

Analysis of Lyrical Change in Latin Songs

Introduction

When presented with the opportunity to come up with an individual project in the digital humanities field, I instantly knew that I wanted to tie it in to my Latino ethnicity. As I was searching for topics in this field not a lot came up, and most of them that did were over published over thirty years ago. However, I managed to find a recent article from the Instituto Cervantes at Harvard University, "Pop in Spanish in the US: A Space to Articulate the Latino Identity". The study "analyzes the evolution of Latin music from its conception as a category through the current moment. It begins with the pan-Latino context of the 19th century and pays particular attention to the emergence of pop in the past few decades... [this allows us to] see how Latin music and its use of the Spanish language have adapted in line with the political, economic, and social status of the Hispanic community in the U.S" (Viñuela 1). It was an interesting study that left me wondering how the lyrics of Latin music have changed in the past couple of years and if that has had an effect their popularity.

Research question

My individual project will focus on studying the lyrics of Latin music and how they have changed through recent years. Essentially is there a pattern or theme that music from a specific year share, and how does it compare to those of other years? My hope is that through answering these questions this study will be able to detect a thematic change or adaptation that Latin music has embraced. Additionally, with data from streaming platforms this study should be able to detect whether the changes made through lyrics have resulted in more or less popularity among listeners.

Upon more research around this topic, I found some similar articles. "The Rise of Regional Latin Music: Latin Music Genres Evolution" by Francisco Toscano talks about the evolution of specific Latin dance genres (Cumbia, Guaracha Electronica, and Trap Corrido) and how they have evolved and adapted as they gain popularity in different Latin countries. I also found an article published in Insider, "'Despacito,' Bad Bunny, and how the world became obsessed with Latin music", that mainly talks about the Latin music's rise in popularity that stemmed from the international success of the song 'Despacito' by Luis Fonsi released in 2017. However, while these articles are similar in topic I have yet to find a study that has analyzed the recent lyrical trends in Latin music and their effect on popularity.

Materials and Methods

Unfortunately, in order to make this a realistic individual project that I can finish within the provided deadline, I decided to limit the scope of this study to encompass a five-year span from 2018 to 2022. Since it is also unfeasible to analyze all the Latin songs released in this five-year period, I have decided to select only 5 songs from each year. I plan on selecting the first 10 Latin songs that appear in the Billboard Hot 100. The Billboard Hot 100 is the music industry standard record chart where rankings are based on sales, online streaming, and radio play. Hopefully by selecting the songs based off of this ranking, it will be easier to generalize the changes made in song lyrics throughout the years. This study will be using each song's chart position and the number of listens it has on Spotify as popularity measures for the songs. To recap, I will select the first 5 Latin songs in the Billboard Hot 100 from each year in 2018 to 2022 and I will use their lyrics, chart position, and number of listens on Spotify as my data for this project.

I will import the lyrics as a string so to clean the data I will make it all lowercase, remove punctuation, tokenize, and eliminate stop words from the song lyrics. I will then create a dictionary for every song which will include name (string containing song name), artist (string containing song artist), lyrics (list containing the cleaned lyric data), year (integer representing the year it came out), billboard (integer representing the position on the Billboard Hot 100 chart), listens (integer representing the number of listens of that song taken from Spotify). I will then create a separate dictionary for each of the five years containing: year (integer representing the year in question), songs (list containing song names), artists (a list containing artist names), lyrics (a list containing all lyrics for selected songs in that year), position (a float containing the average Billboard Hot 100 position for selected songs in that year), listens (a float containing the average number of Spotify listens for selected songs in that year). Once I have organized my data, I will analyze the word frequency for the lyrics of each year. I will then create a word cloud for each year to better visualize the data. Having done that I will attempt to see if there are any specific overarching themes that I can spot and maybe even one-hot encode these themes to the individual songs and then see if there is any correlation between a specific theme and the songs' popularity. I should also be able to see how the focus of Latin songs have changed throughout the years.

Results

"Pop in Spanish in the US: A Space to Articulate the Latino Identity" talks about how Latin music "has evolved over time, adapting to the reality of the Hispanic community of each moment" (Viñuela 2). After having read that study, I am excited to see what thematic elements have changed or adapted within this five-year period. More than anything I am also really interested to see if there appears to be a noticeable difference in the songs pre and post COVID-19 pandemic. In my opinion, as an avid listener of the Latin genre, I do think that there will be a noticeable and hopefully more genuine thematic change in songs through time and we will also see an increase in popularity for Latin songs throughout the years. However, we have to acknowledge a limitation in this study which is that we are only assessing the lyrics of the songs and unfortunately cannot assess the general musical composing of the song and what effect it has on popularity or theme.

Discussion

By analyzing the lyrics of Latin music over a five-year period, this study aims to uncover thematic patterns and changes within the genre. This examination of lyrical content could provide insights into the cultural, social, and political shifts that have influenced Latin music's evolution. By identifying and analyzing these themes, the research could contribute to a deeper understanding of how Latin music artists express their identities, experiences, and perspectives through their lyrics. Moreover, the project intends to explore the relationship between lyrical changes and the popularity of Latin songs. This analysis could potentially reveal the preferences and trends of listeners. Understanding the link between lyrical content and popularity could provide valuable insights for artists, producers, and marketers in shaping their creative strategies and reaching wider audiences.

In terms of broader implications for the field of study, this research contributes to digital humanities within the realm of Latin music and its cultural significance. By focusing on the analysis of lyrics, the project expands the understanding of how artistic expression and identity intersect within the Latino community. The findings can provide valuable insights into the ways in which Latin music reflects and shapes cultural narratives, amplifying the voices and experiences of the Hispanic population. Furthermore, the research methodology employed in this project will be showcasing an innovative approach to studying music and its broader societal impact.