

The ‘Latinx’ Influence

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Introduction

Latino/a are common names used by those who identify themselves as part of the Latino community. *Latinx* is an emerging gender-neutral umbrella term also used to describe or identify individuals or communities that originate from Latin American countries. With an increased presence of *Latinx*, there is widespread support and opposition made by community members across the United States and neighboring countries. The controversy around *Latinx* is also referred to as “The Latinx Debate”. We find that the development of *Latinx* is important to examine because the labels that individuals identify with influence the connection amongst their community members and the manner in which the overall community presents itself. Additionally, understanding the extent to where the term *Latinx* is used also focuses on who is using the term and in what context. Our proposed research project aims to answer the question of what context *Latinx* is used. This includes understanding which demographic uses *Latinx* and in what setting the term is referred to most often. In this proposal, we look specifically at the context in which the term *Latinx* appears amongst the Mexican community.

Demographics

Currently, Mexico has a population of 131 million people (Data World Bank, 2021) with an annual growth rate of about 1%. The population of people from Mexican origin within the United States reached 37 million in 2019 (Noe-Bustamante, 2019) which is about 61% of all Hispanics residing in the United States. More recently, there have been 1.6 million encounters between migrants at the US-Mexico border throughout the 2021 year (Gramlich and Sheller, 2021). This is the highest record of encounters at the Southern border since 2000. Despite the influx of migration interaction at the border, Mexican migrants only accounted for 37% of those immigrating into the United States. Migrants from other countries, most notably from Honduras,

Guatemala, and El Salvador, accounted for the remaining 63% of interactions at the border. Considering that the US and Mexico have substantial connection due to their proximity, the consistent immigration patterns can provide insight into understanding the extent to which cross-cultural trends develop across both populations. The assimilation of languages is a notable aspect showing cross-cultural contact. 71% of Mexicans in the United States speak English “very well” according to a Pew Research Study, (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2019). Similarly, about 12% of the population in Mexico also speak English. This is important because Spanish is the official language of Mexico but there is still an increased presence of the English language which further portrays cross-cultural connectedness. Overall, these demographic shifts allow our research to be more accurate in understanding the context in which *Latinx* is used because of patterns related to migration, cultural assimilation, and language usage.

Existing Data Analysis

Latinx began appearing in conversations around the early 2000s in the United States. Though it is unclear who created the term, some argue that the term was imposed by non-Latino while others explain that *Latinx* was originally used by queer *Latinx* people, (Simon, 2020). David Bowels, an author and professor at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley further clarifies that, “They are the ones who used the word. Our little subgroup of the community created that. It was created by English-speaking U.S. *Latinx* people for use in English conversation,” (Simon, 2020). Overtime, the word *Latinx* increased its presence across different regions and platforms. This also has created a conversation supporting or opposing the usage of the term.

Those that oppose the use of *Latinx* argue that the term is “a blatant form of linguistic imperialism,” (Guerra and Orbrea, 2015). Guerra and Orbrea explain that the term is not

linguistically accessible to Spanish speakers, or even non-English speakers, because of the inclusion of the letter ‘x’. Since the term is found mostly in higher education and can be difficult to pronounce in certain languages, *Latinx* becomes an example of how “English speakers can’t seem to stop imposing their social norms on other cultures.” Contrary to Guerra and Orbrea, others support the use of *Latinx* and argue the importance of continuing to use *Latinx*. In their case, they explain that the use of *Latinx* cannot be a form of “blatant linguistic imperialism” because the Spanish language itself is a language of colonialism, (Scharrón-del Río and Aja, 2015). They explain that by reexamining individual privileges, the use of *Latinx* is still important to promote solidarity within *Latinx* communities.

To develop our research proposal, we turned to existing sources that had some information regarding the context where *Latinx* is used. Google Trends tracks web searches for *Latinx* across multiple countries. Since 2016, the US has averaged about 50 searches for the term *Latinx* each month and the state of California is the area with the most search interest, (“Google Trends”). In 2014, Google searches for “Latinx” began in Mexico and continued to increase similarly to US trends in following years. Baja California, a state in Mexico, is the largest region that shows interest in the word *Latinx*, (Google Trends, 2020). However, this data only reflects web searches specifically for the single word *Latinx*. This does not account for other searches that may include the word *Latinx* in a sentence or other internet platform data. Despite the limitations, these statistics contribute to our research question by quantifying the presence of the term *Latinx* amongst the Mexican population via the internet. It also provides insight into cultural influences as California and Baja California are across the border from each other.

Additionally, a Pew Research study provides further demographic information regarding the use and familiarity of *Latinx*. 20% of Hispanics in the US know of *Latinx* but only 3% know

the term and use it in conversation, (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020). Of those who know the term, a majority of them are between the ages of 18-29. Hispanics born in the US are more likely to have interacted with the term *Latinx* (32%) compared to those who are foreign born (16%). 58% of those who are familiar with *Latinx* are either English dominant or bilingual speakers, (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020). Only about 7% of Spanish dominant speakers have heard of the term *Latinx*, (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020). This data is not specific to a Hispanic population within the US and does not measure the extent of familiarity to *Latinx*. This existing study is important in identifying who is using the term *Latinx*. Though the demographic is limited to Hispanics in the US, we are able to notice specific patterns and recognize how different identifiers influence someone's familiarity with the term *Latinx*.

Proposed Project

Our project involves understanding the context and use of the term *Latinx* among the Mexican community. For this, we specifically used articles from news media sources, academics, and scholars. While some articles provide a general perspective from authors, some work done by scholars already includes data collected from interviews that we utilized for this project. For this project, we primarily collected existing data to understand the scope of the use of the term *Latinx*. Using existing data and published articles allowed us to generalize the broad interpretation of *Latinx* and its use among the Latin/Mexican community.

Like most research, they all contribute strengths and determine limitations. One strength our project had was the use of scholarly academic resources. This is important for our research because reputable sources provide structured context and data analysis that we used to simplify at an academic level. Additionally, these sources come from authors and scholars who generally identify as Latina/o. We believed this was important for our research, as the term *Latinx* is an

identifying marker specifically for individuals in or of Latin descent. One limitation we encountered while gathering data was not having enough data from various age groups. Most of the people in the data range between the ages of 20-35. While this may reflect a higher population, it only grasps those who have heard *Latinx* in schools, institutions, and social media. It does not adequately reflect folks from older generations or young adolescents, of which both are likely to have heard the term either from someone else or an institution.

Overall, we detected no ethical violations in our research. Our research method was simply interpreting existing data and applying the answer to our research question: How is the use of the term *Latinx* conveyed among the Mexican population? Data collection was simply reading through documents from various sources, which was an important factor in our research in order to gather information from untraditional platforms.

Connection

In our class, we learned about the Naming Debate of the use of the word *Latinx*. The idea behind the Naming Debate was to understand how people of Latin America or Latin American descent identify themselves. Many folks had been confused about knowing when to identify as Hispanic or Latino. These identifiers appeared in the United States Census questionnaire. Given that Latino and Hispanic meant different aspects of identity, for example, Hispanic refers to someone who can speak the Spanish language; there were some inconsistencies when collecting data. As a result, many of them were misrepresented in the overall population of Latinos.

In the lecture, we learned that in the 2010 Census data collection, there was a considerable rise in the Latino population in the Southern parts of the United States. This was primarily due to the fact that multiracial individuals who completed their census questionnaire identified as a race and as Latna/o, which enabled more people of Latin Descent to be recognized

for their multitudes of identities. Therefore, a big part of our research was understanding the use of *Latinx*, which primarily involves encompassing and intersecting identities. *As we mentioned earlier, *Latinx* can represent those Latin Americans who do not have the Spanish language as their primary language. The term is also used in a gender-neutral context, not intended to have feminine or masculine suffixes, allowing those of gender identities apart from the binary to be recognized. Additionally, the term accounts for racial identities making it easier for some individuals to identify as part of the *Latinx* community.

Conclusion

For this research project, we decided to work together to gather as much data and perspectives as possible in order to accurately capture the trend use of *Latinx* among the Mexican population. Additionally, it was important that we could understand in what ways communities were accepting of the term and the ways that they opposed. With waves of migration of people from Latin America coming into the United States, it's important for our research to understand why *Latinx* may be utilized as an identifying marker. Through the research process, we learned that specific information among specific Latin community groups might be limited given that most research gives data from the Latin community as a whole. *Latinx* has been argued as a culturally sensitive term but has also been appreciated for an inclusive term. We believe this context is important for future research when gathering data. Without a consistent definition for the term *Latinx*, its multitudes use of context can influence the attitudes of those among the Latin American community.

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