

## Ways of Speaking in a Mexican Transnational Community

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Radio announcers on Spanish-speaking stations in Chicago frequently ask those who call in, Where are you calling from? Then, when the caller responds with, for example, Elgin (a city near Chicago) or Chicago itself, the announcer then asks, Where are you from in Mexico? If the caller then says, for example, Michoacán, the announcer then follows a routine similar to the one below (from a station that broadcasts from Aurora, Illinois): he gleefully shouts, *Bueno! Y en Chicago, Michoacán, ¿qual manda?* (OK! And in Chicago, Michoacán, what (station) rules?), to which the caller responds, *La Ley manda!* (The Law rules!). *La Ley*, the most expressively *ranchero* FM station in the Chicago area, has named itself playfully, with tongue in cheek. “The Law” refers both to the top billing the station claims for itself and to U.S. law enforcement, the latter potentially troubling to migrants living in Chicago without legal papers. By appropriating this source of trouble as the very name of the station, the announcers, and by extension their listeners, enact a typically *ranchero* assertive stance by joking about such potential danger. This stance, though enacted by both men and women, usually indexes a dominant masculinity, and many well-worn phrases in Mexican Spanish personify “the law” and use *mandar* and other similar verbs to invoke absolute authority, for example of parents, particularly fathers, within the home: *¿Quién manda aquí?* (Who rules around here?). Such hierarchical authority is especially characteristic of *ranchero*-based societies that valorize order as *respeto* (see Valdés, 1996: 121; Farr, forthcoming). The radio routine, then, echoes the authority evoked by these phrases, and this is repeated many times each day, which delights and then becomes ingrained in the minds of thousands of listeners.

What is taken for granted in this routine is the cohesiveness of Chicago and, say, Michoacán. The announcer seamlessly blends two distant places, each one far from the national border that separates Mexico and the U.S. (see Figure1). This verbal blending of two locations accurately depicts the on-the-ground experiences of daily living in transnational social fields that characterizes migrants’ lives—of which radio announcers are well aware. For example, a recent Saint’s Day fiesta in the *rancho* cost 30,000 pesos, one quarter of which (about \$850) was contributed by people in Chicago. Even more notable, a committee in Chicago recently gathered \$100,000 (many households contributing \$1000 each) to construct a plaza in the *rancho*, complete with kiosk, electric lights, and water fountain. The families in this study thus continuously maintain multiple links with people on both sides of the border, and, in fact, frequently move back and forth across the border themselves, either to visit or to live for varying periods over the course of their lives. Of course, such back-and-forth movement is easier and more frequent for those with legal papers; those without tend to remain either in the *rancho* or in Chicago for very long periods. Nevertheless, the multiple connections and the frequent cross-border mobility construct a trans national community in relatively constant communication, probably quite unlike migrant communities in past centuries that relied on letters rather than the telephone for such transnational communication, as was the case during the massive German migrations to the U.S. in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Kamphoefner, Helbich, and Sommer, 1991).

Moreover, daily discourse, whether in Chicago or in the *rancho*, is peopled with those *en el otro lado* (on the other side); in fact, much talk is about talk that took place “on the other side.” The instance of *relajo* (a joking activity) that I examine here, in fact, took place in Chicago, but it recounts previous talk that took place in Mexico. Such talk reinforces the social bonds that include all those within the transnational community, whether they are in Chicago or Mexico at the moment. For most families in this social network, an important goal is to own their own home in Chicago and to construct one in the *rancho*, and many already have already met this goal.

My first visit to the *rancho* deeply impressed upon me its connection with Chicago: English print, with specific references to institutions in Chicago (the Bulls basketball team,<sup>1</sup> construction companies, television channels and radio stations, restaurants, etc.) is everywhere, on clothing, ash trays, dishes, calendars, etc. Most houses had a pickup truck parked in front, usually with Illinois plates; one truck in particular exhibited a decal in the rear window depicting “Chicago Winter” complete with falling snow—in jarring contrast to the dry sunny weather in which I viewed it (see photo). When I joked that the *rancho* seemed to be a suburb of Chicago, my intended joke was taken seriously, and I was told, Well, yes, it’s about a 45 hour drive.

If Chicago is endemic in the *rancho*, so the *rancho* is endemic in Chicago. People fill the streets of Mexican neighborhoods in Chicago dressed as they would in Western Mexico: men with cowboy hats, embroidered belts, tight jeans, and mustaches; women with *rebozos* tightly wrapped around themselves and the young children they carry as protection from the early morning chill. Children skip home from elementary school clad in Mexican-style school uniforms (navy blue skirts or pants and light blue shirts). Mexican music spills out on sidewalks from nearby stores, and people cross themselves as they pass Catholic churches named for European saints that now have shrines to the Virgin of Guadalupe, Mexico’s Patron Saint. Mexican street vendors sell *atole*, a corn-based drink, and *elote*, chile-sprinkled corn-on-the-cob, just as they do in Mexico, as well as frozen popsicles (*paletas*), an industry built by *rancho* settlements slightly to the west of the micro-region in this study (Quinones, 2001). Thus have transmigrants transformed both Western Mexico and Chicago, imprinting themselves and their practices on the built environment. In the rest of this paper, I briefly describe these two sites as background for the discussion of language use that follows.

### The Mexican Setting

The *rancho* is situated in northwestern Michoacán. The map in Figure 1 shows the drive between Chicago and the *rancho* and locates Michoacán in western Mexico, bordering Guanajuato and Jalisco, two other states, like Michoacán (and especially northwest Michoacán), with heavy migration to Chicago. Within northwestern Michoacán, the *rancho* is part of the *municipio* (township) of Tingüindín; the town of Tingüindín has about 5,000 inhabitants out of the total of 10,000 for the entire township. The *rancho*, a hamlet of about 400 people, is located

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<sup>1</sup> Such references were especially frequent during the period when Michael Jordan and the Bulls made all Chicagoans proud of their city.

at the intersection of the highway and the railroad tracks about 4.5 kilometers northwest of Tingüindín—a distance that takes ten minutes to drive and 45 minutes to walk. The micro-region around the *rancho*, within which people from the *rancho* travel regularly, includes Zamora to the north (towards Guadalajara) and Los Reyes to the south (see Figure 2). Because it is located along a major highway, travel by bus is easy in either direction, and people do so frequently to purchase food, clothing, and agricultural products, or (for some) to go to work or to school beyond the primary grades (*primaria*). Another significant town on the highway from the *rancho* to Zamora, at which the bus stops, is Tarecuato, an indigenous (Indian) *pueblo* with a large market where *ranchera* women shop early on Sunday mornings. Tarecuato is a center of Indian life in this micro-region and, as such, it is used as an index of Indian identity in everyday conversation. Another significant town on the map is Cotija (to the west of Tingüindín), known as an originally Spanish settlement and a center of *ranchero* society. These places are important to *ranchero* identity in this region, since *rancheros* distinguish themselves from indigenous Mexicans (Indians) and emphasize their primarily Spanish cultural (and genetic) heritage (Barragán, 1997; Taylor, 1933; González, 1974). Although most research literature assumes rural Mexicans simply to be generic (and usually Indian or Indian-descent) *campesinos* (peasants), a few recent studies have shown rural *rancheros* to be notably non-indigenous in orientation and history. Briefly, this orientation is largely non-communal, and instead shows a healthy dose of liberal, and entrepreneurial, individualism, even within the context of a complementary emphasis on familism (Farr, 2000, forthcoming).

The higher altitude Sierra to the west of the *rancho* is called the *Meseta Tarasca*, or Tarascan Tableland, for its many Indian villages. This area, mountainous and cold in winter, was unattractive to Spanish exploitation (West, 1973), but Spanish settlers interested in stock raising established *estancias* (large ranches) and *ranchos* (small property ranches), as well as an hacienda, in this area west of the Sierra. Africans, mulattoes, and Indians worked as cowherds in these settlements, and Africans and mulattoes worked in the sugar mills (*trapiches*) and sugar factories (*ingenios*) in the warmer climate to the south of the *rancho*. West notes:

Immediately west of the Sierra lies a southward prong of the northern plateau landscape, which, like the North, was early settled by whites and mulattoes. At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the large graben valley of Cotija was occupied by cattle *estancias*, and the settlement of Cotija was composed entirely of Spanish blood. As late as 1800 this valley...was an island of Spaniards and some mulattoes surrounded by Tarascans. A few Spanish ranchers and traders settled also in Tingüindín, a large Indian village at the western edge of the Sierra... (West, 1973: 14)

The *rancho* itself is nestled in a small hilly plain on the edge of the mountains at an altitude of 1700 meters (a mile high). Until the 1970s, the economy was based on subsistence farming, primarily corn and beans, and stock-raising (cows and pigs). With dollars from Chicago, the economy was transformed in the last three decades from subsistence to commercial agriculture, primarily avocados, for the national and international market. This transformation illustrates the aspects of *ranchero* identity documented in my own work and that of others: independence, individuality, toughness, and, most importantly, an entrepreneurial spirit (Barragán, 1997; Farr, 2000a, forthcoming; González, 1974). Migration, as one woman told me, has changed everything. Before, everyone was

*...muy pobre, no habia trabajo, dormien en petates...El rancho tenia ni luz, ni carretera.  
No habian vegetales—comien pura lechita y huevos.*

...very poor, there was no work, they slept on woven mats...The rancho had no electricity,  
no highway. There weren't any vegetables—they ate only milk and eggs. (FN 980627)

With such changed circumstances, this woman predicted that the migrant flow to the U.S. would slow down and that people in the U.S. would return to the *rancho*. Although some (younger) people have remained in the *rancho*, many others have continued to find their way to Chicago, and although, over time, some families have returned to live (either permanently or temporarily) in the *rancho*, many more have continued to live, work, and go to school in Chicago. The *rancho* is fast becoming a place of retirement, and a place in which to relax while on vacation from school and work in Chicago.

### The Chicago Setting

A number of scholars have noted that the Mexican experience in the Midwest has been different from that of the Southwest (Gonzales, 1999; Kerr, 1976; Rosales and Simon, 1987[1981]; Valdés, 1991, 2000). Five reasons are given for this: first, Mexicans followed several decades of Eastern and Southern European immigration; second, they did not share the history of conquest, land loss, or subordination found in the Southwest; third, urban settlement patterns more closely parallel those of European immigrants to the Midwest than those of Mexican immigrants to the Southwest; and fourth, whites in the Midwest showed a higher degree of ethnic diversity that worked against unity; and fifth, the larger presence of African Americans in the Midwest provided a buffer for Mexicans from racism on the part of whites (Valdés, 2000). Kerr notes that,

Chicago...had been absorbing successive generations of uneducated and unskilled European peasants, most of them Catholics, for decades. By 1920 these immigrants had already established themselves in the city. They were part of the occupational structure, the parishes, the schools, the welfare system, and the social and political institutions...To some extent the city received the Mexicans simply as the latest immigrants, obliged to suffer the traditional hardships of restricted and unstable employment at low wages, congested and dilapidated housing, and prejudice against alien newcomers...Mexican immigration, however, came at a time when the need for unskilled labor was decreasing. It coincided, moreover, not only with the emergence of a more educated and skilled generation of white ethnics, but also with the large postwar migration of unskilled Blacks to Chicago...Although this [racial and cultural] prejudice [against Mexicans] was less harsh and historically rooted than in the southwest...[it was still] a handicap. (Kerr, 1976: 21)

In spite of hardships and discrimination, Mexicans continued to migrate to Chicago throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although Mexicans had come to Chicago since the turn of the century, when both Mexican and U.S. railroads were complete, the first period of significant migration was from 1916 through the 1920s, when Mexicans were recruited to work on railroads

and in industry. The upheaval of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) accelerated migration, as did the *Cristero* Rebellion in Western Mexico from 1926-1929. After a period of both voluntary and forced repatriation during the 1930s, Mexicans were again recruited as *braceros* (laborers) after World War II. Since 1960, the Mexican population in Chicago has increased at an astonishing rate (see Figure 3). Most Mexican migrants to Chicago have been from rural Western Mexico, especially the states of Jalisco, Michoacán, and Guanajuato. These three states accounted for two-thirds of Mexican immigrants to Chicago in the 1920s (Rosales, 1995: 193), and they still account for a majority of Mexicans in the Chicago area. These states, comprising Western Mexico, are heavily *ranchero* areas and, in fact, include the “cradle of *ranchero* society” (Barragán, 1997).

Mexicans were recruited to Chicago for work on railroads, and in the meat-packing and steel industries (wages were lowest for railroad work, somewhat higher for meat-packing, and highest in steel work). They settled close to these industries in three original neighborhoods (see Figure 4): the Near West Side (railroads), Back-of-the-Yards (meat-packing), and South Chicago (steel). Mexicans followed Italians, Poles, and Slovaks to these neighborhoods, which already had problematic housing, serious economic disadvantages, problems of discrimination and ethnic interaction, as well as gangs (Kerr, 1976). Within these conditions, Mexicans established communities that were well-established by 1940, and the Near West Side “was the [entire] region’s Mexican business, literary, and cultural capitol” (Valdés, 2000: 36), with its proliferation of Mexican social clubs and societies, groceries, restaurants, bakeries, and other shops. In the other two original neighborhoods, Mexicans lived alongside (and intermarried with) Poles, Italians, and other ethnic immigrants. A fourth community emerged in the mid-1960s, after urban renewal (and the construction of the new University of Illinois at Chicago) forced Mexicans (and Italians) to move from the Near West Side. Mexicans moved a few blocks south to the Pilsen neighborhood at 18<sup>th</sup> Street (see Figure 4), a neighborhood that then became the port-of-entry for Mexicans until the 1990’s, when Mexicans began moving directly to locations across the city and suburbs, rather than arriving in Pilsen, and later moving “out” if and when their fortunes improved.

During the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, economic restructuring eliminated the previously abundant jobs in heavy industry, replacing them with jobs in smaller factories and in the service sector. Chicago became a global city in an increasingly globalized world. The transnational nature of Mexican immigrant life, as described here, is part of the larger phenomenon of globalization, in which large numbers of people, capital, and material goods regularly move across national borders (Farr and Reynolds, 2003). This, of course, has changed Chicago in many ways. The sheer presence of so many Mexicans, in neighborhood after neighborhood in Chicago (see the map in Figure 4), changes churches, schools, and other institutions in terms of language and other social practices. Churches in Mexican neighborhoods, for example, now have altars to the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Patron saint of Mexico. Schools have Spanish-English bilingual programs. Voting instructions are mailed out not only in English, but also in Spanish (as well as Polish and Chinese). Mexico, as already noted, has changed as well from the repeated influx of people, capital, and goods from Chicago that accompany migrants on return trips.

The large numbers of Mexicans in Chicago has impacted not only Chicago in general, but other Spanish-speaking populations in particular. Although a common Latino identity began to

emerge in the 1970s and 1980s (Padilla, 1985), the dramatic increase in primarily the Mexican population swamped this process (Valdés, 2000). People in Chicago, then, refer to themselves as Mexican, Puerto Rican, etc, rather than Hispanic or Latino (Elias-Olivares & Farr, 1991). Notably, other Spanish speakers are said to “sound Mexican” when they return to their own homelands, so overwhelming is the Mexican presence in Spanish-language contexts.

Mexicans in Chicago do not generally move into African American neighborhoods, which are primarily to the west of the Loop (see Figure 4) in Community Areas #25 - 29 and on the south side of Chicago in Community Areas #36-38, 40, 42-43, 67-69, and further south. Predominantly Mexican neighborhoods on the south side of Chicago, then, are located between African American neighborhoods on their east toward the lake and white ethnic neighborhoods to their west, notably the heavily Polish neighborhoods in Community Areas #57, 62, 56, 64 (Skertic and Lawrence, 2002), where newly migrating Poles continue to arrive, especially in Archer Heights (#57) (Herguth, 2002). Thus Mexicans primarily have moved into Eastern European-dominated neighborhoods and followed them west and south. This situation was summed up humorously by a young man in the network who has built a successful mortgage business in Chicago. As we stood in front of his father’s home in the *rancho* during a recent visit (for which he drove his Mercedes down from Chicago), he said to me (in English), “We move in, and the Poles move out. The blacks move in, and we move out!”

### Description of Study

For over a decade I have observed ordinary language use among one social network of Mexican transnational families. As a participant-observer within this network of families, I gathered data both in Chicago and in their village of origin in Michoacán, Mexico, including extensive field notes and 150 audiotapes of daily conversation and informal interviews. The focus of the larger study has been on culturally embedded ways of using oral and written language (Farr, 1993, 1994a, b, c, 1998, 2000a, b, forthcoming; Farr and Guerra, 1995; Guerra, 1999; Guerra and Farr, 2000) within the framework of the ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1974a; Bauman and Sherzer, 1989). A forthcoming book focuses on identity construction in three culturally salient “ways of speaking” (Hymes, 1974b); here I briefly present two of these ways of speaking, *respeto* and *relajo*, which are often positioned in opposition to each other. *Respeto* (respect) affirms social order, based on a gender and age-based hierarchy that coheres in a patriarchal system (Stern, 1995). *Relajo*, in contrast, is a verbal play, or joking, activity in which the social order is turned upside down so as to critique and perhaps facilitate cultural change. I will illustrate each of these ways of speaking with selected instances from the audiotapes, after briefly describing the network and how I carried out the study.

Members of these families first migrated to Chicago in 1964; first men came, then their wives and children, and, eventually, single women. In Chicago they have worked in factories and construction; most of the women have worked in food preparation, glass painting, and other factories, and almost all of the men have worked in railroad construction. Chicago is, as one woman put it, *para mejorar* (to improve {our lives}). The *rancho* then is *para descansar*. (to rest). Especially for the oldest generation in the network, in either site, it can be said that they form the fabric of each other's lives; that is, they form a dense and multiplex social network

(Milroy, 1980), since not only are they related by kinship and *compadrazgo* (co-parenting fictive kinship), but they also work, live, and socialize together. Although the second and third generations have extended their networks through work and especially school, even these younger members are still closely tied to the larger network, both in Chicago and in the *rancho*.

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

### Ways of Speaking and *Rancho/a* Identity

Farr (forthcoming) analyzes three ways of speaking that construct *rancho/a* identities: *franqueza* (frank, candid, and direct speech), *respeto* (respectful speech based on gender and age hierarchies), and *relajo* (anti-structural joking speech). *Franqueza*, as the *rancho* “primary framework” for speaking (Goffman, 1974), is a verbal style that is emblematically *rancho*, indexing the self-assertion and dominance that are publicly associated with masculinity. *Ranchera* women, however, far from fitting the public stereotype of “good” Mexican women as self-abnegating, docile, and subservient to men (Melhuus, 1996), frequently use *franqueza* to assert their own independence and individualism. Often this occurs within the verbal play frame of *echando relajo* (joking around) (Farr, 1994c, 1998), when the two ways of speaking overlap, but it also occurs in serious, non-play talk. Among these families, much talk is constructed for aesthetic pleasure, and performances of verbal art are frequent. Verbal art is used persuasively, to construct or transform social identities, especially those involving gender. In what follows I describe *respeto* as the backdrop against which *relajo* can be humorous. That is, *respeto* constructs and affirms traditional age and gender hierarchies, which are then either affirmed (by men) or undermined (by women) as they engage in *relajo*.

#### *Respeto*

*Respeto* ideology guides much verbal and non-verbal interaction between network

members. Valdés defines this term:

Respeto in its broadest sense is a set of attitudes toward individuals and/or the roles that they occupy. It is believed that certain roles demand or require particular types of behavior. Respeto, while important among strangers, is especially significant among members of the family. Having respeto for one's family involves functioning according to specific views about the nature of the roles filled by the various members of the family (e.g., husband, wife, son, brother). It also involves demonstrating personal regard for the individual who happens to occupy that role. (Valdés, 1996: 130)

Thus respect is owed to people not simply out of a sense of personal dignity, but also because of the roles those persons occupy. Fathers and mothers are always to be respected, even when they don't always live up to the obligations of their positions. Even adult children, if they are still living at home (e.g., unmarried daughters), are expected to obey their parents and do what they are told to do. The roles of father, mother, brother, sister, grandmother, etc. include rights, obligations, and privileges. Fathers, for example, are expected to work hard and provide for the family, and they have the right to have their commands followed. Mothers are expected to manage the entire household, be the spiritual center of the family, and socialize the children so that they are *bien educado* (well mannered), disciplined, and responsible. Sisters and brothers also have parts to play within the family. Brothers assume responsibility for and control over sisters, especially if the father is not present, and sisters are expected to take care of brothers, including their "honor," especially with regard to restricting their own sexuality and mobility. Since age as well as gender organizes these social relations, older siblings often have more control over and responsibility for younger siblings, somewhat regardless of gender.

Lauria (1964) defines *respeto* (among Puerto Rican men) as a quality or image of the self that ensures the *dignidad* (dignity) of both oneself and one's interlocutor. He ties *respeto* not only to dignity, but also to honor, and to "ceremonial courtesy" (Lauria, 1964: 55). Both Valdés' and Lauria's definitions of *respeto* invoke honor. The old honor code of Spain was brought to Mexico by conquistadors, priests, and colonists. The word honor is rarely used within this social network, even though a sense of honor is still evident in what is considered misbehavior, often but not always sexual. This sense of honor is talked about as shame or modesty (*vergüenza*), and it is used in reference to both women and men. The term *sinvergüenza* (shameless) is considered the worst epithet one can be called. When a woman is a *sinvergüenza*, it usually is the result of her sexual (mis)behavior or drinking. When a man is called this, he has been terribly lax in maintaining his responsibilities to (his "defense" of) his family. Men or women who are simply *flojo/a* (lazy) are severely criticized, but they don't quite merit being called *sinvergüenzas*, a term reserved for more serious moral lapses.

This moral ideology is strikingly similar to that of the rural "plebian" folk of Pitt-Rivers' classic study of a Spanish village (1971). The honor/shame ideology in Mediterranean societies (Peristiany, 1966; Gilmore, 1987) involves both honor-virtue and honor-precedence; the former concerns morality and the latter concerns status, and they are interrelated. Ideally, each aspect of honor implicates the other. There are, however, class variations in this ideology. In both rural Spain and rural (*ranchero*) Mexico, people hue to traditional honor/shame constraints that are guided by moral considerations, especially sexual ones, since status considerations are largely irrelevant, given the generally egalitarian relations among farmers/*rancheros*. Both men and

women are expected not to commit adultery, although women are more severely judged for this moral failing than men, and men's masculine reputation (among other men) is even reinforced by such behavior, especially if the dalliance isn't made public and doesn't interfere with family responsibilities. For the urban middle class, however, honor/shame constraints include not only honor-virtue, but also honor-precedence, since considerations of status are, for them, unlike their poorer rural counterparts, relevant. Finally, the upper class elite, secure in their honor-precedence, are freer to disregard the constraints of honor-virtue. In Spain this includes upper class women as well as upper class men, according to Pitt-Rivers (1966: 63-4).

### Language and *respeto*

A mother and her teenaged daughter in the *rancho* described linguistic aspects of *respeto*: not using "bad" or taboo language (*no habla maldiciones*). They criticized a man, retired in the *rancho*, as well as his wife, for having a *boca suelta* (loose mouth) or a *lengua floja* (lazy tongue), saying that the wife in particular was *siempre hablando en doble sentido* (always talking with double [sexual] meaning), even about her own daughter. This daughter recently had been known to flirt (*coquear*), and the mother, complaining, told people (ironically) that she would send her to Tijuana to a *lugar para todos* (house of ill repute). My friend and her daughter strongly disapproved of such public talk; both the daughter's behavior and the mother's public talk about it undermined the family's *respeto*. Their opinion was that, even if a daughter were flirting, although she shouldn't be, it should not be publicly acknowledged, least of all by her own mother. Thus the public knowledge of behavior takes precedence over private realities, and one's (or one's family's) public "face" (Goffman, 1967) is the basis for *respeto*. Consequently, *respeto*, as Valdés (1996: 132) points out, involves "both the presentation of self before others as well as a recognition and acceptance of the needs of those persons with whom interactions [take] place." In the above scenario, the mother's presentation of self was lacking in *respeto* in two senses: she herself was using inappropriate language (with sexual *doble sentido*), and she was publicly acknowledging behavior that lessened her family's respect in the community. In doing so, she was not acting with respect toward her interlocutors either, who were offended by her (linguistic) behavior.

Language, then, while not the only kind of behavior important in maintaining *respeto*, plays a crucial part in doing so; in this sense, *respeto* involves language ideology, or beliefs about language that implicate social standing (Woolard, 1998). Linguistically, *respeto* primarily is signaled in Spanish by the choice of *tú* or *usted*, informal/intimate or formal/distant you. A number of studies have concluded that this traditional system is changing, and that *tú* is gaining ground over *usted* in many Spanish-speaking communities in Spain, Latin America, and the United States (Carricaburo, 1997; Correa-Uribe, 1995; Blas Arroyo, 1994-95; Sigüenza-Ortiz, 1996). This change is more reflective of younger than older generations, and it sometimes is correlated with urbanization and other social changes, such as a move toward more egalitarian social relations. In the United States, among Spanish-English bilinguals, the influence of English, which has only one second-person singular pronoun (you), is another factor in the simplification of this pronominal address system.

Most studies of *tú* and *usted* utilize the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1978/1989), linking *tú* with solidarity and intimacy and *usted* with power differentials and

distance. Such studies view pronoun choice as reflective of power/solidarity relations that are pre-existent in the context in which the language is used. An alternative perspective is to view these pronouns as referential indexicals (Silverstein, 1976), that is, linguistic signs that point to aspects of the context. As referential indexes, such pronouns refer to specific persons (e.g., the addressee), but they also refer to something much less concrete than a person: the speaker's affective disposition toward the addressee (Ochs, 1990). Such an affective disposition not only reflects but also constructs either the intimacy/solidarity or the status differentials (power relations) that the pronoun choices index. That is, when someone uses *tú*, he or she is communicating an attitude of either intimacy/solidarity or higher status/power, depending on the context (and the perceived status of the addressee). For example, reciprocal *tú* is normally expected (i.e., it is unmarked) either between speakers of relatively equal power and/or status, or between intimates; reciprocal *usted*, conversely, is expected between those who do not know each other well and/or to convey formality. In non-reciprocal use of these pronouns, *tú* is expected from those with more power and/or higher status in addressing those with less power and/or lower status; conversely, *usted* is expected from those with less power and/or lower status in addressing those with more power and/or higher status. Role relationships, especially familial ones, as well as domain of interaction (e.g., home, church, work), generational group, and speech event are important influences in the choice of *tú* or *usted*, at least traditionally (Sigüenza-Ortiz, 1996). As a rural, culturally conservative population, *rancheros* tend to preserve such verbal distinctions, even in an urban setting like Chicago, although this is more true of older than younger generations, especially those who are bilingual and thus possibly influenced by English.

Within these families, traditional norms for *tú/usted* usage are generally followed, emphasizing role authority and formality. Wives and husbands of the older generation, for example, frequently address each other with *usted* in front of others, a conservative usage that emphasizes their family roles, as in the following excerpt from an audiotape:

- Wife (to Husband): *Ay viejito no hay tortillas. Encargue si por favor.*  
 Oh, honey, there aren't any tortillas. {you formal} Get someone to get them, please.
- Husband: Ahh?
- Wife: *Encargue tortillas.*  
 {you formal} Order tortillas.
- Husband: *Ay vieja pero usted no se fija nunca en nada...¿no ya está usted grandota?*  
 Oh, honey, but you {formal} never ever pay attention to anything...Aren't you {formal} grown up already?

Traditional norms are also shown in other interactions. The solidarity of gender, as well as relatively equal status among adults of the same gender, generate reciprocal *tú* between women and (frequently, although not always) between men. Two factors, however, constrain the cross-gender use of *tú*: first, its potential interpretation as indicating (or creating) inappropriate intimacy, and second, the status differential between men and women, which still precludes the use of *tú* by women toward men, but not its use by men toward women in some contexts. Although other studies have concluded that gender is not influential in the choice of *tú* or *usted* (Carricaburo, 1997), it overwhelmingly influences such choices within this social network.

## *Relajo*

Although people in this network describe *relajo* as purely for diversion and fun, closer examination reveals that, in addition to being a humorous diversion, it carries more significance, particularly insofar as it serves to challenge (within a verbal play frame) the existing social order (Portilla, 1966). *Relajo*, then, embraces both poetics, i.e., the aesthetically pleasing rhetorical skills involved in the story and joke telling that goes on within the verbal frame of *relajo*, and politics, i.e., jointly-constructed resistance and challenge. *Relajo* is a way of speaking framed as play (Bateson, 1972) in which a stretch of behavior (here discourse) is “keyed” so as to be understood by participants as “not serious.” Keying might include smiles, raised eyebrows, an outrageous statement, and other signaling devices. Without such framing, the very same behavior would be taken entirely differently, i.e., seriously and with consequences. When people are “playing,” however, many normal boundaries are transgressed without such consequences. Within the verbal play frame of *relajo*, some individuals in this social network excel as performers of verbal art, telling personal anecdotes (*anecdotas*), stories (*cuentos*), and jokes (*chistes*), and, in general, play with language (Sherzer, 2003). When skilled individuals perform these genres, participants experience aesthetic pleasure, which often works to persuade them to adopt the performer's perspective on the topic at hand.

All of this requires a delicate balancing act: when everyone stays within the play frame, social order is maintained, even while individuals assert themselves, sometimes against the prevailing order (in which case the other participants usually support the initiator in such counter-discourse). If during *relajo* people tease too much or too insensitively, and/or the target doesn't manage to defend him or herself and expresses hurt and/or anger (and thus loses “face”), the play frame is broken and so, possibly, are inter-personal relations. In contrast, when all participants stay within the frame, *relajo* affirms inter-personal connections, and all individuals maintain their dignity and respect. Breakdowns in the *relajo* frame are rare among these families (there is only one instance in 130 tapes of ordinary conversation). One might ask, then, if *relajo*, like joking more generally, simply ends by affirming the status quo, as argued by Douglas (1968). I would argue, instead, following Limón (1982) and Briggs (1988), that such joking can promote change by providing a space within which the status quo can be perceived humorously at an emotional distance. In other words, *relajo* functions as a space in which tensions are alleviated and cultural change facilitated, i.e., *relajo* functions as a kind of built-in mechanism for considering change. The fact that virtually all instances of *relajo* in this study have focused on gender underscores the importance of gender in social relations and thus its potential for disruption leading to cultural change. In what follows, I explore an instance of all-female *relajo* that tackles this topic directly. During this *relajo*, a widow (E) recounts to her friend (R) and R's sister (L) in Chicago, a previous *relajo* during her recent trip to the *rancho*, in which she and an unmarried man with much land were being teased about getting together.

<p>1 <b>E:</b> <i>Y luego voltea Boní, y me pone cuidado</i>  2 <i>como /?/—{Laughter}</i></p> <p>3 <b>E:</b> <i>Y no la puse. Y, y yo, y yo este muy seria no,</i>  4 <i>yo muy seria acá y luego de, y luego este, “Je-</i>  5 <i>je.” El no más se reía “Je-je-je.” Dice la</i>  6 <i>pinche de, de esta te--¿cómo se llama?--Teyo,</i>  7 <i>“Saca un pasaporte Boni y se va, y se va con E</i>  8 <i>pa' todo el mundo.” Y saca la /?/. Ay.</i></p> <p>9 <b>R:</b> <i>Ay.</i></p> <p>10 <b>E:</b> <i>Oye L, el, el /?/ yo creo que este, le entró lo</i>  11 <i>pendejo ¿no? Se r'ía la pinche /?/ y Teyo d' él</i>  12 <i>hasta que más /?/. Otro día temprano viene a</i>  13 <i>decirle, “Oye muchacha, Teyo, yo no me puedo</i>  14 <i>casar con E porque es mi /pariente/” {Laughs}</i>  15 <i>Y yo diciendo “Qué pendejo, y ¿pa' qué se</i>  16 <i>acuerda de eso?”</i></p> <p>17 <b>L:</b> <i>¡Ay E! Y a ver dime luego que tú piense y</i>  18 <i>piense /?/ de verda'.</i></p> <p>19 <b>R:</b> <i>Como no la juntaba /?/ nada.</i></p> <p>20 <b>E:</b> <i>El no, él ni siquiera se fijaba.</i></p> <p>21 <b>L:</b> <i>¿Y qué dijiste, que era tu hermano?</i></p> <p>22 <b>R:</b> <i>O que hubiera dicho—</i></p> <p>23 <b>E:</b> <i>Yo le 'biera dicho que era mi compadre...Y</i>  24 <i>luego, luego 'ira, allá tam'ién, tiene una casita</i>  25 <i>a la bajada de la huerta, no.</i></p> <p>26 <b>R:</b> <i>Umjum. Sí.</i></p> <p>27 <b>E:</b> <i>Y tenía una cama...de puras tablas, no? Un</i>  28 <i>abugero en medio de este corte—Y luego este le</i>  29 <i>digo yo, le digo a la Güera, “Ay Güerita de mi</i>  30 <i>alma, aún que sea una cama, aún que—” yo</i>  31 <i>tendría que si me caiva* no me daba recio, está</i>  32 <i>de alta así. Le digo, “yo me aguantaba así,</i>  33 <i>pero solo que me escrituraran la huerta, pos</i>  34 <i>enseguida, pa' aguantar las aguayabas si no.”</i></p>	<p>And then Boni turns around, and he keeps an eye on me like /?/—{Laughter}</p> <p>And I didn't put it. And, and I, and I uh was very serious, right? I was very serious over here, and then uh— and then uh, “Hee, hee.” He just laughed, “Hee hee hee.” That damn uh, uh—what's her name?—Teyo says, “Get a passport Boni and go, and go with E all over the world.” And [s/he] takes out the /?/. Ay.</p> <p>Ay.</p> <p>Hey L, the, the /?/ I think that uh he got stupid, right? That damn /?/ laughed and Teyo laughed at him until they /?/. Early the next day he comes over to tell her, “Listen girl, Teyo, I can't marry E because she's my /relative/” {Laughs} And I'm saying “What an idiot, what does he remember that for?”</p> <p>Ay E! And tell me, after you were thinking and thinking /?/ really.</p> <p>Why didn't /?/ together.</p> <p>He didn't, he didn't even notice.</p> <p>And what did you say, that he was your brother?</p> <p>Or you could have said that—</p> <p>I would have said he was my compadre...And then look, over there he also has a house at the low side of the orchard, right?</p> <p>Uh huh. Yes.</p> <p>And he had a bed...of boards only, right? A hole of this size in the middle—And then, uh, I say, I say to Güera, “Oh, Güerita my dear, at least a bed, at least—” I figured that if I fell I would not hit myself hard, it's only so high. I tell her, “I would put up with that but only if he put the ranch in my name, right away, to wait for the guayabas at least.” {Laughs} Oh, no, no, but he</p>
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35 {Laughs} *Ay no, no, no, pero es rete loco /?/ y*  
 36 *luego ellas que se morían de la risa.*

37 **R:** *No, ya me las imagino.*

38 **E:** *Yo porque ya estoy--hasta le dije, “No oye,*  
 39 *olvídate que eres pariente de—” Y luego mira,*  
 40 *les digo yo, ahí estaba él ve'da', y les digo yo,*  
 41 *“No, de aquí pa' delante no, nadie va a decir*  
 42 *‘vamos a las guayabas con Boni’ si no van a*  
 43 *decir ‘vamos a las guayabas con Duvina.’ Y*  
 44 *allá me voy a ir yo con la retrocarga de Pelón y*  
 45 *el cabrón que entre a las guayabas y le suelto*  
 46 *un guamazo pa' que sepan que ya la huerta es*  
 47 *mía. Ni a los chiles, naiden\* me va a cortar*  
 48 *chiles.”*

49 {Laughter}

50 **E:** *No, y me aventaba ojitos de ves en*  
 51 *cuando...Y yo que sentía ganas de aay yo no sé*  
 52 *qué hacer de risa {quietly but emphatically}*  
 53 *Pero mira, la Güera y Teyo, las dos son tan*  
 54 *cabronas.*

55 **R:** *Ay, sí, sí, yo sé, yo sé. Aay.*

56 **E:** *Y dice un borrachito de lo que le están*  
 57 *haciendo burla /?/ con el borrachito, con el, con*  
 58 *la hermana del borrachito, le están haciendo—*  
 59 *y luego que se levanta el borrachito de allá de*  
 60 *'onde estaba sentado y dice, “Mire, con*  
 61 *muncho\* respeto le voy a decir—perdone y*  
 62 *respeto pues que,” {woman giggles} dice “Pero*  
 63 *yo le voy a decir una cosa,” dice, “Boni, Boni*  
 64 *oiga, ni con cuatro lumbradas por acá, ya no se*  
 65 *casa.” {Pounds on table} {Laughter}*

66 **E:** *'Tra yo me divertía tanto que /?/. ¡Ay hijita de*  
 67 *mi vida! {sighs} {Laughter}*

is so crazy /?/ and then they wanted to die laughing.

No, I [can] imagine how they were.

Because I'm already—I even told him, “No, listen, forget that you're a relative—” And then look, I tell them, he was there right? And I tell them, “No, from now on no one can say ‘Let's go to the guayabas at Boni's,’ but instead you're going to say, ‘Let's go to the guayabas at Duvina's.’ And I will go there with Pelon's shotgun and the bastard that goes into the guayabas I'm going to blast, so that they know that the orchard is mine. Nor the peppers, no one is going to cut my peppers.”

{Laughter}

No, and he would look my way [checking me out] once in a while...And I felt the urge to, ooh I don't know what because of the laughing, {quietly but emphatically} but look, Güera and Teyo, they are both such bitches.

Oh, yes, yes, I know, I know.

And a drunk says, about what they were making fun of /?/ with the drunk, with the, with the drunk's sister, they were making—and then the drunk gets up from over there where he was sitting and says, “Look, with all due respect I am going to say—excuse me and with respect,” {woman giggles} he says, “But I am going to tell you something,” he says, “Listen, Boni, Boni, not even with four bonfires over here [at his backside], will he get married.” {Pounds on table.} {Laughter}

Look I had so much fun that /?/. Oh, dear girl of mine! {sighs} {Laughter}



Bakhtin (1994[1965]) notes that most people spend inordinate amounts of time talking about talk, i.e., much of our discourse is metapragmatic. The *relajo* here is replete with metapragmatic discourse as a widow replays a previous speech-event, a *relajo* in Mexico during her recent visit there. As she talks about previous talk, she reports her own (humorous) speech in that previous *relajo*. The meaning of her self-quotations, the object language she reflects on here, is necessarily tied to the context in which it was uttered. So understanding her story requires some contextual information: 1) A man named Boni's reputation as an unmarried man with much coveted land, 2) the common practice of teasing unmarried people about getting married, and 3) the pressures on women to be deferential and submissive to men.

As in virtually all instances of *relajo* in this social network, reported speech (or what Tannen [1989] calls "constructed dialogue") is abundantly used to enliven stories. Here the narrator reports her own speech, constructing a dialogue in which she herself is the main speaker. As she quotes herself, she simultaneously expresses her attitudes toward and evaluations of some presupposed contextual information. These attitudes are expressed implicitly through such linguistic devices as intonation patterns that depart from those expected for ordinary discourse. Listeners perceive that the narrator intends to communicate something special, since a device is being used in a marked (not usual) way. Here, a high "girlish" pitch and lengthened vowels as she says in lines 29-30, *Ay, güerita de mi alma, aún que sea una cama, aún que-* (Oh, Güerita my dear, at least a bed, at least-) signal irony, in fact a parody of a (socially-dominant) femininity in which she would be grateful for a broken down bed without a mattress if she could only have Boni in marriage. Thus she implicitly critiques the unstated cultural assumption that women are to be deferential and submissive to men. But then she abruptly switches from a self-quotation anchored in the narrated event (the *relajo* in Mexico) to ordinary language that is anchored in the here and now: she says parenthetically to the two women in the current *relajo* in Chicago, "I figured that if I fell I would not hit myself hard, it's only so high" (lines 30-32). These words are uttered straightforwardly, evoking an authoritative (masculine) voice that contrasts strikingly with her parody of an idealized femininity. In fact, the entire stretch of discourse is peppered with the down-to-earth language of *rancheros*, used by both men and women, in contrast to the dominant (though not totalizing) femininity of the larger society. Such language includes taboo words and blunt expressions, as well as devalued features of rural Mexican Spanish, indicated by asterisks in the excerpt above: *caiva* in line 31, *naiden* in line 47, and *muncho* in line 58. Table 1 presents a more detailed list of these features.

In this excerpt E skillfully shifts back and forth between two gendered voices. Her hyper feminine voice, which, in addition to unusually high pitch, uses politeness features such as the diminutive *-ita* suffix and the phrase of adornment *de mi alma*, contrasts sharply with her masculine-inflected voice of blunt, direct statements with no such verbal frills. Her masculine voice throughout her story is extremely self-assertive, constructing her as independent and willing to defend herself, and evoking masculine *ranchero* values of *valentia* (daring) and self-assertion. She enacts a masculine voice more concretely through indirect indexical references to masculinity, by appropriating traditionally masculine practices: swearing, owning land, and shooting a gun in lines 41-47, the climax of her story. Here her phrasing is carefully paced for its effect on her audience:

*Y allá me voy a ir yo con la retrocarga de Pelón  
y el cabrón que entre a las guayabas  
y le suelto un guamazo  
pa' que sepan que ya la huerta es mía.  
Ni a los chiles,  
naiden\* me va a cortar chiles.*

And I will go there with Pelon's shotgun  
and the bastard that goes into the guayabas  
I'm going to blast,  
so that they know that the orchard is mine.  
Nor the peppers,  
no one is going to cut my peppers.

First, she directly expresses her desire to own land (marrying Boni only if the land is put in her name right away). Working one's own land among *rancheros* in rural Mexico, going to *el labor* (the fields), is closely tied to masculinity and honor (Alonso, 1995). Men who work their fields and thus support their families are owed deference, especially if they hire *peones* (peons) to work for them. One is "more" of a man, then, with land; that is, one has a stronger claim to what Stern (1995) calls superior masculinity. Yet here a woman claims this kind of privilege (in fact, when she retired to Mexico she did buy her own land). Secondly, she threatens to shoot a gun at anyone who trespasses on her land. Although many *ranchera* women traditionally knew how to use guns, they are still associated more closely with masculinity than with femininity. Finally, she behaves like a man linguistically: in addition to the male-inflected *franqueza* direct speech style, she swears freely (*cabrón*, bastard; *cabrónes*, bitches) and makes open references to sex (putting up with the bare bed with the hole in the middle).

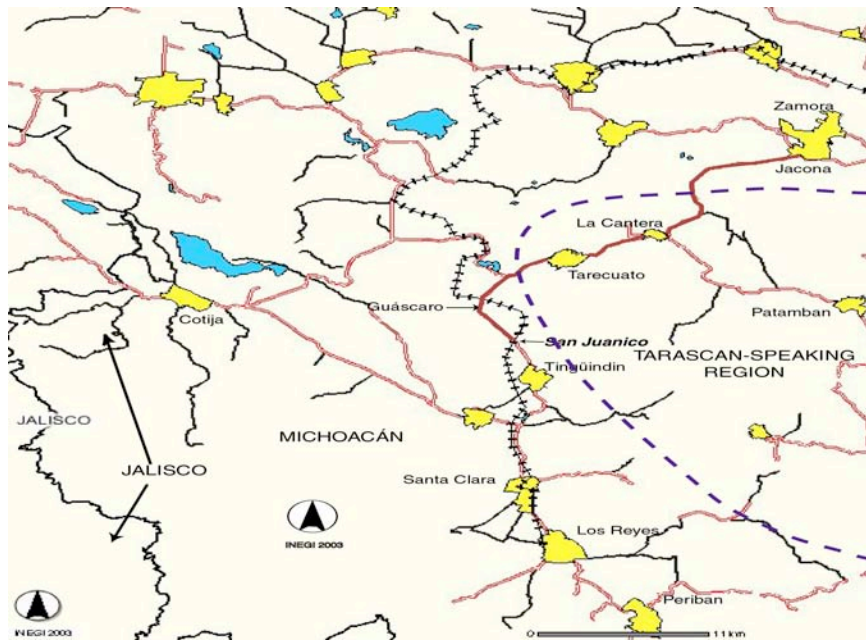
These behaviors are "unmarked" for men, but "marked" for women. When a woman enacts herself in these ways, then, she is appropriating a male voice and thus male status and power. She is indirectly indexing gender, i.e., using linguistic resources to enact a stance (self-assertive dominance) and activities (shooting a gun, swearing, owning land) that are unmarked (considered usual) for men (Ochs, 1992). By indirectly indexing the gender that is not her own, she turns the normal gender order upside down, putting herself in the dominant position which is usually occupied by men.

### Conclusion

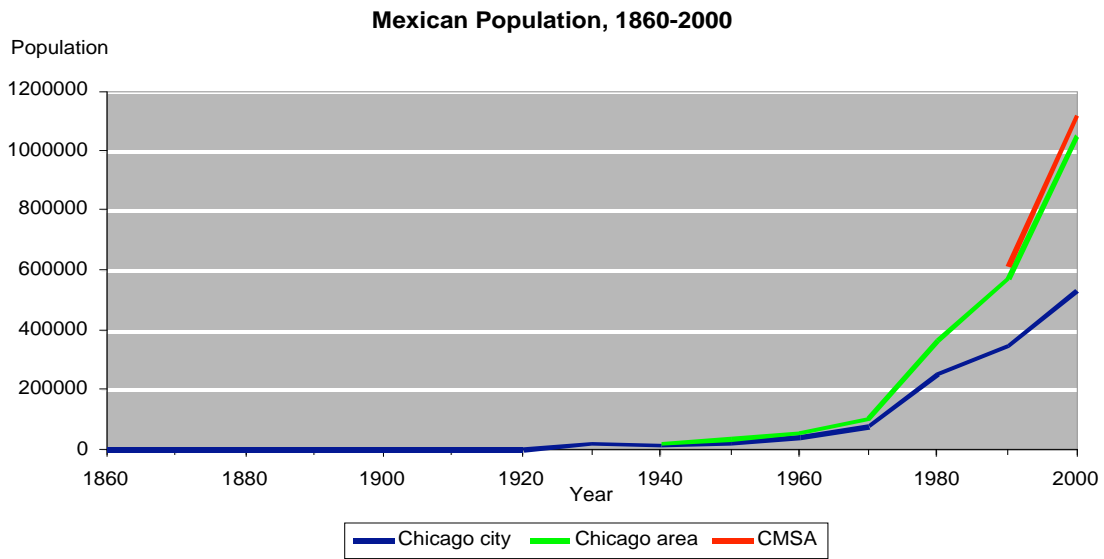
This close analysis of discourse in its cultural context shows the importance of linguistic form, not just semantic content, in the construction of identity. Most literary and sociological studies of identity, if they examine language at all, rely simply on content analysis, usually of written texts. That is, they analyze images, metaphors, and other representations in texts, but they do not address the significance of linguistic form in constructing such meanings. A close examination of **how** individual people use language to construct identity, rather than restricting analysis only to **what** they say, reveals a rich array of attitudes and beliefs that are communicated implicitly via such everyday linguistic devices as pronoun choices, intonation patterns, diminutive suffixes, and reported speech. Such devices are commonly used in metapragmatic language, or talk about other talk, that comprises so much of our everyday language use. In order to understand language and cultural practices "on the ground" among specific groups of people, then, I would argue for two approaches: first, we must attend to pragmatic as well as semantic meaning, and, second, we must link such pragmatic meanings of language to larger cultural understandings that are best studied ethnographically.



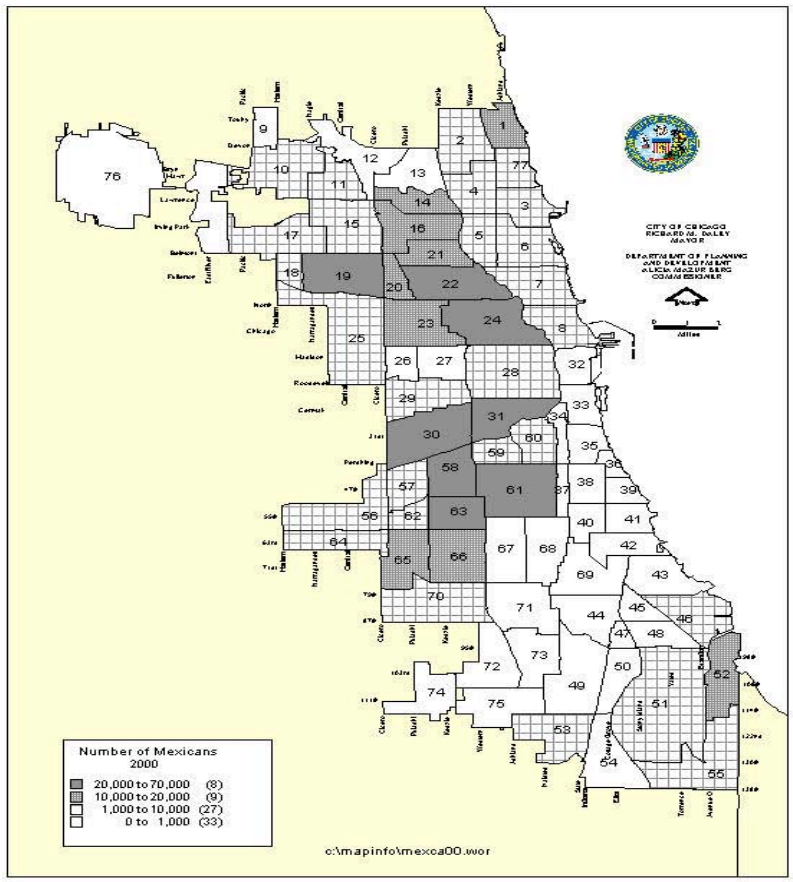
[Figure 1]



[Figure 2]



[Figure 3]



[Figure 4]