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Tracing the Emergence of Latin@ Vernaculars in Studies of Latin@ Communication

Michelle A. Holling and Bernadette M. Calafell

The emergence of scholarship published about Latin@s in the field of communication, or what has been referred to as a “decade of recognition” (Holling, 2008) dates to the 1970s. At the time, however, a focus on Chican@/os circumscribed the field’s understanding of Latin@s, a pan-ethnic label reflecting heterogeneity enmeshed in discursive constructions that are variously contested and often involving negotiated sets of meaning. Nonetheless, examinations of Latin@s’ communicative acts, practices and discourse have been underway for a few decades now. As noted by one of the authors of this chapter, four periods—recognition, integration, (re)turn and repoliticalization—mark published scholarship about Latin@s in the areas of rhetorical and performance studies. Each era makes specific demands, calls attention to particular theoretical and methodological considerations that unfold as research about Latin@ continues, and charts pathways for scholarship (Holling, 2008). Also indicated in scholarship, particularly in the fourth decade of repoliticalization, is the nascent development of Latin@ vernacular discourse.

The materialization of Latin@ vernacular discourse is reflected in several pivotal essays that reflect influences most notably from Latin@ communication studies and critical-vernacular rhetoric studies, while also drawing upon performance studies, critical-cultural work, and area studies scholarship. Latin@ vernacular discourse (hereafter used interchangeably with LVD), which concerns public discourse in visual, verbal, written, or performative forms produced from within Latin@ communities,

advances epistemological claims about embodied acts of identity and culture, rhetorical struggles over identity construction, community formation, and strategies of resistance. Advancing LVD is not about supplanting the study of ethnic nation-specific vernaculars or privileging a pan-ethnic identity. In the past we have voiced our concern about the possibility of displacement occurring through an emphasis on “Latina/o” as a self-naming act of a sub-field (Calafell and Holling, 2006). Rather LVD is an avenue by which the sign of “Latina/o” may continue to be interrogated by scholars while simultaneously offering additional paths for critiquing whether nation-specific identities are implicated in “Latin@” vernaculars, and the conditions under which and implications resulting from such in/exclusions. Given prior work that encourages a stance of “moving between,”¹ maintaining such an approach is fruitful in proceeding with the study of Latin@ communication, which lessens the likelihood for the above concerns stabilizing within scholarship.

Our purpose in this chapter is to explicate the contours of Latin@ vernacular discourse. We argue that LVD assumptively reflects the characteristics of cultural syncretism and pastiche composing the theory of vernacular discourse, while also containing elements related to Latin@ subjects, namely tensions of identity, accounting for the decolonial, and the critic/al role of pursuing LVD. Pursuing those points first requires a discussion of the essay that is Kent Ono and John Sloop’s (1995) “Critique of Vernacular Discourse.” The centrality of their work is evident in scholarship that examines Latin@ communities’ discourse, subsequently evincing the possibilities of LVD. Next, we draw from published work about Latin@ communication as a means of identifying specific essays influenced by Ono and Sloop’s essay as a preliminary and important step toward accounting for the racial, ethnic, class or gendered dynamics that inform LVD. Concluding this chapter, we look ahead to what work remains to be completed in regard to theorizing further LVD.

THEORIZING THE VERNACULAR

The publication of “The Critique of Vernacular Discourse” (Ono and Sloop, 1995) we contend is an important moment that marks the ways in which the development and study of Latin@s’ discourse has proceeded in the field of communication. Importantly, a body of work was underway prior to Ono and Sloop’s (1995; 2002) theorization of vernacular discourse. That is, various scholars argued for the need to study analyze historically marginalized and disciplinary Othered voices as a means of rectifying social and disciplinary blindspots (e.g., Rigsby, 1993; Wander, 1984). Simultaneously a parallel body of work attested to the cultural nuances and specificities that defined, and hence needed to be accounted for when analyzing, for example, Chicano or Mexican American rhetoric

(González, 1989, 1990; Hammerback, Jensen, and Gutierrez, 1985). Together the two complementary areas assisted in producing scholarship that gestures toward an articulation of Latin@ vernacular discourse that is indebted to the theory of vernacular discourse, which served as a springboard for a great deal of other work that extended or commented on it directly (Calafell, 2010; Calafell and Delgado, 2004; Holling, 2006b; Phillips, 1999).

Broadly speaking, the study of vernacular discourse generates knowledge about how disempowered groups proceed in empowering and affirming themselves. Vernacular discourse is discernible through its two defining characteristics of cultural syncretism and pastiche. The former concept involves a simultaneous process of cultural expression and affirmation of community while “protest[ing] against the dominant ideology” (Ono and Sloop, 1995, p. 21); whereas pastiche contains a generative dimension through its recombination and reconstructions from either or both hegemonic and marginalized culture. In particular, pastiche “is an embodied practice that is everchanging, active, and constantly motivated by a concern for local conditions and social problems. When borrowing from popular culture, vernacular discourse emphasizes invention and organization and reconstitutes discourses within specific racial, cultural, gendered and ethnic communities” (1995, p. 23). The process of cultural syncretism and pastiche reflects the cultural experiences of Others who must continually negotiate their identities in relation to hegemonic ideologies and oppressive systems of power.

Vernacular discourse captures both everyday and mediated discussions between members, who are a part of self-identified communities that exist within a larger civic community (1995; 2002). Taking as its starting point the recuperation of historically marginalized voices, experiences and histories, the theory involves more than an exercise in recovery. Ono and Sloop emphasize that the same scrutiny extended to dominant discourse be extended to vernacular communities’ discourse in order to avoid assuming that vernacular discourse is “politically resistant” or “should necessarily be valorized” (2002, p. 14). Critical examination of vernacular discourse is directed at discerning the impact marginalized voices have on culture, both locally and writ large, identifying liberatory possibilities latent in the discourse, and identifying the ways in which community formations are possible (1995). Ultimately, “. . . the practice of the criticism of vernacular discourse should have as its goal a critical framework that works to upend essentialisms, undermine stereotypes, and eliminate narrow representations of culture” (1995, p. 25).

Ono and Sloop (1995) conclude their discussion of vernacular discourse by calling for explorations of various vernacular communities so that we may understand how cultural differences and nuances inform vernacular discourse. Aside from the area of Latina/o Communication Studies, scholars have taken up the call for the study of vernacular dis-

course within queer rhetorics (Brouwer, 2005; Brouwer and Hess, 2007; Squires and Brouwer, 2002) and feminist and gender studies (Reser, 2005; Shugart, Waggoner, Hallstein, and O'Brien, 2001). Along with these scholars, we follow Ono and Sloop's (1995) call in this preliminary mapping of Latin@ vernacular discourse.

LATINIZING VERNACULAR DISCOURSE

Our heading is a playful take on popular discourse that in the prior decade circulated trite slogans such as the "Latin Explosion" or "Latin U.S.A." as a means of calling attention to the increasing influence of Latin@s in various spheres of life.² We endeavor to do similarly with regard to studies of vernacular discourse while taking stock in what differentiates Latin@ vernacular discourse from vernacular discourse, as discussed in the previous section. We acknowledge that only a few essays to date make explicit that they are carrying out a critique of engaging and/or extending the ideas associated with the theory of vernacular discourse in relation to Latin@s, Puerto Ricans, and Chicana/os (i.e., Calafell and Delgado, 2004; Enck-Wanzer, 2006b; Holling, 2006b, respectively). What unites these works in relation to conceiving LVD is their examination of the identity politics, largely based on race and ethnicity, that infuse the social and political struggles engaged in by Latin@s to change material conditions, and secondly, the discursive efforts amongst Latin@s to empower them/ourselves through articulations of identity. Yet, our scope of consideration broadens when we consider that assessing the impacts of local culture on culture at large, considering the possibilities of freedom and examining communities' formation are also a part of the charge of critiquing vernacular discourse (Ono and Sloop, 1995). Several additional works (i.e., Calafell, 2001, 2007; Delgado, 1998a, 1998c, 2000; Flores, 1996; Holling, 2006a; Holling and Calafell, 2007; Moreman, 2009a; Moreman and Calafell, 2008; Pineda, 2009; Rivera-Servera, 2009) although not explicitly executing a critique of vernacular discourse, do work in that vein through their efforts "to upend essentialisms, undermine stereotypes, and eliminate narrow representations of culture" (Ono and Sloop, 1995, p. 25).

We view "Latin@ vernacular discourse" as an encompassing, though not subsuming, metatheory for critically examining the everyday sites in which Latin@s struggle over, produce, engage, enact and/or perform culture, identities and community formation. Of the available ethnic labels, "Latina/o" reflects the most breadth with regard to the ethnicities comprising it, is considered oppositional in nature given its social emergence (Oboler, 1995), and often utilized in contemporary culture colloquially (Delgado, 1998c). We acknowledge "Latina/o" as a sign for a pan-ethnic identity; however, given its media and marketing appropriation post the

"Latin explosion" (Moreman and Calafell, 2008), we look for a term that gestures towards other possible identifications.³ Hence, we utilize "*Latin@*" to call attention to the intertwinement of gender and ethnicity, and the gendered power relations embedded in "*Latino*" to signify males and females who avow or ascribe such an identity. Moreover, what *Latin@* means and who is assumed to be implicated in such an identity or community is not static nor easily apprehended until "the particularities of time and place, of history, family, geography, and economy" are "fleshed out" (Martinez, 2003, p. 254). Subsequently *Latin@* remains contested, negotiated and interrogated in popular culture and scholarly arenas (e.g., Amaya, 2007c; Calafell, 2001; Calafell and Delgado, 2004; Moreman and Calafell, 2008; Valdivia, 2004). In using the term *Latin@* we are careful not to dismiss the different and specific communities falling under that label. We see the importance of inquiry based on specific *Latin@* communities. Even though particular nation-specific discourses may serve as the focus for scholars' inquiry, they still speak to *Latin@* conditions and experiences in the United States.

For a metatheory the critic studying *Latin@* vernacular discourse would orient her/himself to discerning the manifestations and workings of three characteristics animating LVD; namely, tensions of identity, a decolonial aim, and the critic/al role. Doing so will necessitate methodological openness. As *Latin@* discourse arises from an array of sites, the theories and methods employed for critical analysis of LVD will need to be robust and, most likely, operate from an inter- if not, multi-disciplinary approach given the need to explicate the role communication plays in the discourses and lives of *Latin@s*.⁴ Attention then is directed to the "everyday sites" in which vernacular discourse by *Latin@s* materializes that range from instantiations of popular culture in magazines, music, and cable television shows (Calafell, 2007; Delgado, 1998a, 1998c, 2000; Holling, 2006a), a book compendium (Calafell and Delgado, 2004), an academic-activist listserv (Holling, 2006b), the streets of metropolitan cities (Enck-Wanzer, 2006b), and theatrical performances (Holling and Calafell, 2007). As everyday sites where *Latin@* culture is enacted notions of identity, community, collective empowerment and struggle are gleaned as well as how instances of LVD interact with or are examples of popular culture thereby functioning to resist dominant and, likely static, representations of *Latin@s*. In sum, "*Latin@* vernacular discourse" is concerned with the rhetorical-performative acts self-produced by and within *Latin@* communities in visual, verbal, written and/or performative form to which scholars turn a critical eye on as a means to reveal both liberatory and constraining dimensions inhering in *Latin@* discourses.

Across the scholarship we locate within a metatheory of LVD is the examination of identity and the discernible tensions surrounding it. Perhaps some of the most latent pressures regarding identity within *Latin@* vernacular discourse are the often blurry relationships between the indi-

vidual and the collective and heterogeneity versus homogeneity (Delgado, 1998c, p. 430; Holling, 2008; Holling and Calafell, 2007). Within these tensions is the underlying need for the recognition of difference while still maintaining and being open to the potentialities of a collective identity. Recognizing difference must be attentive to cultural nuances, specific histories, metaphors of belonging, community, racial difference, citizenship and legal status, sexualities, and class, while still being able to offer the possibility of collectivizing. Political and social opportunities of a Latin@ affect, meaning spaces for connection across difference based on shared feelings of Otherness, or collectivity should not be downplayed when there are possibilities for coalition building, particularly in contemporary political climates. However, Latin@ differences must be contextualized within what Patricia Hill Collins (2008) refers to as a matrix of domination that understands how oppression is governed by the structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power. These domains of power shape the matrix of domination, which intersectionally accounts for various privileges, spaces of disempowerment, and different social locations (Calafell and Delgado, 2004; Holling 2006b; Holling and Calafell, 2007). Scholars such as Holling (2006b), Calafell (2001), and Calafell and Delgado (2004) have worked to mark the presence of interethnic differences and tensions within Latin@ vernacular discourse, subsequently underscoring the nuances shaping varying Latin@ experiences in the United States based on issues such as region, sexuality, legal status, and class. Even so, more attention to interethnic difference and Latin@s' differential positionings within a matrix of domination should be addressed. Scholars must be willing to address the politics and/or limits of inclusion and exclusion that are possible when theorizing Latin@ vernacular discourse. A central question remains: what is lost and what is gained in theorizing a "Latin@"-centered vernacular?

A second characteristic of Latin@ vernacular discourse implicates the decolonial; that is, the process of decolonization. The historical documentation of Latin@s', in particular Chicana/os', experiences as influenced by the effects of colonization are abundantly accounted for by scholars external to the field of communication (Adelman, 1999; Bonalos and Verdesio, 2001; Rosales, 1997; Ruiz, 2008; Schmidt-Nowara, 2006, among others). Documented are the colonialist tendencies of the United States toward Mexico or Puerto Rico, for example, from which feelings of inferiority, acts of paternalism, racial hierarchy, and sexism result. The markings of colonialism on bodies—familial, social, and geographical—require not only a "conscious awareness" of their machinations, but also underscore the need for "critical self-reflection" to avoid reinscribing colonialist ideologies and interests (Martínez, 2003, p. 254). In tandem with such advice is the importance of theorizing the process of decolonizing as counterhegemonic (Aldama and Quiñonez, 2002; Luis-Brown, 2008; Pérez, 1999). At stake is the need to understand the ways in which a history

of colonization and efforts toward decolonizing have not only “governed our inter- and intracultural contact” (Martínez, 2003, p. 254), but also influence discourse produced by and/or about Latin@s that have residual effects for community and identity formation. Although accounting for either historical experience—colonization or decolonization—in vernacular studies remains in need, there exists a modicum of scholarship that accounts for decolonialist efforts in Latin@ vernaculars (Calafell, 2005; Calafell and Delgado, 2004; Enck-Wanzer, 2006b; Holling and Calafell, 2007).

The aforementioned scholars explicate how decolonial performances, acts, and/or rhetorics are liberating through an availing of agency, a concept not to be taken lightly when acknowledging recent rhetorical scholarship theorizing agency (Enck-Wanzer, 2008a; Foss, 2006; Foust, 2006; Greene, 2004). For example, in our analysis of two performance artists we theorize “decolonial performance practice” as one where performers’ body act as locus for which the ills of colonialism are embodied using Chicana/o tactics thereby creating forms of agency previously unacknowledged and providing “a site of identification and exorcism for multiple audiences” (Holling and Calafell, 2007, p. 78). The possibilities of carrying out a decolonial performance are explored by one of this chapter’s authors (Calafell, 2005) who performs a pilgrimage to the archetypal figure of Malintzin Tenepal as a way to rewrite and resist histories of colonization that have impacted Chicanas. Similarly, Enck-Wanzer (2006b) reveals the ways that an “intersectional rhetoric” manifests the decolonial actions and content of the Puerto Rican Young Lords garbage offensive, who “demanded, through their words and actions, freedom from an oppressive ‘system’ that had subjugated Puerto Ricans for half of a millennium” (p. 176). In so doing, the YLO refrained from “mimicking the form of the oppressor’s rhetoric and reforms” (p. 176), instead opting for an amalgamation of discursive forms, thereby displaying themselves as agentic subjects. Each of these works is central to initiating a conversation about the role of decolonialism within Latin@ vernacular discourses.

Particularly significant is that each of these works in their theorizing of the process of decolonization places attention on the body as a site of resistance and revision. Given the elaborate racial castes or hierarchies created out of colonialism and its resulting *mestizaje*, the body becomes a contested site where colonial ideologies and ensuing racisms continue to reverberate. Anzaldúa (1987) theorizes *mestizaje* as a powerful source of agency and empowerment rather than as a space of oppression. In addition, other scholars (Calafell and Delgado, 2004; Enck-Wanzer, 2006b; Holling and Calafell, 2007) understand the importance of embodied rhetoric that moves beyond textuality and is accountable to the reverberations of colonialism on the body. As part of a decolonial project the body becomes a site of resistance and possibility for agency, revision, and community building. Learned from extant scholarship cited thus far is how

the body configures within the decolonial process through the possibilities to re-inscribe racist and sexist ideologies around those bodies, perform resistance in ways that defy dominant logics, and demonstrate the power of theorizing through experience. It should also be noted that the space of decolonial is also the site where pastiche and cultural syncretism occurs. Arrizón (2006) argues for understanding Latin@s through the lens of (post)colonialism, noting that not only do we engage in hybrid practices as colonized people, but we also have hybrid bodies. Through such hybridity, both practiced and embodied, we come to understand how spaces of decolonialization could draw on cultural practices such as pastiche or cultural syncretism. Certainly, we see the practice of pastiche in our own study of Chicana/o performance artists blending cultural artifacts through strategies such as *rasquache* or *chusmería* (Holling and Calafell, 2007) and cultural syncretism operating in the edited collection *Americanos: Latino Life in the United States* as Latin@s both operate against and in accordance with stereotypes (Calafell and Delgado, 2004). What becomes central in understanding the role of these two practices to Latin@ communities is the connection to the body through the process of *mestizaje* and how this also manifests in bicultural performances of identity. Additionally, we shall later explicate other issues tied to decolonialism, such as language, that must continue to be explored.

Finally, we call attention to the critic/al role of pursuing LVD, both in terms of the role or responsibilities of the (Latin@) critic and, the critical need to pursue LVD. Beginning with the latter as it is what implicates the critic, the import of investigating instances of Latin@ vernaculars rests not only with the recovery and study of Latin@s' voices and what those tell a larger public about social relations, but concomitantly bringing those discursive voices to the fore to examine their machinations and implications. What confounds such an endeavor is when one identifies with the cultural group under examination. For example, when the circulation of representations produced by Latin@s do not dominate social realms, yet the production and distribution of self-representations necessitate critical interrogation not only as a means to offer theoretical advancements, but also to expose any inhering problematics, confronted are tinges of guilt. Implied here is the critic/al dilemma: do we, as Latina/o critics or as critics of LVD, avoid analyzing problematic aspects of/in Latin@ vernaculars? Do we ignore ones we dislike, consequently excluding them from examination to maintain a cultural identification or semblance of unity with a community to which we identify?

The dilemma is not ours alone. Others in- and outside of the field (Calafell, 2005; Chávez, 2009; De La Garza, 2004; Delgado, 2009; Martinez, 2000; Moraga, 1993; Moreman, 2009b; Rebolledo, 1990) share feelings of betrayal with which they grapple in terms of analyzing, writing about and exposing the silences and oppressive elements found within cultural discourses, histories, practices and experiences. Rebolledo's poignant

question, "What am I, a critic, doing in this text anyhow?" crystallizes the tension of being a critic and a member of the community from which a text is produced and under analysis. What strikes us is the gendered dimension of the critic/al aspect of examining LVD. As we do not view guilt and betrayal as being gendered, is the dilemma itself gendered? Of the scholars listed above (and, we offer but a handful of examples), they are all female scholars, with the exception of two, expressing an internal struggle relative to the critical act of celebrating and revealing drawbacks of self- or community-produced discourses. We ask ourselves how this tension may also in some ways be tied back to the construction of Mexican women as traitors, which is traceable to the historical and folkloric narratives of Malintzin Tenepal and La Llorona, both subjects of Chicana feminist revision.⁵ The image of woman as betrayer of culture or as sell-out is pervasive throughout Chicana/o, Mexican American, and Mexican cultures. The psychic, emotional, and material burden of this image has been explored and challenged by Chicana feminists; however, we wonder if its remnants inform the reflexivity displayed by scholars noted?

Rebolledo (1990) implies that she accepts the tension of being both critic and community member in order to generate theory from culturally self-produced texts and by extracting what is most useful or relevant from existing "theoretical discourse that comes from outside ourselves" (p. 354). Extending her suggestion, we offer another. Influenced by the work of scholars (McKerrow, 1989; Ono and Sloop, 1992; 1995; 2002) who advocate "critique" as a means of identifying oppositional truths or unseating essentialisms about marginalized groups, the critic/al role of LVD would also involve the act of re-membering. It joins anew a community's discourse under critique so as to advance different social relations and possibilities thereby containing an ethical impulse. Alternatively, critics of LVD would remember, or bear in mind, some of the external challenges facing critics of LVD, particularly those who themselves are Latin@. For example, Calafell and Moreman (2009a), writing within the larger frame of the challenges of publishing Latin@-focused work in Communication Studies in general, and Performance Studies in particular, detail the challenges faced by scholars of color, including charges of narcissism and lack of rigor.⁶ The charges are particularly magnified when Latin@ scholars engage the narrative voice in their work. Clearly, the Latin@ critic examining LVD embodies McKerrow's (1989) self-reflexive critique while being attentive to how power frames her/his positionings both in and out of a text or context. The challenge of self-reflexivity also manifests itself for the non-Latin@ critic studying LVD who may ask what her/his investment or stake is in projects she/he pursues. Regardless of identity, a commitment to reflexivity must remain a central part of the critical process for the critic theorizing LVD.

Each of the three elements, nominally tensions around identity, decolonialism, and the role of the critic are central to a metatheory for contin-

ued development of Latin@ vernacular discourse. The work we have cited throughout this chapter serves as a foundation for the beginning of theorizing LVD; however, more work remains to be undertaken.

LOOKING AHEAD

Our theorizing about Latin@ vernaculars would be incomplete if we did not envision the kind of work still needed to advance LVD. We note here three possible areas: accounting for the performative, questioning unity, and untaming the bi-lingual tongue.

Asking where performance fits within the theorization of LVD is to push the limits of how both LVD and vernacular discourse have been examined by scholars, and also to underscore the textual bias identified by various critical-cultural scholars (Calafell, 2007, 2010; Conquergood, 2002; Enck-Wanzer, 2006b). Calafell (2007; 2010) has argued for the necessary turn to performance studies as a way to be accountable not only to Other forms of representation, theorizing, or knowledge production, but also as a way to hold a critic responsible to her/his privilege through reflexivity. As previously discussed decolonial performance holds the body of the performer/critic accountable to a sustained critique and an exploration of her/his positionalities. Scholars who have begun to employ a performance-centered approach to the vernacular (though not necessarily framed through the language of vernacular discourse) engage the personal narrative as a way to rewrite or re-imagine dominant narratives or histories (Calafell, 2005; Chávez, 2009; Holling and Calafell, 2007; Moreman, 2009b), present alternative realities or Other stories (Calafell, 2004), or explore the (im)possibilities of identities (Moreman, 2008; 2009a; Moreman and McIntosh, 2010). While these works begin to explore provocative areas, we wonder what other insights might we gather if we continue to turn to the theoretical lens *and* method of performance to study Latin@ vernacular discourses?

A second area regards questioning a façade of unity that appears to corral examinations of Latin@ communication broadly, and Latin@ vernaculars specifically. Within the field scholars acknowledge that Latin@ community is a fiction, imagined by and large by media, but also with the participation of Latin@s themselves, to facilitate ideological ends (Calafell and Delgado, 2004; Del Río, 2006; Moreman and Calafell, 2008). As such critics take up the role of investigating the ways that an imagined Latin@ community becomes possible and plausible. Such work is vital to exposing for whom a Latin@ community is constructed, for what purposes and under what conditions. Also needed, however, are examinations that underscore the moments of contentiousness, instances of dissent or “social discord” (Holling, 2006b) that manifest within and amongst Latin@ vernaculars. Doing so lays bare the struggles over culture and power that

contain the possibility of telling us more about how marginalized communities organize, unite and respond in the face of dominant efforts to exploit, oppress, contain or repress marginalized individuals. With few exceptions (Delgado, 1998c; Holling 2006b), both public discourse, be it news reports, film or television footage, about Latin@s and published work about rhetorical constructions of identity or community formation give an impression of seamless uniformity amongst Latin@s. Although the idea of attaining a unified voz/voice may be appealing socially, politically, or economically absent additional work that deepens scholars' understanding of the ways that Latin@ communities reconcile (if, in fact, this occurs) internal dissent perpetuates a false sense of univocality.

Finally, we call attention to the issue of taming the bi-lingual tongue in our scholarship which draws inspiration from Gloria Anzaldúa's chapter entitled "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" (1987). Our attraction is anchored in her poignant metaphor of "tongue" to dramatize her own personal and by extension Chicana/os' cultural experiences when speaking Spanish (or the inability) and encountering "linguistic terrorism." The act of shaming and humiliation experienced from one's native tongue being disgraced and ridiculed by others (Anzaldúa). With changing national demographics in which Latin@s constitute the largest national ethnic minority, and the growth in (Latin@) scholars studying Latin@ communication, no longer do we think taming bilingualism in our own writing or in the writings which we study advantageous or feasible. In short we advocate for an unleashing of bilingualism, both in our scholarly work and in discourse examined.

Widely understood is the connection between language and ethnicity in which the former is a symbolic marker of identity formation (e.g., Anzaldúa, 1987; Martinez, 2000; Moreman, 2008; Perea, 1998). Acknowledging that presumption, elsewhere we argued for a purposeful violation of normative writing practices, which bears quoting at length:

For non-English words, the normative practice is to italicize them. However, we believe such a practice is textually disruptive and contradictory to the spirit of our manuscript. The performances we analyze dramatize and work toward undoing the effects of "psychic trauma" (Anzaldúa); thus, to italicize Spanish words implies an endorsement of "difference" as negative and a perpetuation of psychic trauma. Therefore, we purposely do not italicize any Spanish terms (Holling and Calafell, 2007, p. 79, fn. 2).

Refusing to italicize Spanish words in scholarly essays contributes to a decolonial process by resisting norms of dominant language expectations. Alternatively one could utilize Spanish, Spanglish, or slang words to capture a sentiment, engage in "word-play"⁷ (Castillo, 1994) or reconceptualize an existing concept in order to theorize instantiations of Latin@ vernaculars (i.e., Calafell and Moreman, 2009; Moreman, 2009a, 2009b). Devising ways to unsettle the norms of writing that emanate from

“local cultures first” expresses the possibility of impacting “cultures at large” (Ono and Sloop, 1995, p. 19) be it socially or in a disciplinary field. Ultimately, the suggestions we offer about *un*-taming the bilingual tongue are valuable to advancing the study of Latin@ vernacular discourse and in combating a history of linguistic discrimination in legal and educational spheres experienced predominantly by Mexican Americans and Chicana/os, and, more broadly by Latin@s given recent backlash against bi-lingual education and anti-immigration policies.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we preliminarily sketched the theoretical contours of Latin@ vernacular discourse. We have begun by first reviewing Ono and Sloop’s (1995) landmark essay “The Critique of Vernacular Discourse” as a means of tracing the origins of LVD. Following this we examined key works that contributed to LVD that facilitated the identification of three elements that are central to the development of LVD. That is, tensions of identity, particularly around difference and collectivity, decolonialism, and the challenges or the responsibilities of the critic. Each of these themes is central to understanding and growing LVD; however, we have also gestured to areas that necessitate further study. A performance-centered approach that challenges textuality, a continued interrogation of what “Latin@” means, and issues of language are areas ripe for exploration and theoretical development. Latin@ vernacular discourse will continue to grow as will the theorizations of it; we follow Ono and Sloop’s (1995) call, continuing to map its properties while engaging in a sustained critiqued.

NOTES

1. A “stance of moving between” recognizes the likelihood of Latin@ and national-ethnic discourses interacting, co-existing, commingling and/or challenging each other in public discourse (Holling, 2008, pp. 310-312).

2. Media attention extended to rising Latina and Latino artists, politicians and everyday individuals during the 1990s was hard to miss in popular magazines that had Latina/os gracing their covers. Examples include *Newsweek* (1999), and *Time* (2001; 2005).

3. It could be argued that Latina/o has become for the 1990s and 2000s what Hispanic was for the 1980s; a marketing term.

4. In the area of “Latina/o media studies,” Del Río (2006) suggests similar with regard to bodies of literature from known area studies, such as Ethnic Studies and Latina/o Studies that must be engaged when working in the area (p. 389).

5. For a discussion of Malintzin Tenepal/La Malinche see Messinger Cypess’s (1991) *La Malinche in Mexican Literature* or Romero and Harris’ (2005) *Feminism, Nation, and Myth: La Malinche*. For a discussion of the cultural significance of *La Llorona* see Perez’s (2008) *There Was a Woman: La Llorona from Folklore to Popular Culture*.

6. Consult Katherine G. Hendrix (2010) for further discussion of the politics of race in publishing. The special issue she edited addresses the challenges faced by both white scholars and scholars of color who study issues of race.

7. Castillo (1994) describes "word-play" as a "Mexican linguistic trait" that is a process "of actively transforming one word into another and then another based on the similarity of sounds, we create new meaning, or give the original thought a fusion of multiple meanings" (p. 168).