

Language variation and the linguistic enactment of identity among Dominicans*

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Abstract

The present study seeks to examine the linguistic dimensions of national and immigrant Dominican societies, in particular, the linguistic attributes and attitudes that delimit Dominican speech communities and the extent to which social identity may be mediated via these linguistic constructs. The sociolinguistic profile to be proffered is achieved by reference to language forms and evaluations unveiled in interviews conducted in the Dominican Republic and New York. Taking a broad view of the findings, we conclude that owing to its phonological and morphosyntactic innovations, the Dominican dialect may not be regarded as a linguistic variety to which overt prestige should be ascribed; nevertheless, the dialect enjoys a considerable measure of covert prestige, as a symbol and enactment of national, group, and individual identity.

1. Introduction

The present study seeks to examine linguistic dimensions of Dominican society. More specifically, it investigates the linguistic attributes and attitudes that delimit Dominican speech communities and the extent to which social identity may be mediated via these linguistic constructs. It merits noting at the outset that although the study is concerned primarily with aspects of the discipline of sociolinguistics as broadly conceived, its focus is different from that of other studies that take an interest in the functional distribution of speech forms. In particular, this study departs from those whose emphasis is in analyzing social structures by appeal to quantifiable linguistic data (see, for instance, the works of Eckert, Labov, Milroy, Macaulay, Trudgill); it does not present replicable models or statistical evidence of unique language behavior among Dominicans but attends instead to the careful and deliberate description of language

variation and language use as social phenomena. This central component of the research thus proceeds with the aim of furthering the understanding of the structure of society through the analysis of language and, as such, may be best situated within what generally defines the sociology of language, rather than sociolinguistics proper (Wardhaugh 1992).¹

The linguistic profile to be proffered is achieved by reference to language forms and evaluations unveiled in interviews conducted in the Dominican Republic and New York with 46 informants representative of both sexes and of diverse ages, socioeconomic classes, and geographical regions. The main method of data elicitation is a modified interview technique, informed by the insights of ethnographers (for instance, Fishman, Gumperz, Hymes). In particular, subjects were invited to participate in a discussion on Dominican cultural traditions and societal norms with a known Dominican investigator. A guiding set of questions, available for reference though not strictly adhered to, comprised three broad areas: personal information, indicators of linguistic insecurity, and perspectives on Dominican ethnicity in the Caribbean and abroad. The sessions were recorded and subsequently analyzed and interpreted with an eye toward assessing speakers' exploitation of linguistic forms in the communication of social meaning.

The principal overarching issues that occupy the linguistic profile are two: (i) an abridged presentation of the salient linguistic features that distinguish Dominican Spanish from the established Standard Latin American Spanish norm; and (ii) the examination of the contributions of language in the construction of self and differentiation from others. Each of these themes is addressed within a specific section of the paper, organized as follows. Section 2 offers the uninformed reader an overview of the linguistic features of the dialect at issue. Though not the principal goal of the work, the discussion points to phonological and morphosyntactic properties that should prove of inherent interest to researchers in comparative and theoretical linguistics. Dominican Spanish will be shown to exhibit variation that may be interpreted as reflecting coexisting, competing grammars, a condition that typifies linguistic change in progress. Section 3, the sociolinguistic kernel of the work, turns to consider Dominican Spanish within its sociohistorical context, both in the Dominican Republic and in New York. Section 3.1 contemplates the social significance of language variation, language diffusion, and language displacement. Section 3.2 reflects on the role of language in marking group boundedness and membership. Among other things, the introspections articulated therein demonstrate that while immigrant and US-born Dominicans in New York have available to them viable alternatives for escaping linguistic prejudice, especially as they become integrated into

Hispanic immigrant communities and the larger society, they remain fiercely loyal to their native dialect, which serves as an immutable marker of Dominican identity. Thus, while there exist a number of markers of identity, such as social group, geography, cultural traditions, and race, for many Dominicans, language is the most significant criterion of self-identification. Finally, section 4 concludes the work with brief commentary.

2. Dominican Spanish and its linguistic import

The immense diversity of the dialects of Spanish spoken throughout Latin America has stimulated significant popular interest and scholarly attention. What invariably emerges from the literature is the uniqueness of the dialects of Spanish spoken in the Caribbean region, with the Dominican Republic at the forefront of linguistic transformation (cf. Henríquez Ureña 1940; Jiménez Sabater 1975). As expected, variations in the lexicon abound. The introduction of Taíno/Arawak indigenisms such as *aji*, *cabuya*, and *guanábana*, and Africanisms such as *ñame*, *cachimbo*, and *féferes* speak to historical contact, and continued innovations in the lexicon attest to the vitality of the language, and to Dominicans' tendency to language play in particular:

- (1) a. DR#2; upper-class male; age 35
 Hay un conjunto de frases propias del país, y hay cosas que se ponen de moda. ... De un tiempo acá se ha usado mucho, cuando una persona es muy diestra en algo, decir, <<Esta persona es un caballo>> o <<un toro>>. En cualquier nivel social tú oyes, <<Fulano, ve donde² ese médico, que es un caballo.>>
 'There is a set of phrases that is unique to the nation and there are things that come into style. For some time now we've been accustomed, when someone is skilled at something, to saying, "That person is a horse" or "a bull." In any social class you hear, "So-and-so, go to that doctor, he is a horse.'"
- b. Yo recuerdo que en una compañía allá en Estados Unidos, un dominicano le dijo a un centroamericano, <<Mira, pásame esa vaina para darle un coñazo a esta desgracia ahí>>. Él no entendió. Si me lo dice a mí, yo le doy cualquier cosa, porque eso es una vaina, eso es una desgracia, eso es una pendejada.
 'I recall that in a company there in the United States, a Dominican said to a Central American, "Look, pass me that *vaina* [thing] so that I can give a *coñazo* [damned blow] to this

desgracia [miserable thing] here.” He did not understand. If he had said it to me, I would have given him anything, because that is a *vaina*, that is a *desgracia*, that is a *pendejada* [stupidity]³

Beyond matters of lexical innovation, there are specific phonological features, morphological forms, and syntactic structures that typify the dialect. Perhaps most prominent to the indigenous ear are the regional variations based in pronunciation, particularly of syllable-final consonants. Especially perceptible are processes that affect syllable-final liquids: lamdacism (/r/ → [l]), glide formation (/L/ → [j]), and rotacism (/l/ → [r]), attested in the capital city of Santo Domingo, in the northwestern agricultural countryside of the Cibao Valley, and in the southern region, respectively. Of these forms, the lateral liquid of the *capitaleño* carries the greatest cultural and political capital, as expected, and the northwestern *cibaeño* pronunciation the least.⁴ As one informant acknowledges,

- (2) El capitaleño se mofa del cibaño hasta en las comedias por la <i>. Cae gracioso. ... En la televisión te ponen un cibaño y le ponen la <i>, y te hace reír. [Y la <l> no?] No ... la <l> no ... Quizás sean los cheques de la capital.

‘The *capitaleño* makes fun of the *cibaeño* even in comedies because of the <i>. It is funny ... On television they’ll show a *cibaeño* and give him the <i>, and it makes you laugh. [And not the <l>?] No ... not the <l> ... It must be the checks from the capital.’

Of seemingly less concern to the island population, but likely more noticeable and noteworthy for the foreigner and linguist, are the morpho-syntactic properties of the Dominican dialect. Unlike the aforementioned variations in pronunciation, these features are not specific to a particular region but are much more widely dispersed. As discussed elsewhere (viz. Toribio 2000a), the dialect may be witnessing a phonological and morphological restructuring that may owe to the reduction of other alveolar consonants. For example, common across regional and social dialects are the velarization and elision of syllable-final /n/ (though the nasalization remains on the preceding vowel)⁵ and the weakening and elision of syllable-final /s/.⁶ These latter alterations have had significant consequences in the verbal system, eliminating morphological distinctions across numerous verbal paradigms. One might predict, therefore, that the reduction and loss of morphological distinctions in verbal endings would effect the rise of overt (and obligatory) pronominal subjects. However, it is unclear whether we can regard the deterioration and loss of morphological endings as the catalyst or determining factor in the

appearance of overt subjects. What is evident is that even verb forms that remain distinct with respect to person and number are nonetheless accompanied by the subject pronoun; that is, any subject pronoun may be overtly expressed, not merely those that would be most plainly necessitated by phonological reductions.⁷ This is further corroborated in observing the availability and prevalence of the nonreferential pronoun *ello*, which is not reproduced in other dialects of Spanish.⁸

The identifying phonological and morphological characteristics outlined previously consort with concomitant innovations in the syntax, in particular, in the pattern of word order attested in declaratives, interrogatives, and nonfinite constructions.⁹ While the word order of declaratives in Standard Latin American Spanish is relatively free, demonstrating a sensitivity to pragmatic considerations such as theme–rheme requirements, in Dominican Spanish it is relatively fixed — subject–verb–object — irrespective of subject type or verb class. Further confirmation for fixed preverbal positional licensing of subjects is the fact that the pattern is maintained even in questions, where the norm requires that the verb appear in second position, preposed to the subject. This lack of inversion in questions is noted by Henríquez Ureña (1940) and Jiménez Sabater (1975), the latter stating that the preverbal positioning of subject pronouns in questions “es prácticamente general en el español de la República Dominicana” [‘is practically generalized in the Spanish of the Dominican Republic’] (1975: 169).¹⁰ Finally, Dominican Spanish permits overt preverbal subjects in nonfinite (infinitival and gerundive) clauses, the attested subject–infinitive order standing in marked contraposition to that observed in the Spanish language, in which the subject would appear postposed to the infinitival verb. While Henríquez Ureña (1940) reports the preverbal positioning of subjects in infinitival clauses as possible for the expression of pronouns, it is described by Jiménez Sabater (1975) as having displaced the canonical postverbal positioning only three decades later, “propagado ya a aquellos casos en que el infinitivo viene acompañado de un sustantivo y no de un simple pronombre como sujeto” [‘extended to those cases where the infinitive is joined to a noun and not simply to a pronoun acting as subject’]. We therefore concur with the latter’s conclusion: ‘Podríamos pensar que se está extendiendo un esquema ‘sujeto–verbo’ en el cual un orden riguroso de las palabras (sujeto precediendo al verbo) sería rasgo relevante’ [‘we might believe in the diffusion of a subject–verb pattern in which a strict word ordering (subject preceding the verb) is a pertinent feature’] (1975: 169).

As laid out, the linguistic patterns manifest in Dominican Spanish reveal that this dialect has expanded to encompass morphosyntactic constructions that are not uniformly replicated in the dialects of other

Latin American nations. Before proceeding, however, it merits stressing that the morphosyntactic structures that characterize Standard Latin American Spanish (e.g. null subject pronouns and postverbal positional licensing of subjects) are indeed available to the speakers sampled. A review of extended transcripts reveals that within one speaker's speech there are segments that are replete with overt referential subject pronouns, whereas others contain very few, and the overt expletive *ello* appears in only a subset of the grammatical contexts where it is theoretically possible; moreover, the postverbal position is employed, with greater frequency for pronominal than for full NP subjects, across the construction types discussed. In other words, Dominican Spanish exhibits the overt pronouns and preverbal subject licensing typical of non-null-subject languages such as English or French, while at once demonstrating the null pronouns and postverbal subjects common to null-subject languages such as Standard Latin American Spanish. The coexistence of these typologies is readily appreciated in the speech samples produced by all of the speakers interviewed.¹¹

Such variation can be accommodated systematically as an intrinsic aspect of the dialect. Discarding suggestions that these innovations may reflect the contributions of linguistic contact (e.g. with the African languages that were brought to the Caribbean, with the French-based Creole of the adjoining nation, or with English), Toribio (2000a, forthcoming a) presents a linguistic-theoretical analysis of internally driven language change.¹² In particular, her treatment draws on the assumption of Henry (1997) and Wilson and Henry (1998) that dialects of languages may exemplify typological distinctions and, as such, may be defined within the parametric limits afforded by universal grammar. This approach to the examination of varieties of Spanish "avails an appreciation of the Dominican Spanish vernacular as a source of facts appropriate to a theory of language variation and change, rather than as a peculiar linguistic artifact that deviates from the pan-American normative standard (Toribio 2000a: 316)." Such an orientation is indicated in the analysis of Dominican Spanish, which presents a clustering of properties, which, a priori, would point to grammatical resetting, "un hecho perfectamente explicable dentro de las posibilidades que ofrece el mismo sistema español" ['a fact that is perfectly explicable within the possibilities that the self-same system of Spanish offers'] (Jiménez Sabater 1975: 169). Accordingly, Dominicans are argued to be "bilingual" in their native language (cf. Roeper 1999), acquiring two grammars with opposed, competing values for the relevant parameters.¹³ That one grammar should become symbolic of Dominican identity or another be deemed "more correct" are outcomes of social, not linguistic, evolution.

3. Dominican Spanish in its sociohistorical context

Its linguistic-theoretical import notwithstanding, the investigation of Dominican speech forms touches on numerous sociolinguistic themes that merit scrutiny.¹⁴ For instance, are speakers aware of the linguistic novelties? If so, do they have a favorable judgment of the innovations? Would they abandon the vernacular for a more conservative variety? Are there any social correlates, for example with the dimensions class and race? What is the relationship between Dominican speech and Dominican identity? These and related themes of linguistic insecurity and ethnicity are considered in this section. Thus, while the following speech samples may be of interest for their rich empirical linguistic content, their primary purpose is in elucidating elements of Dominican thought that have their keenest expression in language.

3.1. *The social significance of language variation, diffusion, and displacement*

As argued in prior paragraphs, the Spanish dialect of the Dominican Republic distinguishes itself in significant respects from the prescribed norm for the Spanish language. These speech forms are readily identified and recognized as being of low prestige, as reflected both in speakers' insecurity and in the negative evaluations of others; and yet, the vernacular enjoys a considerable measure of covert prestige. For example, in New York enclaves, the dialect persists with minimal disturbance; the question explored here is why speakers do not abandon these stigmatized forms in favor of the higher-prestige, more conservative pan-American norm, through leveling, or in favor of the dominant English language, through language displacement.

Linguistic insecurity and covert prestige. The linguistically informed assessment of language variation previously presented is substantiated in subjective evaluations culled from each and every interview session in the Dominican Republic and in New York. The excerpt in (3) attests to speakers' sensitivity to linguistic norms and to the remarkably low esteem in which the dialect is held.

(3) DR#2; upper-class male; age 35

Hay pueblos donde la gente tiene más cuidado en hablar un buen castellano. ... Los dominicanos tenemos el problema que hablamos con faltas ortográficas ... no, es verdad. Aquí se habla con falta ortográfica, no sólo se escribe, sino que se habla también.

‘There are towns where people take more care in speaking a good Spanish. ... We Dominicans have the problem of speaking with orthographical errors ... no, it’s true. Here people speak with orthographical errors, not merely write it, but speak it too.’

Significantly, Dominicans render these judgments of insecurity even on the island, where they are not confronted with direct criticism from (or comparison to) speakers of other varieties of Spanish. The Dominican vernacular is stigmatized and aesthetically undervalued, especially among the middle and upper classes, for lacking certain features of an idealized standard — the Castilian or “European” variety, as asserted in the excerpts in (4); the response in (4b) is especially telling, as the speaker promotes the “Spanish” dialect without definite knowledge of its Iberian origin.

- (4) a. DR#37; middle-class male; age 30
 Me gusta como hablan los españoles. ... Para como hablan los españoles y como hablamos nosotros aquí, hay mucha diferencia, para como uno habla. Me gusta la forma de ellos hablar, su acento y todo, eso me gusta. ... ellos tienen más modalidad que uno hablando.
 ‘I like the way the Spaniards speak. ... The way the Spaniards speak and the way we speak here, there is a lot of difference, the way we speak it. I like the way they speak, their accent and all, I like that ... they have better form than us speaking.’
- b. DR#29; middle-class male; age 54
 El [español] de España es como más fino. La lengua española vino de España, ¿no fue?
 ‘The Spanish from Spain is more refined. The Spanish language came from Spain, didn’t it?’

Conversely, specific regional dialects are discounted or disparaged for incorporating other, less agreeable characteristics, namely, those of neighboring Haiti, as confessed in (5).¹⁵ (Recall also the discussion of Dominicans’ dim view of the northwestern *cibaëño* variety, where contact with Haitian nationals is most pronounced.)

- (5) a. DR#25, working-class male; age 70+
 Uno habla regularcito aquí. ... La región que habla mal, que hablan medio cruzado, es en Vaca Gorda, porque ahí son todos prietos.¹⁶ Es como la lengua que se les cruza, son gente medio haitianados. Ya ellos están aquí como que son dominicanos.
 ‘We speak more-or-less regular here. ... The region that speaks poorly, that speaks somewhat tongue-tied, is in Vaca Gorda,

because there they are all blacks. It's as though their tongues are tied, they are somewhat Haitianized. They are here as if they were Dominicans.'

- b. DR#24; middle-class male; age 55
 Por aquí en El Rodeo había una descendencia haitiana; en esa área del Rodeo no se hablaba bien el español. Ellos usaban a veces unas palabras dialécticas, que a veces uno mismo ni las entendía, esa misma clase de gente, haitianos, que se mestizaron ahí. Yo recuerdo que a veces ellos hablaban delante de uno y uno no entendía las palabras.
 'Here in El Rodeo there was some Haitian heritage; in that area of El Rodeo people didn't speak Spanish well. They sometimes used dialectical words, that sometimes we ourselves didn't understand, that same class of people, Haitians, who mixed in there. I recall that sometimes they speak in front of us and we didn't understand the words.'
- c. DR#3; middle-class female; age 50+
 Los prietos ronchuses de por allá hablan como jmmpf, ¿no es verdad? Como cosa de brutos.
 'The scruffy blacks from there speak like jmmpf, right? The likes of dumb/crude folks.'

This privileging of the Peninsular variety — *la lengua original y pura* 'the original and pure language' — persists in the US, where the Dominican dialect is but one of a multitude of varieties vying for social acceptance. As shown in (6), in the linguistic *potaje* 'stew' that is New York, Dominican Spanish does not fare well. On introspection, Dominicans characterize their speech as *campesino* 'countrified', while they describe other dialects as merely "different."¹⁷

- (6) a. NY#42; working-class female; age 30
 Dominicans don't speak Spanish well. I'm not saying that I speak perfect Spanish or perfect English. ... All you see is Dominicans that are from el campo. Everybody knows right away that they're Dominicans; you get embarrassed because of those people.
- b. NY#44; working-class male; age 15
 I think España [speaks Spanish best]; they have an <s> and a good accent. Everybody else speaks Spanish different.

Note that although all speakers would make repeated reference to prescribed pronunciations, especially of forms in /-s/, the overproduction of such forms was not pervasive. For one informant, however, the interview

setting did temporarily evoke a prestige pronunciation, which did not conform to her grammar, leading to the hypercorrection in (7).

(7) DR#39; lower class female; age 44

Tú estas muy boni[s]ta.

‘You are very pre[s]ty.’

In all of these cases, Dominicans exhibit a singular insecurity about their language and a willingness to accept responsibility for its “poor” state. This anxiety points to the issue of linguistic ideology and a doctrine of correctness that has become part and parcel of the Dominican cultural endowment (consult Labov 1972 for parallel discussion of other stigmatized language varieties).^{18,19} In this predilection for the northern Iberian variety and emphatic repudiation of the influence of the Haitian Creole, Dominicans ignore a central axiom of linguistics — language variation is normal — and affirm their *hispanidad*, an historical obsession that we return to below.

It should be readily apparent from the foregoing excerpts that Dominicans are most conscious of their “radical” pronunciations, especially in view of other highly conservative Latin American varieties; but their lexical regionalisms and syntactic innovations evade self-censure.²⁰ Thus, as noted by García et al. (1988), while Dominicans may regularly substitute *casimente* for *casi*²¹ ‘almost’ and *ayama* for *calabaza* ‘squash’, the more educated Dominicans have a more conservative pronunciation. Furthermore, the other dialectal features (e.g. the overt expletive pronoun and the periphrastic question constructions) are rarely abandoned, for they simply reflect *el habla dominicana* ‘Dominican speech’. In other words, nonstandard pronunciation is thought to betray one as Haitian in the Dominican Republic or misrepresent one as uncultured and uneducated in the United States, but particular lexical regionalisms and grammatical constructions are assumed to merely portray one as Dominican.^{22,23} Of course, there are innumerable speech patterns that may be specific to a community dialect, but, as plainly indicated, it is social evaluation that confers prestige on certain features and stigma on others.

Believing their speech to elicit unfavorable stereotyped reactions, many Dominicans shift between speech modes. The upwardly mobile informant whose speech is represented in (8) is well aware that the negative impact of listeners’ discernment could be considerable, and she chooses to vary her speech to accommodate her Spanish-speaking interlocutors; she demonstrated the most careful speech, producing lexical and morpho-syntactic forms that very consciously reflected a supposed norm of correctness.

- (8) NY45; working-class female; age 24
Si te pasaras un día en mi trabajo, te dieras cuenta que la forma de yo hablar es una mezcla de todos los diferentes tipos de razas de países. El problema es que donde yo trabajo es una farmacia y estoy ahí más porque puedo hablar español. Entonces hay muchas personas de diferentes países y cuando llega una persona por decir, de Puerto Rico, pues yo tengo que saber cómo es que ellos hablan y a qué es que ellos se refieren cuando hablan de algo específico. Entonces cuando viene otra persona de, vamos a decir, del Salvador, que hablan también español, yo tengo también que tratar de entenderlos a ellos, entonces es un trabajo muy interesante. Y la gente me dice, <<Pero tú no hablas como los dominicanos.>>
'If you spent a day at my job, you would notice that my form of speaking is a mix of all of the different types of countries' races. The problem is that where I work is a pharmacy and I am there more because I can speak Spanish. Then there are many people from different countries and when someone arrives let's say, from Puerto Rico, well I have to know how they speak and what it is they are referring to when they speak of something specific. Then when another person comes from, let's say, El Salvador, who also speaks Spanish, I have also to try to understand him/her, so it's a very interesting job. And people tell me, "But you don't speak like Dominicans."'

Language and education of Dominican minorities. The difference between community vernacular and prescribed norm significantly impacts Dominicans in the US. Especially vulnerable are children and adolescents, who are exposed to Dominican Spanish at home and acquire stigmatized forms that often become the basis for teachers' negative impressions:

- (9) DR#28; middle-class male; age 51
Yo conozco muchachos, que han nacido allá en Estados Unidos, que nunca conocían la República Dominicana y hablaban con una <i> más fuerte que cualquier gente de un campo de aquí. Ese caso lo vi yo en un muchacho que nació en Lawrence, Massachusetts. Y tú lo oías hablando y tú creías que estaba hablando con un muchacho de cualquier campo de Salcedo, porque los papás eso era lo que hablaban. Y ellos estudiando español en la escuela y estudiando inglés, y hablaban común y corriente como cualquier cibaño, cibaños de los que hablan malo.
'I know kids, who were born there in the United States, that have never known the Dominican Republic and speak with a stronger

<i> than any person from the countryside here. I saw such a case in a boy who was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts. And you would hear him speaking and you'd believe you were speaking with a boy from any countryside in Salcedo, because his parents that's what they spoke. And they were studying Spanish in school and studying English, and speaking like any ordinary Cibaëño, the Cibaëños that speak poorly.'

One solution has been to enroll Dominican students in introductory, compensatory, or remedial Spanish classes where they can be instructed in how to speak "properly," that is, how to suppress dialectal features such as those reviewed here. In these classrooms, they are ridiculed by peers who openly demonstrate negative attitudes toward their dialect, and, perhaps more injuriously, they may receive little sympathy and advocacy from educators:

(10) DR#28; middle-class male; age 51

Hay gente que diría, <<La hija de Nano vino privando en fi[s]na, pronunciando la 's' hasta donde no va.>> Pero no: si tú aprendiste a hablarlo bien, tú aprendiste.

'There are people who would say, "Nano's daughter returned pretending to be re[s]fined, pronouncing the 's' even where it doesn't go.'" But no: if you learned to speak it well, you've learned.'

To be sure, educators often fail to appreciate the ways in which dialects differ and the practical difficulties and familial and community alienation that imposing a normative standard may present.²⁴ In sociolinguistic terms, "a child who gives up the forms of his local group and adopts those that are widely accepted in the nation would in fact be adopting forms that are the identifying symbols of another group" (Hudson 1980: 200). Thus while the advantages of adopting normative speech patterns may be obvious to educators, the matter is far from transparent for many children, and all that may be effected by teachers' exhortations in the direction of uniform standards is an increase in any linguistic insecurity that pupils already sense (cf. Lippi-Green 1997; Wardhaugh 1998). It is not surprising that in this attendant condition many Dominican youths will seek to distance themselves from their native dialect, reserving the vernacular for the intimacy and safety of the community and home. While such a functional distribution of languages may become a real option for escaping linguistic prejudice, it is also in this situation that attrition of the minority language may ensue (cf. Appel and Muysken 1987; Seliger 1996).²⁵

3.2. *The role of language in conveying social meaning and mediating social identity*

As documented, not only is the Dominican dialect stigmatized, but there is no hesitation in acting on this prejudice. Still, the adamant reprehension of the Dominican dialect is at odds with the observed vitality of Dominican Spanish in New York. While speakers pointed to the Castillian variety as the form to which they aspire and their native Dominican dialect as the form from which they wished to distance themselves, Dominicans remain intensely language-retentive, maintaining and advancing the Dominican Spanish dialect even in the context of other, more conservative Latin American dialects. As the most monolingual of the Hispanic groups in New York (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 1991), Dominicans demonstrate extensive Spanish language usage in the private home domain with family members, as well as with in-group members such as friends, classmates, and co-workers, and in the extended out-group domains of the community (cf. García et al. 1988). The continued use of the Dominican vernacular is a strong indicator that the immigrant community considers its language to be an important feature of its identity, though this central role does not itself reflect a rejection of the negative evaluations that speakers themselves may harbor. As summarized in Trudgill (1974), speakers may emphasize the positive virtues of their own speech communities, while nevertheless recognizing the prestige forms as in some absolute sense "right."²⁶ Thus, while speakers may display an exaggerated preference for standard forms, most have a strong sense of allegiance to Dominican speech patterns; as will become clear from subsequent discussion, Dominicans find solidarity in their native speech variety.

The delimitation of Dominican speech communities. As with other minority speech communities, behind Dominicans' apparent preferences for standard forms lies a counteracting set of affective and instrumental factors that points to strong identification and affiliation with their distinctive speech patterns. In New York enclaves, the Dominican dialect provides for its speakers a link with the past and with fellow speakers abroad. In other words, language maintenance among Dominicans in the diaspora is in large part a result of the nature and extent of their social and emotional ties with their homeland. A good number of Dominicans entered the US in the early 1960s as transient immigrants; they stayed to find employment, married citizens or resident aliens (the normal route to legalizing immigrant status), and requested additional immigrant visas for family members. However, as families (re)united,

many stayed on, forging ethnic communities that replicated cultural and social institutions of the homeland (cf. Guarnizo 1997; Johnson 1998; Pessar 1996).²⁷ As expected, the linguistic characteristics of these immigrant communities coincide with those of the specific residents within its boundaries (recall, e.g., the specific regional pronunciations of sending communities discussed above). As a consequence, the communities into which *dominicanos ausentes* ‘absentee Dominicans’ are received are culturally and linguistically familiar:

- (11) DR#33; middle-class male returnee; age 62
 Aquí hay sitios que uno va a Nueva York y sabe de dónde son esa gente, de una parte de Santiago, de Jánico, de San José de las Matas. Desde que uno habla con unas de esas personas uno sabe que son de por ahí.
 ‘Here there are places where you go in New York and you know where the people are from, from some part of Santiago, from Jánico, from San José de las Matas. Once you speak with one of these people you know that they are from around there.’

Dominican presence is especially strongly felt in the life of the South Bronx and upper Manhattan’s Washington Heights — variously known as Quisqueya Heights, *el pequeño Cibao* ‘the little Cibao’, and *el platanal* ‘the plantain grove’ — where in the local *bodega*, *dominicanos* can find foodstuffs such as *casabe* and *longaniza*, gamble on the Dominican lottery, and catch up on island politics, all in their native, regional island vernacular. In this neighborhood, it is easy to live for years without having to adopt pan-Hispanic speech norms or even learn English. As described by Suro (1998: 198–199), Washington Heights “was not built as a place where newcomers could start the process of becoming Americans. Instead, the purpose was to allow its inhabitants to become transnationals or simply to remain Dominicans.”²⁸

In fact, many Dominicans, especially those of the older generations, are never fully integrated into the fabric of US society; instead, they maintain *un pie aquí y el otro allá* ‘one foot here and the other there’, guarding the hope of returning to the Dominican Republic. Some regard themselves as temporary residents for whom return to the island is not a myth, but a mandate. Indeed, the return migration flow that has transpired in the past decades has led to the forging of a “binational society that articulates both nations” (Pessar 1997: 3).²⁹ And even the younger generations return to the island for regular visits — for Holy Week and Christmas, summer vacations, and family weddings and funerals — likewise settling into this Dominican/American identity, “the state of mind that permits them to remain actively linked to life in the native

land while also becoming acclimated to the values and norms of the receiving society” (Torres-Saillant and Hernández 1998: 156). One significant result is the fortification of social investments and cultural constructs that ensures their full participation in both home and host societies. It is unquestionable that these dense, transnational networks have heightened consciousness of what it means to be Dominican and have contributed to, if not secured, the maintenance of specific Dominican vernacular norms.

Language and race, at home and abroad. Yet, despite their recent socio-political gains, Dominicans in the US have encountered a fair allotment of ill-fortune, and the “American dream” of socioeconomic advancement has remained elusive (see the historical overviews presented in Goris-Rosario 1994; Pessar 1996; Guarnizo 1997; Wucker 1999). The great majority toil long hours in blue-collar jobs in factories and service industries, their underemployment variously attributed to a restructuring of New York City’s manufacturing sector, high rates of single-female-parent households, and low levels of English-language mastery. Further contributing to these disadvantages is the barrier of racial discrimination, which proves especially disconcerting for Dominicans, who, as noted by Pessar (1996: 144), “come from a society where to be partly white (which includes most Dominicans) is to be non-black.”³⁰ In truth, throughout its history, the Dominican Republic has held an unofficial policy against *negritude*, and an official policy of affirmation of the island’s Spanish roots (cf. Baud 1997) — palpable in the foregoing discussion of Dominicans’ privileging of Peninsular Spanish.³¹

This racial attitude, which was given substantive and highly animated expression by most of the Dominicans interviewed, was most recently promoted by the Trujillo dictatorship, which lasted three decades. In advancing his ideology of *hispanidad*, which defined Dominicans as the most pure Spanish people in the Americas, Trujillo put forth a number of tactics to deliver the Dominican nation from “Haitianization,” employing a simple linguistic litmus to sort out friend from foe.³² These “offending” Haitians were to be identified by their inability to offer a native Dominican pronunciation of the word *perejil* ‘parsley’ — the assumption being that the uvular trill of Creole speech would compromise a speaker’s Haitian identity.³³ One informant told of on-going border patrol detention drills that are keenly reminiscent of these maneuvers:

- (12) NY#43; working-class male; age 45
 El tío tuyo Otilio andaba en Dajabón recogiendo a los haitianos,
 para la inmigración. Entonces, el camión ya estaba lleno, en

camino para Haití para llevarlos, y cuando iban para la frontera, había un morenito sentado en el parque. Otilio dijo, <<Déjame ver, déjame chequear a este morenito a ver.>> Se desmontó Otilio y le dijo, <<Ven acá, tú eres dominicano?>> Y dice el haitiano, <<¡Si!>> Dice Otilio, <<Si tú eres dominicano, tú vas a repetir lo que yo te diga.>> Dice el haitiano, <<'Tá bien.>> Dice Otilio, <<Repítame ahí: El Generalísimo Rafael Leónidas Trujillo, benefactor de la patria nueva, nació en San Cristóbal, el pueblo del perejil.>> Dice el haitiano, <<Mejor dime que me suba a la camioneta.>>

'Your uncle Otilio was in Dajabón picking up Haitians, for immigration. Then, the truck was full, en route to take them to Haiti, and when they were going towards the border, there was a morenito sitting in the park. Otilio says, "Let me see, let me check that *morenito*, to see." Otilio got out and says to him, "Come here, are you Dominican?" And the Haitian says, "Yes!" Otilio said, "If you are Dominican, you will repeat what I tell you." The Haitian says, "All right." Otilio says, "Repeat this: General Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, benefactor of the new motherland, born in San Cristóbal, the town of *perejil*." The Haitian says, "Why not just tell me to get in the truck."'

Dominicans continue to endorse the *limpieza de sangre* 'cleansing of blood', opposing Haitian immigration on the grounds that they threaten the national well-being.³⁴ This national propaganda, professed by those who self-identify as "authentic" Dominicans, has proven so effective that many Dominicans believed, and continue to believe, that the Haitians were the only blacks on Hispaniola.³⁵ In fact, lighter-skinned Dominicans, and even darker members of the upper class, call themselves "white"; as one upper-class dark-skinned Dominican explained in (13), "blanco es de la mente."³⁶

(13) DR#2; upper-class male; age 35

Cuando aquí se dice que una persona es blanca es no solamente por la tez de la piel, se mira en el grado de astucia, de inteligencia, en la forma de sus pensamientos. Se dice fulano es blanco, piensa como blanco, o sea, que es una persona que no es bruto, que tiene una habilidad de ver las cosas un poquito más allá de la nariz.

'When we say that a person is white it is not only for their complexion, it is seen in the level of cunning, of intelligence, in the way of thinking. We say so-and-so is white, thinks like a white person, that is, that s/he is a person that is not stupid, that has the ability to see things a little beyond his/her nose.'

This classificatory strategy clearly conflicts with the contrasting conceptions of race in the US, (14a), a fact that does not escape even the most innocent child, (14b). Dominican immigrants quickly discover that in the US to be partly black is to be nonwhite.³⁷ As a result, even the better-educated, lighter-complexioned Dominican elite may struggle alongside other people of color.³⁸

- (14) a. NY46; working-class male; age 60+
 Para los blancos caemos al negro. ... El blanco no distingue entre claros y el negro, sino todo lo conceptúa en el mismo marco.
 'For the white we fall in the black ... that is for the whites. The white person doesn't distinguish between the light and the black, instead s/he conceptualizes it all in the same frame.'
- b. NY#41; working-class male; age 11
 We don't consider ourselves black and we don't consider ourselves white. White people don't consider us white, we're like peach. And the black people consider them [Dominicans] brown, so Dominicans are between black, brown, and peach.

This grim reality of the limitations imposed by racial ideologies in the US has important consequences in the linguistic behavior of the Dominicans studied. For the informants cited in (15), as for all of the New Yorkers interviewed, language is recognized as communicating information about their position in US society and is exploited in the "act of identity" (cf. Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985; Tabouret-Keller 1997):

- (15) a. NY#42; working-class female; age 30
 ... sure, you're Hispanic, but you're considered black. ... When you talk, they can tell.
- b. NY#46; working-class male; age 60+
 En el habla ya se sabe. Hay negros cubanos y hay de otros países.
 'In the speech you know. There are black Cubans and from other countries.'

Hence, just as in the preceding centuries of interaction with their Haitian neighbors, Dominicans have sought to affirm their Spanish cultural heritage and firmly distance themselves from their African roots. In the Dominican Republic, the result was a strengthening of *hispanidad*; in contemporary US society, it is a strengthening of the Spanish language. For, if Dominicans are not distinguishable from African-Americans by overt markers such as physical appearance, language affords one simple

and effective way of identifying themselves.³⁹ In this context, language maintenance is surely favored.

More generally, the Dominican informants deemed language to be a crucial aspect of their identity, a positive assertion and enactment of *dominicanidad*:

(19) NY#45; working-class female; age 24

La cultura dominicana incluye mucho el idioma. Yo diría que ser dominicano y hablar [español] es importante, por no decir original. El dominicano que no hable [dominicano] puede sentirse igual de orgulloso, pero le falta algo.

‘Dominican culture comprises language. I would say that to be Dominican and to speak [Spanish] is important, not to say original/characteristic. Dominicans who don’t speak [Dominican] can feel equally proud, but they are lacking something.’

This is not a novel finding, but an established sociolinguistic (and ethno-linguistic) fact: the presence of stigmatized minority languages is closely bound to the affirmation of a distinct ethnic identity.⁴⁰ However, this finding does shed light on the linguistic situation of a population that has gone largely ignored in the literature. As amply demonstrated, a stable set of vernacular speech norms, described by Milroy (1980: 35–36) as “symbolizing values of solidarity and reciprocity rather than status,” emerges and maintains itself in Dominican speech communities in New York. Thus, although there exist a number of markers of identity, the social context pertinent to Dominicans accredits language a central role.

4. Concluding remarks

To recapitulate, the present examination of language diversity has proven doubly fruitful. From the perspective of formal linguistics, the attested dialectal patterns, which have been empirically recorded and systematically corroborated (*viz.* other writings by the present author), can be appreciated as availing an exemplary source of facts appropriate to the study of language variation. Viewed at once through a sociolinguistic lens, the distribution and function of language forms has laid bare specific social structures. The interviews reveal islanders’ strong affinity for the linguistic forms of particular regional and national origins and abiding aversion toward others. The findings further suggest that most New York Dominicans accrue little benefit in acquiring a pan-Hispanic norm or relinquishing their native language in favor of English — in fact, as concluded by one reader (Stephen Dalton, personal communication), the

deficit would be dual for the Dominican immigrant who relinquishes linguistic (and cultural) ties and nonetheless remains the object of discrimination.

In addition to affording insights into the linguistic dimensions of Dominican society, this enterprise may most profitably be understood as a point of departure for future research in sociolinguistics and cognate areas. For instance, researchers may want to determine whether the morphosyntactic properties of the Dominican vernacular are more stigmatized than its phonological properties; whether linguistic insecurity is more prevalent in the immigrant communities than in sending communities; whether Spanish language traces are more likely to be retained by English-dominant Dominicans with marked African appearance; whether, and if so how, Dominican parents seek to counter the linguistic insecurities that their children might experience. Other more "global" initiatives are also indicated (cf. the urgings of McConnell 1997). For example, researchers may want to investigate whether the separatist function performed by language contributes to its perpetuation among other Spanish-speaking racial minorities in New York; or whether the delimitation of Dominican speech communities serves to affirm social solidarity in other national settings, for example in Spain and the Netherlands, where Dominican immigrants are gaining increasing numerical prominence.

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1. The study is also amenable to elaboration and interpretation within the discipline of social psychology (cf. the works of Giles).
2. The item *donde* is a locative, functionally equivalent to Italian *da* and French *chez*.
3. These lexical items are not readily expressed in English and are only loosely translated here.
4. Social, economic, and secular rivalries also separate the major city in the heart of the Cibao valley, Santiago, from Santo Domingo, thereby reducing intraregional mobility and heightening regional idiosyncrasies. One reviewer notes that “even within the Dominican Republic, there is currently a re-evaluation of stigmatized varieties, particularly the Cibao dialect. Middle-class youth who once shunned the vocalization of /l/ and /r/ (hablar con la “i”) are now adopting this form more frequently.” Covert prestige is certain to elevate the *cibaño* forms stigmatized by those in the capital.
5. For some speakers, then, nasalization may be ascribed with phonemic value (e.g. [ama] may contrast with [amã]), a distinction that may go undetected by the untrained listener, as the author’s first attempt at transcription proved.
6. The elision of /s/ is well documented: while Henríquez Ureña’s early survey of the language revealed that “en la dicción culta se procura evitar la modificación ‘in educated speech one tends to avoid the modification’ (1940: 139),” some fifty years later Lipski (1994) estimates the consonantal reduction to be so common as to be nearly categorical, even among educated speakers.
7. Jiménez Sabater provides an explicit statement of the interrelation of all of the aforementioned properties: “En el habla dominicana actual parece sentirse cada vez más la necesidad de diferenciar la segunda de la tercera persona del singular utilizando los respectivos pronombres antepuestos al verbo. Estos se mencionan, cuando menos, una vez en cada oración o período. ... En la zona del Cibao estas expresiones más o menos redundantes coinciden curiosamente con la utilización del pronombre fósil *ello* como sujeto antepuesto a verbos ‘impersonales’” [‘In contemporary Dominican speech one finds the need to differentiate between second and third persons more and more by inserting the respective pronouns before the verb. These are used at least once in each sentence or turn. ... In the Cibao region, these more or less redundant expressions coincide, curiously, with the use of the fossil pronoun *ella* acting as subject before “impersonal” verb forms’] (1975: 164–165).
8. The preponderance of subject pronouns in the utterances below: (i) demonstrates overt subject pronouns with specific and nonspecific human reference, (ii) demonstrates overt subject pronoun with nonhuman reference, (iii) demonstrates personal and impersonal neutral pronoun *uno* ‘one’, and (iv) demonstrates the overt expletive pronoun.
 - (i) Ellos me dijeron que yo tenía anemia ... Si ellos me dicen que yo estoy en peligro cuando ellos me entren la aguja por el ombligo, yo me voy a ver en una situación de estrés.
‘They told me that I had anemia ... If they tell me that I am in danger when they put the needle in my belly-button, I am going to find myself in a stressful situation.’
 - (ii) [Re: buses] Ellas se saben devolver en Villa; ellas pasan de largo.
‘They often turn around in Villa; they pass you by.’
 - (iii) Uno se da cuenta que uno es adulto ya: nadie te controla, nadie va a ver tus notas, nadie te dice si tú vas o no vas. Tú haces lo que tú te propones a hacer.
‘You realize that you are an adult: nobody controls you, nobody’s going to see your grades, nobody tells you if you can go or not. You do what you set out to do.’

- (iv) Ellos querían renovar el centro para el turismo y ello hay mucha gente que lo opone.
‘They wanted to renovate the center for tourism and there were many people who opposed it.’
9. The fixing of SVO word order is exemplified in the interrogative and nonfinite clauses that follow:
- (i) Papi, ¿qué ese letrero dice?
(cf. Papi, ¿qué dice ese letrero?)
‘Daddy, what does that sign say?’
- (ii) Ven acá, para nosotros verte.
(cf. Ven acá, para verte [nosotros].)
‘Come here, for us to see you.’
10. The dialect also employs an additional strategy as a means of circumventing the inverted order, namely, the pseudocleft illustrated in (i), which could explain the null operator focus strategy, in (ii), which is very pronounced in the Dominican vernacular (cf. Toribio 1992, 1993b, 2000b).
- (i) ¿Dónde fue que tú estudiaste?
‘Where did you study?’/‘Where was it that you studied?’
- (ii) Allá en los Estados Unidos yo hice fue el kinder.
‘There in the United States I went to kindergarten/it was kindergarten I went to.’
11. The variability exposed in the individual speech of the following speaker: “Déjeme yo contarle ... Cuando él vino la primera vez, que vino con veintiocho mil dólares en papeletas y dijo que le iba a echar plata a la casa y yo le dije que no se le puede echar plata a la casa sin tú hablar con los otros hermanos tuyos, ¿tú oyes? porque después cuando yo me muera, tú te vas a hacer dueño de la casa tú solo ¿y los otros qué van a hacer? ... ¡Ay, ese hombre gastó un dinero ahí! ¡Y de luz que pagaba una cantidad! Sin consumir la luz. Porque ello no hay luz, aquí no hay luz, no ... Una vez le dijo ladrón al jefe de la compañía, porque no hay necesidad de que hayan apagones habiendo dinero. Ya agua hay, y va a haber más agua todavía. ... Ya aquí no nos falta agua, ya aquí no nos falta agua. Y cuando conecte otra tubería, habrá en la llave ya, ... sí ello viene un poquitico ya en la llave ya. ... Yo me bebo yo solo un litro de Remi Martin ... a mí no me hace nada, y es lo único que tengo. ¿Tú sabes qué hago yo con mi cama? Me la preparo antes de yo ponerme a beber, por si acaso me emborrache” [‘Let me tell you. ... When he came for the first time, he came with twenty-eight thousand dollars in bills and said that he was going to come to invest money into the house and I told him that you can’t invest money into the house without you speaking with your brothers, you hear, because later when I die, you will become owner of the house all by yourself, and what will the others do? ... Oh, that man spent a great deal of money there! ... And in electricity he paid a huge amount! Without consuming electricity. Because there is no electricity, there is no electricity. ... One time he called the chief of the company a thief, because there is no need for there to be power outages when there is money. There is water now, and there will be more water yet. ... We don’t lack in water, we don’t lack water. ... And when I connect the other pipe, there will be (water) in the tap, ... yes, there is already a little in the tap. ... I drink a liter of Remi Martin by myself ... it does nothing to me, and it’s all I have. Do you know what I do with my bed? I prepare it before I set to drinking, just in case I get drunk’].
12. In this, Toribio draws on the findings of extensive research reported in the literature. Remarking on the potential import from the African languages that were carried to the

Caribbean region, Lipski (1994) affirms that “no major innovation in pronunciation, morphology or syntax in Latin American Spanish is due exclusively to the former presence of speakers of African languages or of any form of Afro-Hispanic language, creole or otherwise” (1994: 133). And speaking specifically to Dominicans’ continued contact with the French-based creole of the adjoining nation, Lipski states, “the impact of Haitian Creole on Dominican Spanish is largely confined to the rural border region, and to life on the sugar plantations” (1994: 237). Finally, in like manner, Jiménez Sabater (1975: 168) cautions against attributing the innovations to linguistic contact with English: “Un rasgo morfosintáctico tan característico difícilmente habría podido calar de modo tan profundo en una masa analfabeta como la de nuestro país, donde predomina, antes bien, el arcaísmo castellano — o la evolución de tendencias lingüísticas netamente hispanas — y en la que apenas se cuentan escasos préstamos léxicos de otros idiomas, por oposición a lo que sucede con otras zonas antillanas como Puerto Rico en donde también es corriente este orden de palabras” [‘A morpho-syntactic feature could have hardly reached so deeply into the illiterate masses of our country, where the linguistic tendencies lean toward the use of archaic Castilian forms or of typically Hispanic solutions and where lexical loans from other languages are rare and strikingly different from what occurs in other Caribbean areas like Puerto Rico where this word order is also common’]. We must, therefore, look beyond cross-linguistic contact in explicating the presence of the attested linguistic forms.

13. In minimalist terms (Chomsky 1993, 1995), speakers acquire two I-grammars with opposing strengths for nominal features on the functional projections TENSE and AGR (Toribio 2000a, 2000b, forthcoming a).
14. The intuition and inspiration for examining these and other affective and social factors that enter into language loyalty are found in Johnson’s (1998) thesis on Dominican cultural and racial identity. Although that work did not highlight the nature of the linguistic issues of interest here, the connections between language and cultural identity, on the one hand, and between language and race, on the other, were recurring themes.
15. Most Dominicans refuse to refer to the variety as Creole, instead referring to it as *patois*, “implying (intentionally or not) that Haitians have not yet managed to speak a proper language” (Wucker 1999: xv).
16. *Prieto* is a descriptor, often a term of endearment, but also commonly used derogatorily for a dark-skinned person.
17. The former observation is indeed well founded — the Cibao valley yields a substantial number of Dominican immigrants.
18. Labov (1982) coined the term “linguistic insecurity” to describe how speakers subordinate and devalue their own language.
19. It should not go unnoticed that the varieties of the dialect that are singled out for attention are linked with other national origins. The popular consensus is that the “best” Spanish language variety approximates the Castilian norm, and the “worst” variety is spoken by those who, by dint of birth or social circumstance, are believed to be influenced by the African substratum.
20. Several of the New York informants indicated that when they spoke Spanish, they were regarded as poor and uneducated, but when they spoke English, their pronunciation identified them only as Hispanic; the clear implication is that Dominicans, among Hispanics, are most disadvantaged. This finding is consonant with García et al. (1988).
21. *Casimente* includes the (redundant) adverbial morpheme *mente*, equivalent to ‘ly’ in English.
22. A reviewer notes that the pleonastic *ello* is “definitely on the decline in the D.R., although perhaps not in the Dominican diaspora.” We coincide in this reviewer’s

judgment that “the sort of ethnic pride that is evident in New York has its roots in the Dominican Republic, rather than, or in addition to, the multi-ethnic NYC environment.”

23. In this respect, it merits pointing out that Dominicans’ self-conscious evaluation of their pronunciation over other linguistic properties does not correspond to the assessments of other Hispanic groups toward the Dominican vernacular. As many of the individual features (e.g. the /s/-reduction and /n/ velarization) may resonate with speakers from other Latin American nations (though not with the frequency or amplitude attested among Dominicans), the latter speakers signal the overuse of subject pronouns and the lack of inversion in questions as uniquely Dominican.
24. It is probable that these linguistic differences or, more accurately, peer and teacher attitudes toward these distinguishing linguistic characteristics play an important part in the educational underperformance of many Dominican students. See Torres-Saillant and Hernández (1998) and Grasmuck and Pessar (1996) for interpretations of the 1990 U.S. Census data on academic achievement.
25. There is evidence, however, that this is not the case for young Dominicans. As they develop the ability to alternate between their languages, they also develop the ability to code-switch, especially with in-group peers. In so doing, they may be viewed as revitalizing and reinventing the vernacular.
26. Comparable manifestations of the phenomena of covert and overt prestige are widely reported in the literature (see, for instance, Labov’s New York study, Macaulay’s Norwich study, Eckert’s study on jocks and burnouts, Zentella’s study of *El bloque*); for the speech communities studied, there is an awareness of which are the “right” varieties, although there will also be competing constructions of social acceptability.
27. Today, about one million Dominicans reside in the US, concentrating predominantly along the eastern seaboard, with an estimated 69% in New York, and they have continued to immigrate in large numbers (cf. Lobo and Salvo 1997). The 1990 Census reports 511,297 Dominicans in the US, a figure that does not account for undocumented residents (cf. Torres-Saillant and Hernández 1998; Grasmuck and Pessar 1996).
28. Of course, the situation is more complex for children, who may identify with the linguistic and cultural norms of the larger society. But, as noted here and elsewhere (cf. Zentella 1997), for many children the fluent command of Spanish and English affords a unique dual identity.
29. Therefore, the dichotomous model of migrants as settlers or sojourners is ill-suited in accommodating the facts of Dominican immigration and return migration (Guarnizo 1997).
30. In the 1990 census, 50% of Dominicans in New York City identified themselves as mulatto or other and 25% self-identified as black. Grasmuck and Pessar (1996) note that skin color is a significant predictor of poverty, with black and mulatto Dominicans suffering higher poverty levels than white Dominicans.
31. The result has been a propagating of the sentiment that African heritage is negative and shameful and an enforcing of white supremacy, positions that Dominicans publicly disavow but privately uphold. One informant recalls the racial politics surrounding a previous election: “Nosotros perdimos unas elecciones porque al candidato lo acusaron de haitiano. Lo humillaron, le hicieron de todo. Cuando lo necesitaton para ir al Club de París a intervenir por República Dominicana con un atraso de una deuda, era blanco y buen mozo, pero cuando quiso ser presidente ya es prieto y feo y haitiano. Y aquí hay negros, negros, más prietos que el haitiano ... a mí me da pena y vergüenza como pensamos nosotros” [“We lost some elections because the candidate was accused of being Haitian. They humiliated him, they did everything to him. When they needed

- him to go to the Paris Club to intervene on behalf of the Dominican Republic with a delay on a loan, then he is white and handsome, but when he wanted to be president he was black and ugly and Haitian. And there are blacks, blacks, blacker than Haitians here ... I feel sorry and embarrassed at the way we think].
32. This is reminiscent of the biblical passage of the Gileads' identification of comrades through the pronunciation of the word 'shibboleth'.
 33. In the century preceding, when Haiti declared its victory over the French, Jean-Jacques Dessalines ordered that all French who remained on the island be killed; they were identified by their inability to sing *Nanett alé nan fontain, cheche dlo, crich-a li cassé* ['Nanette went to the fountain, looking for water, but her jug broke'] with the requisite African cadences.
 34. Haitians are repeatedly blamed for all manner of social ills, from low wages and high unemployment, to malaria and syphilis, to overall moral deformity and societal stagnation, with a vehemence that leads to original reasoning, as evidenced by one informant's musings: "Aquí en el país hay al rededor de un millón de haitianos que viven aquí. Ya los obreros de la construcción en la República Dominicana son haitianos en un ochenta por ciento. ... los picadores de caña de los ingenios azucarero en un noventa por ciento son haitianos también. Lo que son los trabajos más duros que se hacen actualmente: la caña y la construcción. Pero ¿qué pasa? Eso al mismo tiempo es una mano de obra barata, es una demanda agregada en la economía, pero también representa el atraso de la sociedad dominicana. Mientras aparezca un hombre que trabaje por pocos pesos una jornada de trabajo, una persona nunca va a tener un tractor en el campo, porque esa mano de obra está barata y está ahí. Igual sucede en la construcción: tú siempre vas a ver, durante mucho tiempo hasta que esto no cambie, un hombre con un pico y una pala" ['Here in the country there are about a million Haitians that come here. The construction workers are eighty percent Haitian already ... the sugar cane cutters in the sugar mills are ninety percent Haitian too. The hardest jobs that are done today: the sugarcane and construction. But, what happens? That while it is an inexpensive labor force, it is an addition to the economy, but it also represents the decay of Dominican society. While there is a man who works a full day for a few pesos, nobody will ever have a tractor in the countryside, because that manpower is cheap and it is there. The same happens with construction: you will always see, for some time until this changes, a man with a pick and a shovel'].
 35. To cite the historian Moya Pons (1981: 25), "Dominicans perceived themselves as a very special breed of Spaniards, living in the tropics with dark skins." But recent years have witnessed increased indisposition toward Spanish cultural and colonial heritage in the Dominican Republic (cf. Sorensen 1997), and Dominicans have resurrected the past and constructed a Taino-influenced ancestry to explain their color (Wucker 1999).
 36. The vast majority of Dominicans call themselves *mestizo* or *mulato*, though even within these categories, numerous subtle shadings are recognized — e.g. *trigueño*, *grifo*, *indio claro*, *indio oscuro*, *jabao*, *canela*, *moreno* (all forms produced in the interviews). These are commonly buttressed by reference to related desirable or undesirable physical characteristics, such as hair textures and size of the nose, lips, hips, and buttocks (cf. Johnson 1998).
 37. In this context, Dominicans "face the very real prospect of having their educational or economic achievements dismissed or devalued by the host society. Many immigrants retain contacts with a home society whose members, they hope, will value their compatriots' sacrifices and achievements" (Pessar 1997: 4). Thus, the institutional racism that confronts Dominicans in the US also contributes to the transnational processes and structures.

38. Not wanting to be “confused” with African Americans, Dominicans are rendered especially susceptible to social strategies of subordination, appropriating the discourse and exclusionary practices that work to their own disadvantage. As aptly observed by Grasmuck and Pessar (1996: 290), the dilemma arises “when Dominicans with African features or dark skin, regardless of their social sense of self, find themselves identified by many in the United States as Black and are discriminated against on that basis (rather than language, for example), and are often not prepared to interpret discriminations on these grounds.”
39. Thus, not unlike the *perejil* touchstone of the Trujillo era, the Spanish language plays a vital separatist function, isolating Dominicans from their African and African-American neighbors.
40. These findings are viewed as supporting Giles’s ethnolinguistic identity theory, which suggests that when ethnic identity is perceived as important, individuals will make themselves favorably distinct on dimensions such as language.

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