

## **JUNK SPANISH, COVERT RACISM, AND THE (LEAKY) BOUNDARY BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPHERES**

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To attend to "constructing languages" and "constructing publics" implicates two directions of thought. A constructionist perspective problematizes and de-naturalizes the idea of "language," and suggests how the fragile textuality of our talk is the result as much of ideological processes as of neurobiological constraints. To consider the construction of "publics" draws linguistic anthropology in new directions. While the idea that the arenas in which opinions are formed and decisions are made are the products of social work is not new (cf. Myers and Brenneis 1984), "publics" suggests a particular kind of arena, Habermas's ([1962] 1991) "public sphere, ... a category of bourgeois society." The concept of "public sphere" exposes a new arena for our attention, distinct from the interactional field of the market or the kin group, where people who live in states speak "as citizens," with reference to public affairs, yet not as agents of the state. Habermas of course argued that the bourgeois public sphere flourished only ephemerally before it was captured by the culture industry with its capacity to manufacture inauthentic "public opinion." Habermas has been much criticized for his nostalgic commitment to the freedom and rationality of the bourgeois public sphere, as well as his neglect of the way in which it functioned as much to exclude as to include (cf. papers in Calhoun (ed.) 1992; and Robbins (ed.) 1993). The concept of "public" is, however, productive precisely because it sketches in the broad outlines of an important arena for the reproduction of exclusions in contemporary societies.

I do not use the term "public" here, however, as a category of sociohistorical theory in the way that Habermas attempts. Instead, I take "public" and "private" to designate "folk categories," or, perhaps better, "ideologies," for certain speakers of American English. (These ideological complexes are obviously closely related to the theoretical ones proposed by Habermas, and, as he points out, exhibit historical continuities going back at least to Roman times). The English words are polysemous, referring to contexts ("publicity," "public figure," "in public," "go public"), and to social entities (broad ones, as in "public opinion," or more narrowly defined groups, such as "the public" of an actor or singer). This paper aims to suggest that what is most important about the public/private distinction in the United States today is not the zones of life clearly included within each category, but the play of meaning along the ambiguous boundary between them, especially between kinds of talk defined as "public" and those defined as private." The sense of boundary between these "spheres" involves several dimensions: Of the social spaces where talk occurs, of the topics and themes which it engages, of speakers, of styles and genres. All of these are sites for contestation about how talk may "count" and how speakers

may be held responsible for it.<sup>1</sup> I will be concerned here with how a particular ideology about appropriate styles for "public" talk facilitates the persistence in this sphere of "elite racist discourse" (van Dijk 1993), and thereby constructs the publics for such discourse as "white," excluding people of color as audiences and participants. I discuss the case of what I call "Junk Spanish", a way that Anglos in the United States can use light talk and joking to reproduce the subordinate identity of Mexican-Americans. Junk Spanish, and elite racist discourse in general, seems to oscillate along the boundary between "public" and "private" talk, making the public reproduction of racism possible even where racist discourse is supposedly excluded from public discussion. Junk Spanish is, of course, only one of a whole complex of discourses that have been recognized as covertly "coded" as racist (for instance, talk by white politicians about "teenage welfare mothers" or "gangbangers" does not conjure up an image of misbehaving white children, in spite of the fact that whites constitute a high percentage of such groups). Junk Spanish is, however, relatively easy to identify and "decode," facilitating our exploration of the leaky boundary between racist joking construed as "private" and "serious public discussion."

Two dimensions of language ideology facilitate this persistence of a racist discourse in public talk. The first is a set of tensions about interest, between a "presumption of innocence" for public discourse - that talk offered up as serious public discussion will be presumed to be addressed to the general good in an unbiased way - and a "presumption of interest" - that such talk will be biased and interested in favor of speakers or those they represent. The second is a set of tensions about style that dates back to the earliest period of the American republic. Cmiel (1990) has traced the history in the United States of what he calls the "middling style": The idea that a speaker in a democracy will eschew the high language of gentility appropriate to monarchies and strike a more popular tone, that admits the possibility of plain speaking including slang and colloquialisms. The preference for the middling style blurs the boundary between serious public discussion and light private talk, such that elements of the latter, in this case Junk Spanish slang, may leak into public usage. Once such slang is used "in public" it gains access to the contest over innocence and interest, and can make claims to the former quality. At the same time, this light talk is protected by conventions of privacy, especially those of solidarity among interlocutors and the idea that private talk should not be taken too seriously. These two ideological complexes protect racist (and sexist) discourse, and make possible its continued reproduction, even where convention proscribes it. By examining the ways in which the racist register of Junk Spanish can leak across the public-private boundary, we may perhaps make progress in understanding how this reproduction occurs, and thereby develop strategies for intervention.

Michael Warner (1990) pointed out that conventions of "public" speech that formed at the time of the foundation of the American republic required that those engaging in it should not be, "byass'd by any private or partial View, prejudicial to

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Fraser (1990) identified this boundary as a particularly interesting phenomenon.

your Country's Service" (Warner 1990: 41).<sup>2</sup> It is this convention that precipitates the contest between innocence and interest. Those making public representations make a claim of innocence, the absence of bias; those opposing them make a claim that the representation is interested. However, ideas about what sort of talk, and what sort of speaker, is likely to be "interested" are themselves contestable. It is very easy to attack as "interested" a pronouncement on economic policy by the head of an investment bank, or a defense of Social Security by the president of the American Association of Retired Persons. But in the case of racist discourse the contest is heavily weighted, at least for white speakers, in the direction of a presumption of innocence. One of the most important reasons for this is that the fact that "whites" are a "race" is simply invisible to most members of this group, who take themselves to have no "race" and take their own positions to be universal (cf. Morrison 1992).<sup>3</sup> Thus, attacks on the speech of African-American or Latino leaders as racially "interested" are a common feature of public discourse in the United States, but the idea that Felix Rohatyn or Ellen Goodman might be speaking for the interests of "whiteness" is considered by most people to be a very strange notion indeed (one that could be advanced only out of a "racial" bias by a person of color). Not only is "whiteness" universalized and invisible, the persistence of racism as an ideology is denied. Most white people believe that "racists" are found only among marginalized white supremacist groups who are behind the times, inadequately educated and socialized. Thus to accuse a speaker of racism is a deep insult that evokes a whole range of highly undesirable qualities.

Van Dijk (1993) takes the denial of racism to be a key component of racist discourse, one that protects the positive self-image of the racist and in turn the positive image of whites more generally, and second, permits racist discourse and its negative and exclusionary functioning to proceed. I believe, however, that van Dijk's account is not complete, in that it misses the fundamental fact that denials of racism become relevant only within the terms of the contest over innocence and interest. This explains an important element of racist rhetoric that van Dijk himself has identified: That people making racist representations in public so often claim that they are being "fair." The idea of "fairness" acquires coherence only within the context where a claim of lack of bias is relevant. For instance, consider the rhetoric in defense of California's Proposition 187 and similar legislation now being proposed elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> The *Los Angeles Times* (Nov. 19, 1994, quoted in García 1994: 13)

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<sup>2</sup> Yet as Warner pointed out, these "unbiased" spokesmen could not be imagined as other than white male property owners. By this means, the point of view of this group was made universal, unmarked, its bias invisible. Thus the cultural construction of the public sphere in the United States functioned from its beginning as a powerful device for masking and mystifying racism and sexism.

<sup>3</sup> Lest there be any confusion here, my position is that "race" is not a biological category, but is a category available for the purposes of social exclusion that is essentially empty, available to be filled with whatever semiotic elements are most appropriate to a particular epoch (Goldberg 1993).

<sup>4</sup> I am indebted here to the work of Rogelio García (1994). Proposition 187, which passed overwhelmingly in the November 1994 election in California, denies access to public education to illegal immigrants and to their children (even where these children are U.S. citizens), and also denies them access to many other social benefits that are normally universally available, including non-

quotes a woman who supports the proposition, who says, "I work full time for benefits for my family, and I don't feel it is fair for illegals to be coming in and getting health care free." The *Arizona Daily Star* has received a number of letters from legal immigrants (from Canada and Western Europe) who argue that "fairness" requires that benefits be available only to those who follow the demanding road of legal immigration. Precisely the same rhetoric is used by opponents of such legislation: In a letter to the *Arizona Daily Star* (December 26, 1994), Xavier Enriquez says, "Opponents of Proposition 187 do not desire anything to be 'free,' but rather fair": Previous generations of immigrants contributed to the U.S. economy and benefitted from public education, and this should not now be denied to a new generation of hard-working immigrants. In addition to the "fairness" argument, contributors to the debate invoke market "rationality," which makes a strong claim of disinterestedness. For instance, the *Los Angeles Times* (November 15, 1994, cited in García 1994: 12) quotes a supporter of 187 who says, "We're exporting jobs and importing poverty. And unless something is done, this state has nothing to face but fiscal havoc." *USA Today* (November 8, 1994, cited in García 1994: 14) cites a "financial counselor" who says, "Everyone would like to provide all services to all people, but we just can't afford it." Again, opponents of the proposition also use market arguments, trying to quantify the contribution of illegal immigrants in the form of taxes paid, jobs created, and prices of the products of their cheap labor kept low for consumers.

For many Americans the contest about innocence and interest is relevant only when talk is "public": When a person speaks "in public" (as in a letter to the editor or in a public meeting), or when a person speaks as a "citizen" about topics held to be appropriate to "public opinion," even if the talk is conducted within the domestic or intimate sphere. For instance, a speaker telling a racist joke at a family gathering might be judged by her relatives to have poor judgement, or bad character, but she would not be thought of as "advancing an interest," of saying something that might "count" in the formation of opinion.<sup>5</sup> Here, however, we enter a slippery realm of the boundary between "spheres," where the social spaces in which speech occurs, topics and themes for discussion, kinds of persons who are speaking, and styles and genres interact in complex ways.

Consider an interesting case of the ambiguity of a social space, the classroom. On the one hand, it is argued that students and their teachers must be free to voice

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emergency medical care. Most analysts of the rhetoric in support of the proposition find that it is clearly racist, including nearly all the well-known tropes of elite racist discourse directed at a vision of an "illegal immigrant" who is a person of color, Asian or Latin American. Furthermore, a good deal of the money backing 187 and similar legislation now being proposed in other states comes from organizations with well-known racist agendas. García presents in evidence the following telling quote, elicited by *USA Today* from Don Barrington, a Tucson retiree who is leading the charge for 187-style legislation in Arizona. Barrington says, "And it's not a racial issue. My friends have never heard a racist word out of me. I just don't like wetbacks" (*USA Today* 11/18/94, cited in García 1994: 11). García argues that it is no accident that the Proposition in California bears the number "187": This is police and highway patrol code for "murder" and the number is widely known to the citizenry because the code is used on TV cop shows to give an "insider" ambience.

<sup>5</sup> Scholars, of course, recognize such "private" talk as a very important site for the reproduction of racism.

frank opinions, in the interests of seeking the truth. While many teachers try to move students toward a preference for "objective" grounds for opinions (thereby inculcating the conventions of "public speech"), personal experience is also admitted (as part of a general privileging of individuality that is beyond the scope of the present discussion), thereby eroding the proscription against private bias. This suggests that classroom discussion is not precisely "public." On the other hand, it is argued (probably out of precisely the same ideology that privileges personal experience), that students as individuals have the right to be protected against epithets that may threaten their pride and identity. This drive toward protection against the damage of conflict suggests that the classroom is somehow "public," that what is said there "counts" in a way that a slur shouted across a street would not.<sup>6</sup> Some sites are less seriously contested. Especially in the worlds of business and commerce, there are occasions defined as "off the record" or "backstage" when sexist and racist talk are actually highly conventionalized. Thus a business leader or politician may be known to possess a large repertoire of grossly racist and sexist jokes, deployed when socializing among cronies in the appropriate interstices of business discussion, yet be celebrated for progressive views on diversity advanced in talk framed as "public." These "backstage" zones are increasingly entering the contested boundary realm, as the courts carve out the rights of employees to an environment that is not threatening or demeaning on grounds of race or gender, but there is, of course, substantial backlash against this enlargement of what is "public."<sup>7</sup> Many people continue to recognize a "backstage," an uncontested private zone. When interlocutors are speaking within this zone, it is not considered appropriate to censure their talk, even when it is possible to construe it as racist and sexist, even as grossly so. To censure breaks a contract of intimacy and solidarity, and exposes the censurer as in turn censurable, as a pettifogging killjoy.<sup>8</sup>

Topic and theme also influences judgements as to whether speech is

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<sup>6</sup> On at least one occasion, a slur shouted out a window was counted as "public" and accountable, because the window was in a dormitory at the University of Pennsylvania. This is the famous case from 1992, of the student who shouted "Shut up, you water buffalos" at a group of African-American women whom he judged to be making too much noise late at night. The student, brought up before a disciplinary panel for making a racist slur, claimed that he had learned the "water buffalo" insult in Israel and did not believe that it had any racist content.

<sup>7</sup> A case in point occurred as I was preparing the revision of this paper. A staff member from the Affirmative Action Office of the University of Arizona came to brief members of my department on sexual harassment policy. She pointed out that it was official university policy that sexually offensive material could not be exhibited on university property. This prohibition was issued when an outside visitor complained to the president of the university about a "Sexual Harassment Consent Form" poster that was taped to a file cabinet in the Department of Physics in an area that would probably have been conventionally defined as "backstage." Her presentation of this university policy met with outrage from several members of the faculty, who realized that it applied to what they had hitherto considered to be their own "backstage," the "personal and private" dimension, of their offices and labs, like nude postcards taped to their whiteboards or pornographic coffee cups half-hidden in their desk clutter.

<sup>8</sup> Hence, the classic lightbulb joke:

Q: "How many feminists does it take to screw in a light bulb?"

A: "That's not funny."

somehow aimed at the formation of opinion. For instance, Nancy Fraser (1990) pointed out an interesting case of a more-or-less successful struggle to move a topic into the public sphere. Feminist discourse extracted what is now called "domestic" violence from the realms of non-momentous gossip and boasting into a zone of "serious public discussion." This required considerable work in assimilating the question of "beating your wife," a matter that might reflect on judgement or character, to the terms of talk about "public issues." It required the creation of a public that accepted that a woman at the domestic site was not just Joe's long-suffering wife, but a "citizen" whose treatment could be considered within the zone of legal "rights." It required the widespread recognition that interactions within the family were not always and everywhere "personal", but could constitute a site where larger political structures, specifically those of a gender hierarchy that compromised an ideal of individual rights, were produced and reproduced. However, domestic violence remains ambiguous; neighbors who would not hesitate to call the police if they saw a stranger breaking into Joe's house may still feel that they are "poking their noses into other people's business" if they make a call when they overhear the sounds of Joe smacking his wife around, and in many communities police are still reluctant to make arrests in such cases.

Persona or reputation of the speaker is an important factor along the public/private boundary.<sup>9</sup> Certain persons are defined as "public figures" (a formal category in libel law); the term "role model" is also gaining currency, implying that certain people are influential and accountable simply by virtue of reputation. Talk by such a personage may become the object of censure as an accountable "public" utterance even if it is uttered backstage. Exemplary are the recent cases of backstage remarks involving Marge Schott, owner of the Cincinnati Reds baseball team, and Jesse Jackson, a prominent African-American politician.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, there exist other kinds of persons who are judged as absolutely without influence, who can utter racist statements without censure in a context that is unambiguously "public." For example, in a feature on "Sixty Minutes" during the 1992 presidential campaign, Mike Wallace interviewed an elderly, obviously working-class, white man in a bar, asking him his opinion on what the most important issues were facing the country. The man, obviously conscious of constraints on public discourse, said something like, "Well, I probably shouldn't say what I really think." Wallace reassured him that his opinions were valuable. The old man then said, "Well, I think the biggest problem is that the colored people are just trying to get too much." Wallace's facial expression made it clear (at least to some viewers) that he was not

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<sup>9</sup> Warner (1990: 38) notes that in the 18th century public discourse was taken to be "impersonal by denition;" public discourse was impersonal "both as a trait of its medium and as a norm for its subjects." (Ibid.) Yet this "impersonality" apparently can become a property of "persons." Fraser suggests that public spheres do not in fact exhibit pure impersonal rationality, in spite of this "bourgeois" conception; instead, they are very importantly "arenas for the formation and enactment of social identities ... construct[ed] and express[ed] ... through idiom and style" (Fraser 1990: 68).

<sup>10</sup> Schott apparently used rough racist language like "nigger" with great frequency. Jackson's problems involved his reference to New York City as "Hymietown." In these cases, the colorful and slangy language was of course provocative, but as the following example shows, the "public" nature of these persons was probably the main reason the language was censurable.

pleased with this remark, but he thanked the man politely for participating. The interview was aired nationally with absolutely no public reaction. The notion that a person who is an obvious nonentity should hold such views, even in his role as a citizen asked for his opinion on national television, was unsurprising and undiscussed. This case is disturbing not only because there was no challenge to this obvious racism, but precisely because the old man was not "taken seriously." The incident makes clear the difficulty of making any vernacular opinion into "public" opinion.

A fourth very important zone of ambivalence at the boundary between "public" and "private" talk involves style. The contest over innocence and interest in the "public" zone requires that stylistic choices here index rationality over emotional commitment, the latter being taken as intrinsically more "interested" (Kochman 1984). Cmiel (1990) has traced major changes in the relationship between public talk and stylistic choice. "Neoclassical notions of discourse," writes Cmiel, "assumed that the *homo rhetor* was a gentleman, that his ethos, or character, would guide his every act and word. His refined taste, his avoidance of vulgar speech, was essentially tied to his sense of self, that *humanitas* presumed to commit him to the public good" (Cmiel 1990: 14). Several trends worked during the 19th century to undermine this association. First, technical and professional languages achieved equal footing with the refined literary language of gentility. Second, within the democracy basic skills of "civil speech" spread widely, and ideas of "refinement" and "vulgarity" came to refer to styles, and not to social groups. Finally, the democratic masses supplanted the small "rational elite" as the most important audience for public discourse, requiring the incorporation of popular styles of discourse. The resulting triumph of what Cmiel calls the "middling style," defined by informality (including regional and colloquial language and slang), calculated bluntness (including both "plain speaking" and deliberate insult), and inflated speech (including bombast, jargon, and euphemism) is obvious in American public speech today. Among the dominant classes of American English speakers, it is appropriate to inject a light note even into the most serious expression of public opinion. Jokes are a highly institutionalized component of public speaking, and even written opinion, as by newspaper columnists, may be punctuated by light elements including slang, with only a few expressions still widely considered off-limits in the mass media. Some political columnists, like Mike Royko and Molly Ivins, have built a reputation for their command of a light style, and the slang and regionalisms that punctuate their writing construct their opinions as especially honest and authentic. Public figures thought to be of patrician origin are especially constrained to salt their discourse with vernacular jests; George Bush's efforts to achieve a rhetorical "common touch" during his years as vice president and president became something of a national joke.<sup>11</sup> Yet style presents ambiguities similar to those posed by the classification of social spaces, topics, and persons; style and sphere are intricately related. Some

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<sup>11</sup> Cramer (1991) suggests that the presentation of a public front with no trace of snobbery was a special obsession of Bush's parents, who tried to distinguish themselves from what they considered to be untoward aristocratic pretensions of some members of their social universe. Thus Bush's preppy light style was not a mask assumed only when he tried to get into Texas politics, but dated back to his earliest upbringing.

forms of vernacular expression are proscribed in "serious public discussion" (the worst racist and sexist epithets fall into that category).<sup>12</sup> Other forms, however, are acceptable, and again, there is a contested zone, rendered especially complex by the efforts of stigmatized groups to reclaim pejorative labels (like "black" and, more recently, "Mexican").

To the degree that a particular stretch of talk is keyed as "light," I believe that it may be relatively resistant to proscription. This resistance derives from cultural models that associate style, person, and space in simplistic default configurations. Light talk and joking are prototypically private, associated with the spaces of intimacy, and they are prototypically vernacular, associated with persons of a type whose talk would be unlikely to have public significance. Thus their use "in public" constitutes a sort of metaphorical code switch, permitting "privacy" to be evoked within a larger public context. In "private" spheres the contest of innocence and interest is not in play, or at least it is less likely to be in play than in the "public" sphere. Indeed, the assumption of a key of "lightness" constructs a context of intimacy, and to reject the content of such talk is thereby to reject the intimacy itself. Censurers of offensive talk in the prototypical light style/private space/intimate relationship context must attack, not interest, but character or judgement, a much "heavier" threat to the face of the speaker. They run the risk of being accused of violating the contracts of intimacy that hold "in private," of being overly precious and correct, of "not having a sense of humor." A censorer will be accused of "Political Correctness": A position that is held to deprive speakers of their legitimate right to use light talk and humor. When light talk appears as a code switch "in public," this complex of rights seems to come with it. Those who censure the content of public light talk, who accuse it of unfair "interest," as in accusations of racism and sexism, are vulnerable not only to the above accusations, but to additional ones: They may be accused of elitism, of undemocratically rejecting plain everyday language and, in turn, the "common sense" that has been held to reside in it since the days of Thomas Paine.

I devote the remainder of this paper to the use within the public sphere of a "light" register of American English that I have called "Junk Spanish." I have shown that Junk Spanish is regulated through a powerfully racist semiotic. Spanish loan elements in this register are consistently pejorated and pejorating, which can be shown to derive, by metonym, from a racist view of Spanish speakers (and to continually reproduce that opinion). There are two lines of evidence for racism in Junk Spanish. One is that in order to "get the joke" of Junk Spanish expressions, one must have access to negative stereotypes of "Mexicans." The second is the fact that Junk Spanish is often accompanied by racist visual imagery of stereotypical "Mexicans" (Hill 1993a, 1993b). For instance, a farewell card with the caption "Adios" may be accompanied by a picture of a "Mexican" asleep under an enormous sombrero (the equivalent, in the representation of Mexican-Americans, of a picture

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<sup>12</sup> Apparently conventions against gross racist and sexist talk are being eroded on so-called "talk radio," where members of the public phone in to express their opinions. While there seems to be a general agreement in the mainstream press that talk radio is an increasingly important forum for public opinion (national leaders including candidates for the presidency have appeared on these shows), I don't listen to it and will have nothing to say about it here. Obviously linguistic anthropologists should be attending to it.



of a black man with an ear-to-ear grin, rolling eyes, and a huge slice of watermelon). I have collected many greeting cards and other paraphernalia with this sort of imagery, which would invite lawsuits if it were to appear on, say, a corporate logo or in a political cartoon in a newspaper.<sup>13</sup> The position that I am trying to develop here suggests that images of this type on greeting cards, for instance, are acceptable because they are "private," a matter between intimates. Yet the language of Junk Spanish, separated from these kinds of racist images, is permissible and even welcome in public discourse, and in fact is used by people who are universally credited with "progressive" opinions on racism and sexism.

I will briefly summarize what Junk Spanish is (and what it is not).<sup>14</sup> Junk Spanish is a set of strategies for incorporating Spanish loan words into English in order to produce a jocular or pejorative key. Three major strategies govern this borrowing. The first is the semantic pejoration of Spanish expressions, by which they are stripped of elevated, serious, or even neutral meanings in the source language, retaining only the "lower" end of their range of connotations (and perhaps even adding new lowering). For instance, the polite and neutral Spanish farewell, "Adios," has meanings in Junk Spanish ranging from a marking of laid-back, easy-going, Southwestern warmth to the strong suggestion that the target is being insulted, "kissed off." An excellent example (which also exemplifies Chicano awareness of these usages) is a cartoon in the series *La Cucaracha* by Lalo Alcaez, published in the *Tucson Comic News* (December 1994; cited in García 1994) shortly after the passage of Proposition 187. The cartoon showed an Anglo man holding a 187 flag and calling, "Hooray, we saved our state." Next to him is an Anglo woman jumping up and down in hysterical post-election exuberance, shouting "Adios, Pedro!" (The joke is that the supposedly solid ground on which the two are standing turns out to be a mighty fist labelled "Latino Activism"). The second strategy involves the recruitment of Spanish morphological material in order to make English words humorous or pejorative. For instance, in a Joe Bob Briggs movie review (1987), we find the expression "mistake-o numero uno." The third strategy produces ludicrous and exaggerated mispronunciations of Spanish loan material. For instance, a greeting card shows the rear ends of a row of undulating Hawaiian dancers

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<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, one of the anthropology graduate students (whose name won't be used here so she won't lose her job) recently found a particularly egregious case of the use of the image of a "Mexican" asleep under his sombrero while leaning against a cactus, on the Christmas gift wrap of a local chain of kitchenware shops, "Table Talk." The image was part of a "Southwest collage" that included the "sleeping Mexican" image, a howling coyote wearing a bandana, and a striped snake wearing a cowboy hat. A Mexican-American student complained to the manager of a branch of the chain in a major Tucson shopping mall and was told the paper would be withdrawn, but when I checked back at this branch just before Christmas 1994, not only was this gift wrap still available, but large prewrapped packages using it were stacked in the aisles of the store.

<sup>14</sup> What it is NOT is "Spanglish" or "Caló" or "Border Spanish." I take "Spanglish" to be a practice where the target language is Spanish, but a Spanish that is wide open to English loans, often treated in a jocular way. However, from what I know about "Spanglish," it is a much richer and more wide-open set of practices than Junk Spanish, which is, when all is said and done, a narrow, constipated little register of insults that doesn't really offer much potential for play or originality. This is in sharp contrast to the extravagant anglicisms of Cholos, or the rich play with the two languages found in Chicano authors or performers like Guillermo Gómez Peña.

dressed in grass skirts. Opened, the card reads, "Grassy-ass."<sup>15</sup> All of these strategies directly index that the utterance in which they are found should be taken to be humorous, and that the person who produced them has that valued quality, "a sense of humor."<sup>16</sup> However, in order to achieve their humorous effect, it is clear that a second, indirect indexicality is required, which reproduces an image of Spanish, and, in turn, of its speakers, as objects of derision.<sup>17</sup> Most Spanish speakers with whom I have discussed these issues concur, and in fact report that they are acutely aware of Junk Spanish and find it irritating and offensive.

Junk Spanish is very widely used "in public" (on television programs, in films, and in magazines and newspapers). Because of the ambiguities of "social space" discussed above, I give here only examples of the use of Junk Spanish in what is, very explicitly, "public discussion": The realm of political talk intended to help form public opinion. One notable history involves the use of the phrase "Hasta la vista, baby." This tag exemplifies the strategy of pejoration. In Spanish, "Hasta la vista" is a rather formal mode of leave-taking, that expresses a sincere hope to meet again. The pejorated line, taken from Junk Spanish by an alert team of screenwriters, was placed on the lips of Arnold Schwarzenegger in his role as the Terminator in the film *Terminator II: Judgement Day*.<sup>18</sup> It was then exported into public political talk by Schwarzenegger in another role, as a Republican celebrity who appeared alongside George Bush in his second campaign for the presidency. From the New Hampshire primary on, Schwarzenegger appeared regularly as a Bush supporter, and his most crowd-pleasing line, uttered at the end of an attack on the current leading Bush opponent, was, of course, "Hasta la vista, baby." The line next appeared in the Texas senatorial campaign held during the winter of 1992-93 to fill the seat left vacant by the appointment of Lloyd Benson as Secretary of the Treasury. While both candidates used Schwarzenegger's tag, the Democratic aspirant, Robert Krueger, made an especially memorable picture, appearing in television ads dressed in a sort of Zorro suit, with black cape and hat, uttering the famous line. It was very important for Krueger to suggest that he had a "common touch," because it was well-known that he was in everyday life a college professor of English, specializing in Shakespeare, and, thereby, a snob and a sissy until proven otherwise. Interestingly, the line backfired; Krueger was apparently considered too much of a wimp to dare to use this famous "tough guy" tag. Increasingly, he became a figure of fun (the commercials were even held up to ridicule on national television), and lost the election by a substantial margin to Kay Bailey Hutchinson.

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<sup>15</sup> I owe this example to Barbara Babcock, who received the card in thanks for some kindness.

<sup>16</sup> Astonishingly, many Anglos believe that they can produce expressions of this type because they have been exposed to the Spanish language (this is true even of some quite sophisticated informants). Thus, in addition to directly indexing a speaker's sense of humor, such utterances may index that a speaker has some education and cosmopolitanism (but carries it lightly).

<sup>17</sup> I take the concepts of "direct" and "indirect" indexicality from Ochs (1990).

<sup>18</sup> Schwarzenegger is taught the "Hasta la vista, baby" tag as part of a larger repertoire of insults by John Connor, the tough little Los Angeles kid who is under the protection of the Terminator.

We must also consider the possibility that the large Hispanic population in Texas, a key component of the Democratic electorate there, was offended by these commercials and declined to support Krueger.

A second example that exemplifies the strategy of pejoration was reported in the *Tucson Weekly* (December 8, 1994; cited in García 1994: 11). The organizer of an incipient effort to develop Proposition 187-style legislation in Arizona reported to the *Weekly* that he had had buttons and t-shirts printed up for sale to support his campaign. These items bore the legend, "If you're an illegal, head south, Amigo." This usage obviously invokes the lower reaches of a semiotic range for "amigo" in Junk Spanish that extends from mere jocularity to this case, where "amigo" obviously means anything but "friend." The legend attempts to differentiate "illegals" who should "head south" from legal immigrants and citizens of Latin American background. This distinction is, however, completely undone by the fact that in order to "get" the humor of the legend, audiences must have access to a general negative image of Spanish and its speakers that includes no such subtle discriminations.

Junk Spanish constructions using Spanish inflectional and derivational elements such as *-o*, *el ...-o*, and *-ista* frequently appear in public discourse. In an example heard on the McNeill-Lehrer News Hour in April 1993, a spokesman for President Clinton stated that the then-current draft of the administration's health-care reform plan was "not an *el cheapo*." This usage, of course, requires access to an image of extreme trashy cheapness associated with Spanish. David Fitzsimmons, the political cartoonist for the *Arizona Daily Star* (who is regularly attacked by conservatives as biased toward the left), produced a cartoon attacking Ross Perot, showing him holding a sign that said, in part, that he was running for "el presidente." The image of Perot thus constructed was, of course, one of a tinhorn dictator, dripping with undeserved gilt medals, an image derived from pejorative stereotypes of Latin American public officials. The liberal newspaper columnist Molly Ivins is a frequent user of Junk Spanish elements, which are a part of the construction of her persona as a Texan. All the cases below are from Ivins columns printed in the *Arizona Daily Star* during 1993. In a column on the Canadian elections, Ivins said, "The chief difference between Campbell and Chretien is that Campbell thinks the Numero Uno priority is to reduce the deficit, while Chretien wants to reduce the deficit without cutting the hell out of the national safety net." In a column on health care, Ivins wrote, "...one way to cut a little closer to the heart of the matter is to raise two pertinent questions. One is: What should we be allowed to die of these days? And numero two-o: What is actually going to affect the behavior of individual patients and individual doctors in consultation?" In a column on Kansas senator Bob Dole, Ivins opened as follows, "With the Clintonistas on a peppy schedule of at least two foreign policy crises a week..."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Don Brenneis suggested that Ivins might have borrowed her Junk Spanish from her partner in crime on the Dallas Times-Herald in the early 1980's, Joe Bob Briggs. Joe Bob Briggs was especially well known for his reviews of outrageous grade-B drive-in movies, in which he commented on the number of severed limbs, the size and number of exposed breasts, the amount of blood, the disgustingness of the monsters, the sound of the chain saws, and the like. He wrote these reviews in a "redneck" voice, and Junk Spanish was an important component of this. Joe Bob eventually lost his job due to public objections to these reviews, which were considered to be especially demeaning and insulting to women. His defenders argued that Joe Bob was an especially pungent satirist, and

A third type of selection from a Junk Spanish repertoire was used by CBS anchorman Dan Rather, on election night, November 1992. Discussing the tight race in Texas, Rather elucidated for his listeners what was at stake as follows: "Texas is the Big Taco...If Bush doesn't take [certain Texas counties] there is No Way José he can make it." Here, the expression "big taco," which endows Rather's speech with "involvement" and authenticity, comes from a family of borrowings of Spanish food terms like "the big enchilada," and "the whole enchilada" that constitute exaggeration and emphasis by substituting for English elements like "thing" or "one." By adding the Spanish name José to "No way," this everyday English negative is endowed with special vernacular pungency. Here, the indirect indexicality that is prominent is of course that Spanish is a particularly "vernacular" language appropriate to a slangy style.

Readers might object that English speakers can use other languages in exactly these ways. This is, of course, partly true. For instance, Japanese *Sayonara* can be used in a sense that is almost exactly like Spanish *adios*. However, other European languages cannot easily be substituted in these kinds of expressions. I invite the reader to try out an English epithet like "sucker" in combination with leave-taking expressions from familiar languages. German, like Japanese the language of a former enemy power, almost works: *"Auf wiedersehen, sucker."* Taking up more recent international enmities, I can imagine the hero of a colorful spy novel dispatching a member of the KGB with the wise-crack *"Do svidaniya, sucker,"* although I don't think this expression is popularly available in the way that *"Adios, sucker"* is. French and Italian really do not work, in spite of the familiarity of the expressions - *"Ciao, sucker,"* *"Au revoir, sucker"* (well, perhaps in some future thriller constructed around the recent Haitian intervention, a villainous attaché might be knocked off to this sound effect by a heroic American agent). In summary, such usages seem to require access to contempt or enmity which is not traceable, in the case of Spanish, to any political threat, real or perceived, since 1898! Similar experiments can be conducted with lexical equivalents of the other expressions cited above, and I predict even less success.

All these are cases where Junk Spanish is part of a code switch into a light register, in which the speaker is represented as a person with a sense of humor and the common touch, a truly egalitarian American who doesn't have fancy pretensions. This characteristic conceit of the "middling style" requires a metaphorical code switch into the "private" social space, where people are thought to be at their most "authentic." Thus Junk Spanish can inject authenticity and "common sense" into public discourse, which might otherwise be "too serious." Such talk blurs the boundaries between public and private discourse. It is fairly easy analytically to show that Junk Spanish is driven by a racist semiotic, and that it functions to reproduce negative views of Spanish-speaking people. Yet Junk Spanish is not racist in an obvious way: There are no epithets here. If the examples above were uttered in private, most people would consider it ridiculous to censure them. This resistance

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that women who objected to his work had no sense of humor (does this sound familiar?) The reason I mention this here is that I am not at all sure that Junk Spanish is used by real rednecks. I strongly suspect that Joe Bob learned it at the University of Texas; it has been well-documented in campus contexts since the late 1940s. It is interesting that Joe Bob considered it to be an appropriate register for the racist and sexist persona of the reviews.

to censure leaks into the public space by way of the metaphorical code switch, so it is extremely difficult to attack these usages even though they are obviously public and contestable along the interest-innocence continuum. Further, such an attack would require that the "interest" involved be characterized: It is, of course, the interest of "whiteness," a quality that is largely invisible and not conventionally defined as an "interest." Furthermore, to characterize such talk as "racist" requires that one familiarize one's audience with the complexities of modern thought on racism, which is again remote from the understanding of a public that thinks of itself as "anti-racist."<sup>20</sup> Thus, such usages of Junk Spanish are generally defined as "innocent."

At the same time that Junk Spanish functions at the blurred boundaries between public and private talk, it also illustrates the permeable boundaries of language itself. Junk Spanish has moved into public discourse in the last decade, at the very same time that heightened concern about language boundaries, in the form of the "Official English" campaign, has grown in American life. Why, then, is there no objection to Junk Spanish by language purists? I believe that no objection occurs because Junk Spanish in fact strongly supports the essence of the purist campaign: That foreign languages, while they may be permitted in the home, should not be allowed in public discourse. As is well-known (Woolard 1989), "Official English" objections to foreign languages have been aimed especially at bilingual ballots and other forms of the public use of Spanish. The use of Junk Spanish constructs a particular place for the Spanish language in American public discourse: It can function *only* in light talk, in the "code-switching" that protects an American speaking in public from being seen as too pompous and domineering. This function seems to be well established, and will make it increasingly difficult for any public uses of Spanish to be heard as "serious." It will, by definition, always be "private," and thus will have in the public sphere no more than a poetic function. For this reason, Junk Spanish in fact advances the purposes of the Official-English movement. Furthermore, to the degree that it is covertly racist, this will presumably be sensed with approval by those with racist agendas.

Finally, the use of Junk Spanish (as well as other subtly and not-so-subtly coded forms of racist discourse) in public talk functions importantly in "constructing the public." If an appreciation of the humor in Junk Spanish requires unreflective access to negative stereotypes of Latinos, then these sallies are clearly shaped for the appreciation of people who define themselves as "not Latino." (I use this phrase rather than "define themselves as 'White'" because the public thus defined almost certainly includes African-Americans, although this fraction of the U.S. population is of course the object of an unending repertoire of other exclusionary discursive strategies). Junk Spanish thus is one of many devices through which the sphere of 'public discussion' in the most widely-diffused media in the United States becomes profoundly, invisibly, exclusionary against people of color.

In closing, I wish to turn to a point raised recently by David Palumbo Liu (1994). Liu suggests, in an analysis of the media characterization of racist alignments in the recent Los Angeles riots, that Hispanics in some contexts can

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<sup>20</sup> Claudia Brodsky Lacour (1992) has pointed out the paradox of racism, "whose pervasive existence depends on its tenacious nonadmission and complicitous nonrecognition."

stand in as a surrogate for more dangerous and problematic African Americans. Liu points out, for instance, that Latino participation in the riots was hardly mentioned in the mass media, which emphasized the polarization of the Black and Asian communities. However, after the riots Hispanics were apparently arrested and deported in great numbers. Liu suggests that the deportations projected onto Hispanics desires that were in fact aimed at African Americans - who cannot, of course, be deported because they are all, without doubt, recognized as citizens of the United States. It is interesting to consider a similar complementary distribution between Junk Spanish and African-American materials in the English of Anglos. African-American slang expressions of course move rapidly into the slang of White Americans. Often, this slang is reshaped into virtual unrecognizability, so that those who use it are unaware of its Black English origins.<sup>21</sup> However, a register that might be called "Junk Black English" is an important component of the gross jokes that are told in the zones of privacy mentioned above, in light talk especially among men. Graphically offensive jokes are often told using reported speech in a broad "Sambo" or "Aunt Jemima" dialect. However, as far as I know, no whisper of this practice ever leaks into the public discourse. In fact, as long ago as the 1950's a cabinet officer (Eisenhower's Secretary of Agriculture, Earl Butts), was fired after reporters overheard him telling a grossly offensive "Sambo" joke. To produce obvious parodies of African-American speech of the type that are apparent in Junk Spanish is simply too dangerous. However, Junk Spanish is apparently considered to be entirely harmless. We must consider the possibility that it is a safe substitute for this more dangerous possibility for covert racist discourse, for the voice of Amos 'n Andy, of Minstrelsy. Interestingly, even parodists like Joe Bob Briggs, who tries to be as outrageous as possible (see note 19) do not dare to venture into this realm, although Briggs' cast of characters does include at least two foolish and quarrelsome buddies who have Hispanic surnames.

"Junk Spanish" is a very useful tool for exploring the ambiguities and problems of the boundaries between the public and the private. It is easy to spot it: Its obvious morphology and lexicon function like a sort of radioactive tracer, which can be identified immediately when it shows up at a new site. What I think we learn from looking at these materials as they move back and forth across the public/private boundary is that the idea of the "public" and of "public discourse" continues today as an ideology that mystifies and confounds what is going on in the way of race, sex, and class-based oppression in American life, just as it did in the Revolutionary era. The imbrication of "light talk," "plain talk," "humor," and "common sense" have created an impenetrable tangle under which a great deal of racist and sexist talk, both public and private, can be produced, and a shield by

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<sup>21</sup> A particularly famous case involves the expression "up tight", which in White English means overly concerned for propriety (the organ that is "tight" is the rectum). The expression probably entered general American English in a song made popular in the 1960s by African-American singer Stevie Wonder, where the line was "everything is up tight, all right, clear out of sight" (the organ involved was probably the penis). In recent years, with the enormous popularity of rap music and hip-hop culture among young people of all races, slang of known African-American origin is increasingly widespread among whites. However, I am unaware of a parodic register of African-American English that is comparable in range of usage and context among whites to Junk Spanish.

which critique of these practices can be very effectively deflected. Through these practices of language the structures of "citizenship" by which people are licensed to participate in public life are produced - and also raced, and gendered.

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