Early in my fieldwork in the *rancho* I was introduced to a man outside of the chapel following the weekly Sunday morning mass. I reproduce this dialogue below :

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | MAN: <i>¿Qué eres?</i> | What are you? |
| 2 | MF: <i>Soy Marcia Farr.</i> | I am Marcia Farr. |
| 3 | MAN: <i>No, ¿qué eres? ¿Inglés, Aleman, qué?</i> | No, what are you? English, German, what? |
| 4 | MF: <i>Bueno, pues, Ingles, Aleman, y un</i> | Well, English, German, and a little French and |
| 5 | <i>poquito de francés e irlandés.</i> | Irish. |

- 6 MAN: {nodding and smiling} *Bueno, ¿cual* {nodding and smiling} OK, what religion are
 7 *religión eres?* you?
- 8 MF: *Fui bautizada catolica.* I was baptized Catholic.
- 9 MAN: {nodding and smiling} Well, then, you {nodding and smiling} Well, then, you are very
 10 *are very welcome here in the rancho.* welcome here in the *rancho*.

As shown in line 1 above, the very first thing this man said to me was, What are you? Thinking that I has misheard him as asking me **who** I was, not **what** I was, I replied with my name. “No,” he said firmly, **what** are you? English, German, what?. Somewhat taken aback, I replied honestly and factually with my ethnic background as I understand it. Nodding approval of my ethnic background, he continued to interrogate me: OK, what religion are you?. Thinking quickly, I replied that I was baptized Catholic (which is true, but in saying this I avoided claiming that I was a practicing Catholic). He smiled, slowly nodded, and then said, switching to English, Well then, you are very welcome here.

This incident illustrates not only the *franco* ‘frank’ verbal style of bald on record, it also shows how such a verbal style constructs a powerful stance on the part of the speaker toward the hearer. Not knowing anything about me except that I was from the United States, instead of acknowledging distance, and possibly higher status, through various verbal politeness devices, he used direct questioning and a bald on record verbal style. Moreover, he used *tú* (second person singular, familiar pronoun) rather than *usted* (second person singular, formal pronoun). The use of *tú*, of course, like *franqueza*, indexes either intimacy or higher status on the part of the speaker vis a vis the hearer. Since we were virtual strangers, his use of *tú* did not index intimacy; instead, it indexed a claim of at least equal, if not higher, status on his part vis-à-vis me.

His verbal choices here must be understood against the widespread awareness in the *rancho* of the power of the United States vis-à-vis Mexico, both historically and currently. Virtually all of the families in this *rancho* either have members working in the U.S. and sending money for daily necessities like food and clothing, or they have worked there in the past and now live off those earnings. Moreover, the man in whose household I stay when in the *rancho* has pointed out to me explicitly that the United States has exerted much control over affairs in Mexico. His son even told me once that the United States was planning to annex some northern Mexican states. Although this struck me as a wild rumor, it nevertheless vividly evoked the Mexican-American War in the mid nineteenth century in which the United States took over half of what was then Mexico and incorporated it into the U.S. In the interaction in front of the church, then, all of these background understandings came into play. Although I was in some respects of a higher status (more educated, richer, and from a powerful nation), this man chose to use *franqueza* with me to assert himself and to claim his own high status, a status at least equal to, if not higher than, my own.

It is interesting to consider whether my interrogation, evaluation, and then (fortunate for me) welcoming in front of the church would have happened in this way had I been male, a *gringo* rather than a *gringa*. Certainly the fact that I am female facilitated a man’s use of a bald on record verbal style in this traditional patriarchal *rancho* society. Looked at this way, I was being incorporated into the local status order: The use of *franqueza* with me communicated that although I might be of arguably higher status than

he, I was, after all, a female, and so could more easily be confronted with such direct questioning than a male of my class and national status. This is not to say that *franqueza* is not used between men (it most certainly is), either as equals or from a higher status speaker to a lower status hearer. Depending on the context, *franqueza* constructs somewhat varying meanings. In this context, however, the fact that it was a male-female interaction unavoidably invoked gender relations, especially in a society in which gender is such a fundamental principle for social ordering.

It is also interesting to consider this interaction in the light of critiques of politeness theory. Hernández-Flores (1999) argues that Brown and Levinson's definitions of positive and negative politeness are grounded in Anglo Saxon cultural values:

[Brown and Levinson's] proposal presents some problems of adequacy to cultural values from some communities. In fact, the features ascribed to face wants focuses on the individuality of people, on their right to privacy, by claiming own territories (negative face) and social approbation of own wants (positive face). Wierzbicka points out that the focus on individualism is a characteristic cultural value of Anglo Saxon communities, but this value is not shared by other communities (1991, ch. 2). (Hernández-Flores 1999: 38)

Following Bravo (1996), Hernández-Flores argues for **autonomy** and **affiliation** to replace the concepts of negative and positive face respectively. Autonomy and affiliation, seen as universal categories, then are "filled" with the cultural content of each case. In Spanish society (the locus of Hernández-Flores' study), autonomy and affiliation are not opposed to each other, but are linked in a common emphasis on group belonging: Autonomy is the wish to be seen as an original individual standing out from his/her group (and therefore worthy of group acceptance); and affiliation is the wish to achieve closeness within a group. Autonomy is expressed as **self-affirmation**, so that one is seen as having such desirable qualities that the group will accept one. Affiliation is expressed through the search for *confianza* 'trust' in a close relationship, such that open, candid communication can occur. In order to fulfill the face requirement of autonomy, "the individual is expected to display her/his self-confidence by means of assertive behavior" (Hernández-Flores 1999: 40). In order to fulfill the face requirement of affiliation, developing *confianza* (which presumably follows from self-affirmation), allows speakers to speak openly and intimately, as though they were in a family context, which is highly valued in Spanish society. Distance, then, and a corresponding lack of *confianza*, is negatively valued.

In the interaction above, I initially was taken aback by the *franqueza* expressed in direct, blunt interrogation, which I interpreted as a face-threatening act (an FTA). My "interrogator," however, may not have perceived this as an FTA. Rather, his *franqueza* may have been intended as a "natural" expression of self-assertiveness, putting "one's best foot forward," so to speak. Moreover, it may have been thought especially appropriate, given our gender differences. It was my interrogator's strategic choice, of course, to foreground the gender differences and background the class and national differences. In doing so, he was incorporating me into his group, on local terms, laying the groundwork for *confianza*, wherein such candid language is appropriate. At the same time, of course, he was impressing me with his own positively valued *ranchero* qualities of independence and self-sanctioned authority.

In similar interactions between men, *franqueza* can either index an egalitarian relationship, or it can index a relationship of unequal status. The latter often occurs in

interactions between *rancheros* and the occasional *indígena* who comes to the *ranchito* to work for or do business with them, especially if it is “clear” that the person is *indígena*, but unknown. If the former (within *ranchero* society), this direct unadorned verbal style sets up expectations of a basically egalitarian social order based on *respeto* ‘respect’ between independent, authoritative men (or between self-assertive women as equals). For both men and women, at least when they are communicating within their own gender or with intimates, the ethic invoked is that of a frontier society in which the individual must be strong and independent in order to survive. As I have described them above, women here, although publically subservient to men, are physically and emotionally tough and resilient. They work not only in the kitchen, but also in the fields when necessary, and they take care of the smaller animals, killing chickens and other birds in order to cook them. Some know how to use guns and ride horses. They learn at an early age, like everyone else on the *ranchito*, to take care of themselves in the natural and social world in which they live, defending themselves both verbally and physically when necessary. Thus when these women appropriate this verbal style, it directly indexes strength, and it only indexes masculinity indirectly (Ochs 1992).

6. *Franqueza* constructed in narrative performance

As is shown in the interaction in front of the church described above, *franqueza* is an emergent quality of discourse constructed by interactants “on the spot.” In this sense it is an emergent quality of performance (Bauman 1977; Hymes 1975/1981), which is introduced by one speaker and then either accepted or contested by the other speaker(s). (In my eagerness not to offend anyone during my early fieldwork, in the dialogue above that took place in front of the church, I did not contest my interrogator’s *franqueza* and implicit status claim.) *Franqueza*’s bald on record style either indexes an egalitarian ideology among equals (e.g., male to male or female to female, when both are of roughly equal age), or a patriarchal ideology of hierarchy (e.g., older to younger or male to female).

In the following excerpt from a tape made early in the research project, when we were relative strangers to each other, *franqueza* is constructed in a narrative recounting told by a very senior male of the extended family to Juan Guerra, my then Ph.D. student and co-ethnographer in the first phase of the study. At the time, this man, the eldest brother in this extended family, was visiting from the *ranchito*, where he had retired after many years working in Chicago, and where he managed the family avocado business. The interaction took place in a kitchen in a home in Pilsen, the most well known Mexican neighborhood in Chicago and the traditional “port of entry” for Mexican immigrants in recent decades. The kitchen was filled with people, since this house and family served as a center for the entire extended family in the early years of the study. We had finished eating and were about to teach a class that would help family members prepare for examinations and interviews in the amnesty process that would make them legal. Don Jaime (a pseudonym), unlike most other family members, already had a green card that granted him residency in the U.S., although in this excerpt he tells Juan about his interactions with the immigration authorities when he was still working without legal papers.

Juan began the interaction by asking, “*Bueno Don Jaime, me dicen que usted, cuando primero vino a los Estados Unidos, fue a Harlingen.*” (Well, sir, they tell me that you, when you first came to the United States, went to Harlingen.) After some back and forth discussion of where Harlingen, Texas was located near the Texas-Mexican border, Juan tells Don Jaime that he was born there. Don Jaime agrees that, yes, he was familiar with the town, but that he didn’t like it, since he was incarcerated twice there by the immigration authorities before he was legally sanctioned to work in the U.S. Then he tells Juan that he was the first to come here illegally from his *rancho* and that eventually about a hundred people followed him to Chicago. He continues to explain that, with money earned in Chicago, many of them bought land back in the *rancho* and planted avocado orchards, and so today the *rancho* is vastly different from the pre-Chicago days when only a few people had money and most of the *rancho* was very poor. (The few people who had some money had migrated to Kansas in the previous generation.) After two interruptions from others in the kitchen, and in the midst of multiple conversations being carried on by others, Juan and Don Jaime continue their conversation, and Don Jaime launches into his story.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1 JAIME: <i>Este, a mí la ley americana NUNCA</i>
 2 <i>me dobló la vista. O sea nunca le tuve su puro</i>
 3 <i>miedo. Me decía mira que esto y que l' otro,</i>
 4 <i>“Está bien, tú estás en tu derecho. Yo voy hacer</i>
 5 <i>el mío. Cometí un error, lo voy a pagar, nomás</i>
 6 <i>que allá en México.”</i></p> | <p>Well, to me, the American law{man} NEVER made me look down in fear. That is, they never made me really scared. He would tell me, look, this and that. {I would say} “OK, you’re within your rights. I am going to assert mine. I made a mistake, I’m going to pay, only over there in Mexico.”</p> |
| <p>7 JUAN: <i>Sí sí.</i></p> | <p>Yes, uh huh.</p> |
| <p>8 JAIME: <i>Dice--ya después me encontré con un</i>
 9 <i>emigrante de, en /?/, Detroit, Michigan. Y me</i>
 10 <i>agarró allá /?/ entonces había un muchacho qu’</i>
 11 <i>empezó a decirle que mira /?/ le digo, “Mira,</i>
 12 <i>dile, dile nada más que eres de México, y, este,</i>
 13 <i>no tienes que decirle cómo llegaron.”</i></p> | <p>He says—then after that I encountered an immigration officer of, in /?/, Detroit, Michigan. And he grabbed me over there /?/ so there was a young boy who began to tell him, hey look /?/ I told him, “Look, tell him, tell him nothing more than that you are from Mexico, and, well, you don’t have to tell him how you got here.”</p> |
| <p>14 JUAN: <i>Sí.</i></p> | <p>Yeah.</p> |
| <p>15 JAIME: <i>‘Tonces m’ empezó hablar el, el</i>
 16 <i>emigrante, “Sabes qué, me da pena con él.</i>
 17 <i>Apenas es un muchacho y siento feo que lo,</i>
 18 <i>este, que lo estás investigando así.” Dice, “Oye</i>
 19 <i>me gustas como pa’ emigrante,” y me rogó</i>
 20 <i>tanto que me quedara en, en Michigan para</i>
 21 <i>donde la frontera de de Canadá pero, “Pero yo,</i>
 22 <i>¿qué voy a hacer aquí? Todo está afuera y yo</i>
 23 <i>no sé hablar inglés.” Dice “No, tienes un</i>
 24 <i>sentido /?/.</i></p> | <p>So the immigration official began to speak with me, “You know what, {I told him}, I feel sorry for him {the young boy}. He is just a boy and I feel bad that, well, that you are investigating him this way.” He says, “Listen, I’d like you as an immigration official,” and he begged me so much to stay in, in Michigan for, at the Canadian border, but {I said} “But what am I going to do here? Everything is foreign and I don’t know how to speak English.” He says, “No, you have a feel /for it/.”</p> |
| <p>25 JUAN: <i>Sí.</i></p> | <p>Yeah.</p> |

- 26 JAIME: “Vete a la frontera. [Slight pause] y “Get yourself to the border [slight pause] and
 27 vas a—” “¿Y voy a denunciar a la gente?” le you’re going to—” “And I’m going to denounce
 28 digo. Dice, “Sí.” “/Pos/no-o-o!” [marked fall my people?” I say to him. He says, “Yes.” “Oh-
 29 rise intonation] *Al poquito ya me volví a venir h-h no!”* [marked fall rise intonation] After a
 30 *aquí, fui a traer a mi esposa, nacieron dos little while I returned here, I went to bring my*
 31 *niños.* [pause] *La--nos admitieron aquí en este wife, two children were born.. [pause]*
 32 *país por medio de esos dos niños, ya ‘tán The—they admitted us here in this country*
 33 *grandecitos, aquella es m’ hija, ella es mi because of those two children, now they are*
 34 *hermana y, y así.* grown, that one is my daughter, she is my sister
 and, and, that’s how it is.
- 35 JUAN: *Sí.* Yes.
- 36 JAIME: *De veras fue reduro.* Really it was very hard.
- 37 JUAN: *Es muy difícil al principio, ¿verdá’?* It’s very hard at the beginning, right?
- 38 JAIME: *Sí.* [pause] *Muy difícil.* Yes. [pause] Very hard.

In this brief excerpt, Don Jaime tells a story within a story: While telling Juan the story of their migration to the United States, he recounts the story of his capture, along with a younger male migrant, by the immigration authorities in Michigan. This capture occurred during the period in which he was a migrant without legal papers, after he had been a legal *bracero* (manual laborer recruited by a U.S. program which ended in 1964) and before he became legalized through the birth of his two youngest children in Chicago. In this story, he stands up to the immigration officer (referred to colloquially as *el emigrante*), saying that American lawmen NEVER caused him to *dobló la vista*, literally ‘look down at the ground,’ meaning in fear. I have described *rancheros* as particularly proud people with erect posture and direct eye gaze, so for them this colloquial phrase is particularly apt. To be strong (NOT afraid) is to maintain direct eye gaze, literally to “stand up to” another person.

In this story, Don Jaime not only stands up for himself in front of *el emigrante*, but he also stands up for the younger male who is captured with him, and who, possibly out of fear, begins to tell *el emigrante* everything. Don Jaime stops him, saying, all you need to say is that you are from Mexico, not how you got here. Don Jaime is aware of his rights under American law and points this out to the representative of this law who is arresting him: You are within your rights to arrest me; now I am going to assert my rights. Although this storytelling could be perceived as masculine “bragging” about toughness and strength in the face of authority, this particular performance is not unusually highlighted. That is, though fleeting, it is a performance in the sense that Don Jaime is aware of his attentive audience (Juan) and crafts his language in aesthetically pleasing and persuasive ways (Bauman 1977; Hymes 1975/1981; Tannen 1989). But it is not as highly performative as Don Jaime’s storytelling language is on other occasions. Masculine “bragging” within this network generally coincides with a more highlighted or intense verbal performance, often involving humor and coarse language.

How is this performance, then? In other words, how does it differ from Don Jaime’s ordinary conversational language? The primary device which Don Jaime utilizes to make this story performative is reported speech, or what Tannen more accurately calls

“constructed dialogue” (Tannen 1989). He quickly shifts back and forth between his own voice and that of *el emigrante* in the recounted episode, and by doing so he embellishes a simple narrative with artfulness, constructing a dramatic dialogue between himself and the immigration officer in which he is placed in a position to decide whether or not he would denounce his people by becoming an immigration official himself. As he shifts between these two voices, he sometimes includes and sometimes omits *digo* ‘I say’ and *dice* ‘he says’, but the speakers are clear to Juan, the listener, through marked changes in pitch level, pronominal reference (through verb endings in Spanish), and semantic context.

Displaying these various voices within his story allows Don Jaime to construct his own identity in contrast to the others. First, he contrasts himself with the boy, who is frightened and talking too much; in his recounting of this episode, Don Jaime calmly stops the boy in mid-sentence and then speaks on his behalf to the INS officer. Second, he contrasts himself with the INS officer, whom Don Jaime represents as trying to get him to switch allegiances. Here Don Jaime constructs himself as a self-assertive individual who is sophisticated enough to know his rights and insist on them in the face of authority, and as someone who is responsible and loyal to his people. Note here the construction of an identity that evidences **both** autonomy, i.e., standing out from one’s group, **and** affiliation. Since identity construction relies on the creation of salient contrasts with other identities, the constructed dialogue here is crucial to Don Jaime’s representation of himself through *franqueza*.

Below I extract the constructed dialogue from the story within the story told to Juan in Chicago to clarify this artfulness and identity construction (I include here only the English translation; the original Spanish is provided in the full story above, lines 1-38).

6.1. *Constructed dialogue within story*

- J (to Official): OK, you’re within your rights. I am going to assert mine. I made a mistake, I’m going to pay, only over there in Mexico. (Original Spanish lines 4-6)
- J (to Boy): Look, tell him, tell him nothing more than that you are from Mexico, and, well, you don’t have to tell him how you got here. (Original Spanish lines 12-13)
- J (to Official): You know what, {I told him}, I feel sorry for him {the young boy}. He is just a boy and I feel bad that, well, that you are investigating him this way. (Original Spanish lines 16-18)
- Official: Listen, I’d like you as an immigration official...(Original Spanish line 19)
- J: But what am I going to do here? Everything is foreign and I don’t know how to speak English. (Original Spanish lines 22-23)
- Official: No, you have a feel /for it/. Get yourself to the border [slight pause] and you’re going to - (Original Spanish on lines 23-27)
- J: And I’m going to denounce my people? (Original Spanish line 27)
- Official: Yes. (Original Spanish line 28)
- J: Oh-h-h no! {marked rise fall intonation} (Original Spanish line 28)

In line 28 (the last line above), Don Jaime enunciates */Pos/ no-o-o!* ‘Oh-h-h no!’ with a marked rise fall intonation pattern, marking this particular speech as especially performative. These words also serve as the resolution to the climax of the story-within-a-story: When urged by the immigration official to become an *emigrante* himself because he has “a feel” for the work, Don Jaime refuses so that he won’t have to denounce his own people.

Don Jaime’s own voice in the story clearly shows the self-assertive verbal style of *franqueza*, which constructs him as independent, strong, and in control in the face of authority. His first words to the official in lines 4-6

*Está bien, tú estás en tu derecho. Yo voy hacer el
mío. Cometí un error, lo voy a pagar, nomás
que allá en México.*

OK, you’re within your rights. I am going to
assert mine. I made a mistake, I’m going to pay,
only over there in Mexico.

are direct and unadorned, and they are all in the active voice. With their uniformly pronominal *tú* ‘you’ and *yo* ‘I’ subjects, they develop both a grammatical and a semantic parallelism that aligns the equally short independent clauses into a staccato-like rhythmic pattern, which signals performance. The first two lines parallel each other, one focusing on *tu* or “your” rights (the rights of the officer to arrest him), and the other focusing on *yo* or “my” rights under your law. The staccato-like rhythm is especially notable in the last three lines which begin with *Cometí un error* ‘I made a mistake’:

*Está bien, tú estás en tu derecho
Yo voy hacer el mío.
Cometí un error,
lo voy a pagar
nomás que allá en México*

OK, you’re within your rights.
I am going to assert mine.
I made a mistake,
I’m going to pay,
only over there in Mexico.

These poetic qualities serve to affirm Don Jaime’s authoritative stance. Moreover, he uses *tú* with the official, rather than the more self-humbling and respectful *usted*, and in his account the official accepts Don Jaime’s claim of equality between them with his own use of *tú* (here in second person singular Spanish verb endings). Thus, their words immediately construct an egalitarian relationship between the two men, even though one is an immigration official arresting the other, a migrant without legal papers. In Don Jaime’s account, his self-assertive claim to rights is not contested; in fact, it is admired so that the official begs him to consider becoming an INS official himself. These two are the two equals; the younger man, whom Don Jaime also addresses with *tú* (line 10), here indexing that the hearer is of lower status due to his age, is under the protection of Don Jaime.

What is important in this story is not its facticity, although it may well be factual. Of more interest here is the frank verbal style used in the story and its construction of *ranchero* identity. Don Jaime recounts that he did not *dobló la vista* before the immigration official, but instead addressed him directly, with a bald on record verbal style. This is the rhetoric of the self-made man, an independent individualist whom nobody orders around. He is, after all, in a foreign country to work and thus to improve the social and economic well-being of himself and his family, and, in his view, deserves

respect for doing this.

7. Conclusion

The analyses of the instances of discourse presented here should make clear how *franqueza* works to construct *ranchero* identity. The bald on record verbal style of *franqueza* indexes an egalitarian, individualist ideology, and it is a predominant verbal style among the *rancheros* I have known for over ten years now. It is perhaps the most salient characteristic of this group, creating a sense of personhood that is straightforward, candid, and honest on the one hand, and self-assertive, tough, and proud on the other. Qualities of sincerity and honesty are thought to support an egalitarian and stable social order, while self-assertiveness protects that order and assures one's (family's) own progress.

While evoking all these qualities of personhood, this verbal style often indirectly indexes masculinity. Women, though, also use *franqueza* and thus also frequently, in specific contexts, construct themselves as tough and independent individuals. Even children use this style of speaking. Thus it is an ideology that is generally shared throughout the community and so underlies cultural, not just individual, practices, although some individuals are known to be *mas franco/a* 'more frank' than others. Yet virtually everyone participates in and generates cultural and linguistic practices that evidence self-assertion and a belief in their own abilities to progress through hard work and effort.

Such examples of a belief in and commitment toward upward mobility through hard work, independence, and interdependence abound in these families, as does discourse that uses such constructs to explicitly distinguish themselves from other groups of Mexicans, primarily indigenous Indians, who are perceived as hard working, but not as valuing of private property nor upward mobility. In verbal style, they also distinguish themselves from "cityfied" people, who, some say, don't really work because they don't work with their hands on their own land. That is, they don't create things, and their own material well being, with their own hands and effort. *Rancheros*, in contrast, are proud of doing and making things themselves, including their own houses and, for some, businesses; they take raw land and other resources, and with their own labor convert them into something profitable that benefits themselves and their families. Migrating to Chicago, then, can be seen as one important manifestation of an ideology that is fundamental to their identities and permeates their discourse. As Don Jaime once said to me, referring to Chicago, *Es una herencia* 'It's an inheritance' for his children, giving them a base from which to *mejorar* 'improve themselves'.

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