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(Mis)pronunciations of Hispanic Given Names in the U.S.: Positionalities and Discursive Strategies at Play

Paola Enríquez Duque 

Department of Spanish and Portuguese, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH 43210, USA; enriquezduque.1@osu.edu

Abstract: This qualitative study examines the indexical nature of given names and their role in self-positioning within diverse social contexts. The study centers on the pronunciation of Hispanic given names in the United States. The analysis is grounded in interviews with six young adults who recognize that their names have Spanish and English variants, and it demonstrates that bearers' phonological awareness plays a critical role in distinguishing name variants and mispronunciations, as evidenced through metalinguistic comments. These distinctions are additionally shaped by personal criteria. By examining the participants' narratives and one participant's discursive strategies in particular, I show that the pronunciation of given names constitutes a significant linguistic resource intentionally mobilized and managed to negotiate social positionings. Moreover, this research highlights that conferring Hispanic given names in the U.S. constitutes a sociocultural strategy that extends beyond an indexical ethnocultural naming practice across generations. This practice is found to be a means of fostering and maintaining intergenerational relationships.

Keywords: names; mispronunciation; social meaning; discursive strategies



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1. Introduction

1.1. The Power of Names

Names and their corresponding phonetic and orthographic realizations are not just referential forms but also social indexes (Bucholtz 2016; Rymes 1996). Given names are a symbolic representation of “images, significations, and emotional reverberations for the giver, the bearer, and the community at large” (Zelinsky 1970, p. 748) because they carry great cultural significance (Parada 2019; Rymes 1996; Thompson 2006) and are indexes of ethnic identity and group and community membership (Ainiala and Östman 2017; Lipski 1976; Parada 2019; Rymes 1996; Sue and Telles 2007), especially in pluri-ethnic and racial contexts, which also tend to be multilingual spaces. In the context of immigrant and heritage populations, names become key indexes in the multiple communities of practice in which immigrants participate (Pavlenko 2001) and are part of the construction and negotiation of bicultural, bilingual, and *binominal*¹ identities (Thompson 2006). In this way, a given name has “the power to not only convey but to help form a sense of ethnic identity and even commitment to the language it represents” (Parada 2013, p. 304). It is common for these names to become distinctive above the mainstream language names because of their phonological patterns, pronunciation, and/or orthographic representation, and, as such, ethnic names, or even single phonemes of these, function as complex social indexes (Parada 2020).

In the context of marginalized or ethnically minoritized populations, names can function as a source of discrimination and racial aggressions materialized in offensive naming practices (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Goldstein and Stecklov 2016; Kohli and Solórzano 2012; Lipski 1976). In the U.S., studies have shown that people with distinctive African American names (e.g., Lakisha or Jamal) face differential treatment in contexts such as searches for jobs (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004), rentals (Carpusor and Loges 2006),

or temporary lodging (Edelman et al. 2017). In all three studies, African Americans received fewer callbacks or acceptances than people with White-sounding names (e.g., Emily or Greg). Similarly, proper names can prime stereotypes. Paredes (1993) focuses on the Mexican-American border and discusses how Anglo-Americans make particular use of the names *Pedro* and *Pancho* as distinctive derogatory ethnic labels to invoke a stereotypic view of Mexicans or Mexican Americans: *Pedro*, “usually pronounced with a long *a* as ‘Paydro’—evokes the fat, stupid but basically harmless peon”; and *Pancho* suggests “the bandit stereotype, the Mexican with the long mustaches and the cartridge belts crossed over his chest” (33). In addition to this renaming practice (i.e., arbitrarily assigning a different name), denaming (i.e., erasing someone’s name), misnaming (i.e., naming with someone else’s name) (Bucholtz 2016), and mispronouncing (i.e., phonetically rendering a name into the dominant language phonetic system) (Lipski 1976) are all instances of (linguistically) violent actions. As Lipski (1976) argues, it is essential to recognize that, although mispronouncing could occur unintentionally due to “lack of phonological awareness or dexterity and laziness,” it also happens deliberately with the “desire to degrade, belittle, or ridicule” (113). This phonological alteration into English could reach the point of hyperanglicization, which in some instances becomes an exaggerated imitation of a Spanish accent underlying racist jokes (Zentella 2003), as is the case with Mock Spanish (Hill 2008). Consequently, it has been argued that in immigrant-background families, the choice of a given name in the language of the host country, as opposed to a name in the parents’ language, signals an early stage of acculturation in contrast to ethnic maintenance (Goldstein and Stecklov 2016; Parada 2016; Sue and Telles 2007). Additionally, in some cases, the deliberate selection of a mainstream name is understood as a strategy by parents to protect their children from racially discriminatory experiences (Souto-Manning 2007).

Research framed within third-wave sociolinguistic approaches and linguistic anthropology has shown how language use functions as a complex resource for social indexicality (Eckert 2019; Hall-Lew et al. 2021). Studies analyzing this complexity range from specific linguistic variables (e.g., Babel et al. 2021; Babel 2014; Barnes 2015; Bucholtz 2009; Chappell 2016; Walker et al. 2014) to languaging² practices (e.g., Babel 2018; Mendoza-Denton 2008; Rosa 2019; Zentella 1998). However, scholarship on the pronunciation of personal names as a sociolinguistic variable is still scarce. Likewise, despite the extensive breadth of the field of onomastics (the study of names) (Hough 2016; Kostanski and Puzey 2016; *Names: A Journal of Onomastics*), the subfield of socio-onomastics is still in its infancy.

Ainiala and Östman (2017, p. 1) define socio-onomastics as “the sociolinguistic study of names as linguistic elements that are not only employed as identificatory or reference devices but that are also used to accomplish a variety of culturally, socially and interactionally relevant tasks.” Some studies in the field have revealed how the phonetic realization of foreign place-names indexes speakers’ social categories. For instance, Hall-Lew et al. (2010) and Silva et al. (2011) examine how English speakers in the U.S. use different pronunciations of *Iraq* and *Iran* to index their political stance and signal their status as bi/multilingual speakers or as individuals who have served in the military. Hill (2008, pp. 143–44) discusses how the distinct pronunciations of *Tucson* serve as social indexes of cultural identity (e.g., Chicana) and speakerhood (e.g., speaker of Spanish). In Austin, Texas, Regan (2022) studies the pronunciation of two popular streets with Hispanic names: *Guadalupe* and *Manhaca*. The author finds that, while the English-phonology guises were perceived in terms of localness, the Spanish-phonology guises indexed lower socioeconomic status and higher social affect by participants, but perceptions varied based on the listeners’ demographics, including time lived in Austin and ethnicity (i.e., Hispanic or non-Hispanic). This body of work focusing on place-names, although different in nature from personal names, shows that a sociolinguistic perspective on the study of names and name pronunciation is fertile ground for exploring indexicalization and identity construction and negotiation.

In a particularly noteworthy investigation in the understudied arena of personal names, Wolf et al. (1996) explore the pronunciation of French surnames in New Orleans as a device by which speakers manage their interactions. Based on interview analyses, the

authors contend that name bearers are not necessarily committed to any pronunciation of their names and therefore have varying attitudes toward particular mispronunciations. In this way, understanding pronunciation as (in)correct comes from a personal stance and is mediated by the context of the interaction itself. Likewise, correcting a mispronunciation can include varying strategies depending on the case, such as informing the interlocutors about the pronunciation or expecting the interlocutor to repeat and produce the corrected form of the name.

Hispanic³ given names in the U.S. usually present two variants: a Spanish-phonology variant and an English-phonology variant. The current study focuses on the pronunciation of given names as a social variable and a linguistic resource to deploy and construct social identities.

1.2. Hispanic Names in the U.S.

Parada (2016, p. 21) contends that Hispanic naming patterns in the U.S. vary by communities' sociohistorical backgrounds, demographics, language patterns, and political and sociocultural stances. An early study of Hispanic given names in five different U.S. cities (Lavender 1988) provides an analysis of the twenty most frequent male and female names, classified as Hispanic names (Spanish spellings, e.g., Carlos), bicultural names (names spelled identically in English and Spanish and frequently used in Anglophone and Spanish-speaking cultures, e.g., Andrea), and English names (English spellings or variants, e.g., Michael). The results reflect the size, historical background, and language patterns of the five communities. Notably, Miami was the city with the highest proportion of Hispanic names among its adult population, primarily attributed to its large foreign-born demographic. Conversely, the remaining four cities, namely, San Antonio, Tampa, Denver, and Albuquerque, favor bicultural names rather than total assimilation to English names. Among these four cities, Denver and Albuquerque stood out with the largest proportion of English names.

Using data from 1995, Sue and Telles (2007) examine the most popular 500 names of children in Los Angeles county, most of whom were of Mexican origin. They argue that, when looking at naming patterns, previous studies have often oversimplified the categorization of names as *ethnic* or *nonethnic*.⁴ Therefore, they introduce a five-point scale that allows a more gradient classification and understanding of the language choices of a name. The scale is in the form of a "Spanishness" continuum, which has at the left-most extreme the most English names with no Spanish equivalent, e.g., *Ashley*, and at the right-most extreme, Spanish names with no English equivalent, e.g., *Guadalupe*. The categories in between represent names that have corresponding counterparts in English and Spanish, e.g., *Michael* and *Miguel*, and the centermost category contains names native to both languages, e.g., *Andrea*. The authors found that U.S.-born Hispanics tended to give their sons more English-translatable names than first-generation immigrants, but for daughters, more exclusively English names were given. They argue that the selection of both English- and Spanish-translatable names over exclusively Spanish names allows people of Hispanic heritage to participate in both heritage and mainstream communities because the name, familiar in both languages and cultures, works as a bridge between the two.

Parada (2016), in a study of Hispanic naming patterns in Chicago, found similar results to those of Sue and Telles (2007) in Los Angeles: Hispanic names are predominant in the first generation (59%), and their proportion decreases gradually for the second (54%) and third (38%) generations. Additionally, English name proportions increase across generations: 16% to 31% to 45%. Parada suggests that this growth in English names may signal a progressive cultural and linguistic shift. Nonetheless, the data reveal that the third generation continues to bear Hispanic names, showing that "it is likely that the implicit understanding of the connections between names, ethnic affiliation, and language is at the heart of Latino immigrant parental naming practices" (32). However, as the results differ between the two communities, with LA presenting a higher adoption of English names

than Chicago, the author calls for more nuanced approaches to analyzing naming patterns and practices in each context.

Focusing on a Mexican American family in El Paso, [Doran \(2001\)](#) analyzes three generations (grandparents, parents, and children) and shows that grandparents tend to use Spanish phonology in personal names more consistently and about twice as often as parents and children. The author claims that, although there seems to be a certain degree of conventionalization for the choice of Spanish phonology in some instances, for most words no clear pattern as to which ones are pronounced with Spanish or English phonology is apparent. However, as one participant argues, it is necessary to “know the code” of the community, which means recognizing which pronunciation a particular name calls for ([Doran 2001](#), p. 167). For instance, elders’ names call for Spanish pronunciation more strictly than do the names of younger community members.

The trends shown in the previous studies give an idea of the complexity and significance of naming practices and what these entail at an individual, family, community, and cultural level. Furthermore, research over the past decades confirms the continuous presence of Hispanic names in the personal-names landscape of these communities. Most of these studies have provided large-scale regional descriptions and analyses, setting up the context for qualitative work centered on ideologies and attitudes toward names.

There are very few studies that examine the social meanings of Hispanic names from a qualitative perspective, with [Parada \(2020\)](#) being one of the most representative. Based on data from two focus groups sessions, the study addresses the nexus among names, language, and identity, and specifically, the role that name-based attitudes, ascriptions, and stylizations play in the dynamics of the negotiation of identities. Focusing on Spanish-receptive bilinguals in a Spanish L2 college classroom, the author shows how names can serve as indexes of language competence and ethnolinguistic affiliation. The study explores the students’ attitudes toward their names as ethnolinguistic markers and how names and their pronunciation serve as a sociolinguistic resource in negotiating identities.

Parada identifies two positions among the students: those who feel misrepresented by their ethnic names and those who feel more neutral or positive about them. On the one hand, pride in their family and ethnic heritage resulted in a positive appreciation of their names. On the other hand, the main reasons for a more negative stance were name length, pronunciation difficulty, negative ethnic stereotypes tied to the name, and being directly racially profiled, which included the expectation of knowing Spanish. The author discusses that the pronunciation of names is a dynamic social variable whose value is determined situationally. For the receptive bilingual participants, the Spanish variant of their names seemed to function as one of the few linguistic means they use to overtly index their ethnolinguistic background to convey a sense of honoring their ethnolinguistic roots and even assert certain Spanish competence when in conversation with monolingual or Spanish-dominant speakers, such as their grandparents. Alternatively, they felt that if they were to use the Spanish variant in an English-dominant context, such as school, it would invoke an unwanted identity stereotype (i.e., positioning them as an “expert” in Hispanic heritage and the Spanish language). Ultimately, Parada’s study shows that names are important indexes of ethnolinguistic identities and that their phonetic realizations are sociolinguistic tools for initiating style choices and navigating social spheres.

Parada’s work aligns with [Baird et al.’s \(2018\)](#) study on the indexicality of lexically specific phonology switches (LSPS). LSPS occur when a Spanish loanword, that is, any lexical element such as object names (e.g., taco, piñata), personal names (e.g., Carlos, Garcia), or place-names (e.g., San Antonio, Colombia) is produced with Spanish phonology in a full English utterance. Baird et al. posit that the use of Spanish phonology in Spanish words indexes stereotypes of Hispanic communities in the U.S. and that this use makes even native English-speaking bilinguals targets of racial and cultural profiling. [Kohli and Solórzano \(2012, p. 47\)](#) discuss that, in the U.S. context, the mispronunciation or changing of given names of racial minorities and people of color constitute racial microaggressions, defined as “covert or everyday forms of systemic racism used to keep those at the racial margins

in their place.” Their study focuses on K-12 classrooms when teachers, intentionally or not, mispronounced their students’ names. Retrospective narratives of student participants from different ethnic backgrounds show that, in some cases, these microaggressions become internalized and have lasting consequences. For some Hispanic participants, what may seem like casual mispronunciations, such as placing the stress on the wrong syllable or not rolling the <r>, made them feel like outsiders or as if they were not Americans. During their childhood, these mispronunciations caused them feelings of embarrassment and contributed to the formation of negative perceptions of: (1) themselves because of how different their names appeared to be; (2) their parents, who chose those names for them; and (3) their ethnicity and culture in general.

Overall, scholarship on Hispanic names and naming practices in the U.S. demonstrates that given names are significant and complex indexes of individual and cultural identities. Hispanic communities and immigrant generations in the U.S. exhibit varying naming practices resulting from the different historical and sociocultural contexts, and individual choices of names are the result of situated factors that account for the caregivers’ expectations for their children. The cross-generational presence of Hispanic given names in a politically English-dominant country is a testament of the significance of the choice of Hispanic names as an enduring naming practice in Hispanic communities in the U.S. Nevertheless, despite culturally shared understandings and experiences across communities, attitudes towards the pronunciation of names are as individual as each life story, and these result from individual interpretations of (mis)pronunciation experiences.

2. Methods

This study is based on qualitative data from six individual interviews conducted in early 2022 over Zoom, lasting on average 35 minutes each. Only the audio recordings were stored for further analysis. Three participants came from personal connections, and the other three were contacts from people in my personal social network. Following [Rubin and Rubin \(2011\)](#)’s qualitative interviewing framework, the conversations consisted of a semi-structured and responsive interviewing style, characterized by flexibility of design and active listening. The guiding questions were not addressed in a fixed order or posed literally in the same manner to each participant but adjusted to how the conversation developed in each case. Most lead-in questions were open-ended, and follow-up questions were posed when necessary to encourage the participants to elaborate further on their commentaries. No specific language was strictly set. Therefore, in all cases, Spanish and English were used, following the naturalness of the interaction between both parties. The following are some of the guiding questions posed in the interviews:

- How do you usually pronounce your given name?
- Are there any circumstances under which you alter this pronunciation?
- How important do you think an accurate pronunciation of a name is?
- How do you feel about other people pronouncing your name differently?
- Could you describe any incident involving the mispronunciation, changing, or disrespect of your name, if any?
- Do you know the story behind your name?
- What does your name mean to you?
- How would you name your children in the future?

The participants were three men and three women, all young adults between the ages of 19 and 28 (mean = 23.33; standard deviation = 3.28). All of them self-identified as Latino/Hispanic. Five of them were of Mexican heritage and were born in the U.S., and one was born in Peru. Following [Silva-Corvalán’s \(1994\)](#) and [Del Carpio’s \(2022\)](#) immigration generation groupings, three participants were second generation (i.e., parents were born abroad, and they were born in the U.S.), two were third generation (i.e., they were born in the U.S. along with at least one parent also born in the U.S.), and one, having arrived in the U.S. at the age of 8, belonged to the 1.5 generation (i.e., born in their country of origin but completed their formative periods of education in the U.S. [[Rumbaut and Ima \(1988,](#)

p. 22)). Four grew up in the Midwest, one in the Southwest, and one on the West Coast. Two participants were high school graduates, one was an undergraduate student, two were graduate students, and one was a graduate professional. All of them were multilingual and reported speaking Spanish at home, mainly with their parents. Following Sue and Telles's (2007) scale for measuring the "Spanishness" of names, four of the names fall in the fourth category, i.e., Spanish names with an English translation; one falls in the third category, i.e., a name native in both languages; and one falls in the first category, i.e., an English name with no Spanish translation. However, regardless of the category, all participants recognized that their names had English and Spanish pronunciations with which they were familiar.

Participants received the informed consent form via email before the pre-arranged appointment for the Zoom interview, and it was discussed before beginning the interview and the recording. Considering that personal names constitute the object of study here, participants agreed to make and discuss explicit references to their given names. Participants were guaranteed that any other potential personal identifier (e.g., last name, relatives' names, name of an institution, etc.) that would come up during the conversation would not be transcribed to text. In addition, this identifier would be bleeped out from the audio recording with white noise in an effort to maintain anonymity and confidentiality in disseminating the results of this study.

Following Guenther's (2009) critical discussion of the methodological decision of using real names or pseudonyms in social science studies, and Parada's (2020) reference to it, I opted for pseudonyms in the 24 excerpts chosen below due to the small sample size of the study. Efforts have been made to choose a pseudonym alternative that belongs to the same categories of "Spanishness" (Sue and Telles 2007) the original names fall into and to reflect relevant phonological features that distinguish each name variant from the bearers' perspectives, as will be discussed in the following section. Consequently, the four pseudonyms in the 'Spanish name with English translation' category are *Alberto*, *Estela*, *Leonardo*, and *Elena*; the pseudonym in the 'Native in both languages' category is *Leyla*, and the pseudonym for 'English name with no Spanish translation' is *Tristan*.

The data analysis is framed within a qualitative approach and grounded theory (Bernard 2006; Charmaz 2006; Glaser and Strauss 2006), which is a methodology in social sciences that aims to develop theory from empirical data collected systematically. As such, grounded theory methodology contrasts with logical deductions from a priori assumptions, and data analysis under this approach consists of coding for themes and synthesizing the data in an iterative process (Bernard 2006; Charmaz 2006). After the first step of data collection (in this case, conducting interviews), emergent themes were identified during the transcription process, and when this process was completed, the themes were refined, categorized, and related. The overarching category of this analysis is the meanings of (mis)pronunciations of names. It is informed by three main themes selected: (1) metalinguistic (phonological) awareness of the name variants; (2) the role of name variants in social relationships and contexts; (3) the pronunciation of names as a negotiation strategy for social positionalities.

In addition, a case study is presented, which consists of a discourse analysis of one of the participants' narratives of (mis)pronunciation experiences, selected due to the participant's particularly open and detailed retelling during the interview. The analysis focuses on the interaction of three main discursive strategies used by Elena, which support the selected themes: the usage of metalinguistic comments, the use of reported speech, and the use of the discourse particle *just*. (In Section 3.2.1, I give a brief overview of *just* and its multiple discursive functions.)

The discourse analysis is framed within the Interactional Sociolinguistics approach (Gumperz 1982, 2015), which focuses on the meaning-making and interpretation processes, or how meanings are constructed and understood in specific interactions occurring in a situated context (Bailey 2008). Within Interactional Sociolinguistics, the multiple social

categories that comprise social identities are considered dynamic and are communicatively constructed in the discourse (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz 1982).

3. Analysis and Discussion

All participants recognized that their names are phonetically realized in multiple forms, usually referred to as the Spanish and English pronunciations. These variants involve disparities between certain phonemes contained in the names, which bearers distinguish and demonstrate by metalinguistic commentary about vowel and consonant realizations.

- (1) *Tristan*⁵ I guess it (the difference) would come down to like just the alphabet, right? Like the way, the way the language difference in language is like and in Spanish, dices [a] so ['tris.tan], whereas in English it would-it's [ei] so it's ['tɪs.tən]
- (2) *Leonardo*: in English like drop the <r> I guess, and yeah, and just slow down and make that subtle change of like the <l> sound

Participants resort to the alphabet to explain the difference between the variants. Wolf et al. (1996, p. 420) discuss how the alphabet is a significant metalinguistic device that individuals use to address (mis)pronunciation of names, as it facilitates the connection between speech and writing and thus affords speakers a tool to manage the phonology of their names. In excerpt (1), Tristan explicitly mentions that the difference between variants depends on the respective alphabets and then expands upon his explanation. Although his name contains a letter <a>, his description alludes to the fact that the orthographic vowels have different phonetic realizations in each language. In excerpt (2), Leonardo mentions what he perceives as the difference in the phonetic realization of two consonants in his name, a drop of an <r> and a change in the <l>. The metalinguistic comments reveal, from each individual's viewpoint, the meaningful differences that determine if their names are being produced in Spanish or English, which are personal rather than strictly phonetic. The individual take on the phonemes that contrast and shape the variants' distinctions demonstrates that an exhaustive phonetic account, as a linguist would provide, may be unnecessary for determining when a name is pronounced in one language or the other, for individuals seem to be attuned to a limited set of identifiable differences between the two forms. This highly personal interpretation also suggests that the consideration of the pronunciation of a name as a mispronunciation is subject to individual deliberations and is not a fixed category.

In line with Wolf et al. (1996), the participants' attitudes towards the (mis)pronunciations of their names are not homogeneous. For some participants, only the Spanish form is considered correct, while for others, both pronunciations are taken as valid, illustrated below in excerpts (3)–(6).

- (3) *Alberto*: I think it sounds kind of awesome because it's like, "hey, I can pronounce myself in English and Spanish, en inglés y en español". (...) And like I recently learned how to say my name in German (...). So it's like there's three ways of saying it. It sounds like... It makes you sound educated. It makes you sound nice. It's just- it sounds awesome
- (4) *Leyla*: para mí no (no hay una versión correcta y una incorrecta) porque como crecí con los dos lenguas estoy como que me acostumbré a los dos y pues los dos no no cambian para mí, es como lo mismo
'for me, no (there's no correct or incorrect version of the name) because since I grew up with the two languages, I am kind of like used to both and, well, neither changes for me, both are like the same'
- (5) *Leonardo*: I would say, obviously, that the way that I grew up saying it is the proper way to say it, I would grow up to say, you know, [le.o.'nar.ðo],

like, you know, but it's, but yeah I would say that that's the correct way, yeah that's the correct way

- (6) **Estela:** the correct way that my parents would pronounce it, like they'd be like "[es. 'te.la] *ven para acá*" ('come here') or something like that

Alberto and Leyla accept both name variants but express different emotional stances toward them. For Alberto, the multiplicity of variants is positively assessed as an index of multilingualism, as indicated by the adjectives *awesome*, *educated*, and *nice*. Alberto embraces the three different pronunciations of his name as a tool to display his multiple linguistic resources, which he recognizes as valuable in his social environment. Leyla, on the other hand, expresses a less emotive stance. She accepts the correctness of both pronunciations of her name based on her familiarity with the name variants, as she grew up accustomed to hearing both realizations.

Excerpts (5) and (6) demonstrate how, for both Leonardo and Estela, the way the closest people in their most intimate circle pronounce their names has a direct impact on their definition of the 'correct' variant. For Leonardo, mentioning how he pronounced his name growing up reflects how his family would say it, which establishes the correct model. For Estela, the command phrase ('come here') following her name as a vocative gives the sense of a typical childhood interaction between her and her parents. These participants' responses illustrate how the value of correctness for the name variants usually develops throughout their childhoods.

The tight connection between the Spanish pronunciation of their names and their families is also apparent in the rationale behind the selection of their names. Some of the participants note that their Hispanic name was chosen out of consideration for those in their closest social spheres, like non-English speaking relatives, who may not feel comfortable pronouncing an English-only name.

- (7) **Leonardo:** there's not much of a story behind it (the name) other than they (the parents) keep insisting that it is a it's a name that would sound good in English and Spanish and it was a name that they just liked
- (8) **Elena:** (mi madre) quería un nombre es que dijo que tenías que tener en este tiempo un nombre que se podía pronunciar en español (...) dijo "mis tíos, mis tías, todos no podían pronunciar un nombre en inglés y aunque te quería poner... si te quería poner algo como Ashley o algo así, no se podía hacer, era algo que no aceptaban", entonces decidió este nombre porque pensó que se podía pronunciar bien en los two idiomas y que no iba a ser como difficult for the Spanish speakers and the English speakers
- '(my mom) wanted a name she said that, at that time, you had to have a name that was pronounceable in Spanish (...) she said "my uncles, my aunts, everyone couldn't pronounce a name in English, and even though I wanted to call you... even if I wanted to call you Ashley or something like that, it was not possible, it was something that was not accepted," so she decided this name because she thought it was easy to pronounce in the two languages and that it was not going to be as difficult for the Spanish speakers and the English speakers'

In both cases, the parents' aspiration for their children is that they would partake in their ethnolinguistic heritage by establishing relationships with close relatives such as uncles and aunts. A Spanish form is an index of this heritage, and the availability of this variant benefits the Spanish speakers of their circle, who, in some cases, might find pronouncing an English-only name complicated. This consideration is still present in the second generation, showing that the practice of giving names pronounceable in Spanish is robust across generations, as seen in excerpt (9).

- (9) **Leyla:** quisiera que... podría que si tuviera una hija podría relacionarse con con sus grandparents, you know? con mi parte de la familia que tiene

ese español, pero también al mismo tiempo con la parte de hablar inglés que es la que yo traigo. Y por para mí sí sería importante escoger nombres que tienen una pronunciación en español y una en inglés (...) una parte de respeto a mis padres para que ellos puedan decir los nombres de de mis hijos en una versión correctamente, you know? sin sentirse como que están diciéndolo mal, porque creo que es importante esto también

'I would like that... she could, if I had a kid, she could connect and interact with her grandparents, you know? with that part of my family that has that Spanish, but at the same time with the English speaking part that is the one I bring in. For me it would be important to choose names with a Spanish and an English pronunciation (...) a form of respect to my parents so they can pronounce my kids' names correctly, you know? without feeling like they are saying it wrong, because I think that's important too'

As previous studies have discussed (Baird et al. 2018; Hall-Lew et al. 2010; Regan 2022), articulating a proper name, such as a place-name, in the phonology of the source language can be perceived as a demonstration of higher social affect and respect towards the culture represented by the name. In the case of personal names, the respect is extended to individuals. In line with Parada's (2020) participants' comments, Leyla makes it explicit that a Spanish variant constitutes a way of honoring and showing respect to her closest relatives, and therefore to her family and ethnolinguistic heritage. Since Spanish might be the dominant language of previous generations (as is the case for all six participants), the Spanish pronunciation of names becomes a meaningful resource for establishing a connection among generations. An English-only name could be difficult for her parents to produce, causing them to feel linguistically unskilled when addressing their future grandchildren.

Elena's (8) and Leyla's (9) comments underscore that a Spanish name facilitates inter-generational relationships where linguistic practices may differ. Furthermore, an intentional name with both pronunciations depicts the cultural negotiation that multicultural and multilingual people engage in daily. The younger generations' regard for parents, grandparents, and people in their community, upon choosing Spanish names for their children, shows that a given name carries value beyond its referential function and that its choice is emotionally and socially motivated. In tandem with these motivations, individual social meanings for names, and particularly for the name variants, are constructed throughout a person's life (hi)story, as Leyla explains in excerpt (10).

- (10) *Leyla*: creo que es como aceptar que tengo dos i-, bueno no dos identidades, pero dos cosas que pueden definirme como a mi identidad. Como tengo mi nombre como se diría más culturalmente por parte de de mis padres, de, you know, de ser mexicana y luego por parte de haber crecido aquí. Es como, no sé, tener esas dos versiones es como explicar todo mi pasado en una una manera

'I think it is like accepting that I have two i-, well not two identities, but two things that can define me like define my identity. Like I have my name as it would be said more culturally from my parents' side, from, you know, from being Mexican, and then, on the other side, from having being raised here. It is like, I don't know, having those two versions is like explaining my entire past in a way'

Hill (2008, p. 143) posits that the social indexicality of language choice is complex in multicultural contexts where languages are in conflict, as is the case of English and Spanish in the U.S. This complexity is reflected in the way name variants index different components of an individual's positionality. The junction of family, ethnic, and national-origin heritage, the speakerhood of multiple languages, and the participation in different social networks and sociocultural contexts intervene in the formation of meaning and the constructed value of a name with multiple pronunciations. This process begins when the bearer becomes aware of the existence of the two variants, which usually happens when they compare the

linguistic practices they undertake in an educational context with the Spanish linguistic practices at home, as shown in excerpts (11)–(13).

- (11) **Tristan:** I guess when I started going to school because when I, when I-I was born in Peru, so Spanish is my first language, so when I came over to the U.S. and I went to school, I guess that's when and I talked with people that spoke English. That's when I realized, so I guess like elementary school (...) when I first encounter that, like the difference, I would think about it, but it's so it's so common now that it doesn't even I don't even think about it anymore
- (12) **Elena:** Ahh la primera vez no recuerdo muy bien, pero sé que estaba chiquita, it was elementary school, tenía medio 8 o 9 años y me estaba pensando como por qué en la escuela todos me dicen [ə.'leɪ.nə], like no me gusta que se suena así y todos en mi casa me dicen [e.'le.na]. Entonces así me- ahí me di cuenta y luego entré a high school en mi clase de español, pronunciaban mi nombre en español, y ahí estaba como “¿por qué lo podemos hacer aquí pero no a mis otras clases?”
- ‘Uhm, the first time I don't remember clearly, but I know I was little, it was elementary school, I was like 8 or 9, and I was thinking like at school why does everybody call me [ə.'leɪ.nə] like I don't like that it sounds like that, and at home, they call me [e.'le.na]. So that's when I realized it, I noticed it, and then I started high school, and in my Spanish class, they would pronounce my name in Spanish, and I was like, “why can we do it here but not in my other classes?”’
- (13) **Leyla:** se me hizo tan natural que en la casa me decían ['lej.la] y en la escuela me decían ['leɪ.lə] y era como que me acostumbré rápido y llegué al a la universidad y ahí es cuando me di cuenta de que de esa diferencia porque estaba más en la universidad que en la casa, pero cuando mi mamá me llamaba por teléfono me decía ['lej.la] y decía “¿y por qué nadie lo dice así aquí?” es cuando me di cuenta, pero antes de eso no, no pensé mucho de eso
- ‘it was so natural to me that at home, they called me ['lej.la], and at school, they called me ['leɪ.lə], and it was like I got used to it fast, and then I got to college, and that's when I noticed that difference because I spent more time at school than at home. But when my mom used to call me on the phone, she would call me ['lej.la], and I used to say, “why does nobody say it like that here?” That is when I realized it, but before then, no, I didn't think much about it’

There is a clear relationship between the Spanish pronunciation and the way names are pronounced at home. In (11), for Tristan, the difference became evident when he started learning English at school after moving to the U.S. from Peru. The then-novel realization of the English pronunciation of his name became an ordinary vocative that he grew accustomed to, to the point that he would not think about the distinction later on. Leyla reports something similar. Both pronunciations of her name always felt natural, depending on the social context. However, contrary to Tristan, Leyla would start reflecting on the difference later in college. Spending less time at home and more time at school made her notice that the Spanish variant of her name was mostly restricted to an intimate circle of people. For Elena, awareness of the two pronunciations started early in elementary school and she noticed a personal preference for the Spanish variant. However, in high school, specifically in Spanish class, she would question why she had to tolerate two different pronunciations. These experiences show that, starting at an early age, the pronunciation of participant's names is one of the identity and linguistic resources they mobilize when navigating different sociocultural contexts and relationship spheres. Not only do they manage when to allow other people to pronounce their name in one way or another, but

they themselves also decide when to alternate between the variants to conform to a given context, as highlighted in (14)–(16).

- (14) **Alberto:** If I meet somebody, you know, an English speaker, like let's just say he's not Latino, he's an American, and he is, "Oh, hey what's your name?," "[æ.l.bæt]." That's it. Like, oh in Spanish, it's like "[al.βer.to]"
- (15) **Elena:** Cuando hay muchas personas que solamente solamente hablan inglés deajo que lo pronuncien como en inglés que luego dicen [ə.'lei.nə]. Ahh en la escuela también dicían [ə.'lei.nə]. A- así es donde lo dejaba pasar. También muchas veces cuando voy como al doctor, al dentista, ahí no importa, lo pronuncian como pueden
 'when there are a lot of people that only speak English, I let them pronounce it in English, and they say [ə.'lei.nə]. Also at school, they used to say [ə.'lei.nə]. That is when I let it happen. Also, usually when I go to the doctor, the dentist, there it doesn't matter, they pronounce it however they can'
- (16) **Estela:** If it's someone that I just met and I know that we're not going to like have any type of contact, it's fine ['stɛ.lə], it's, I mean, it'll go by. But if it's someone that I meet, and we're becoming friends and they can't pronounce my name wrong [sic], it starts bugging me. So yes, eventually, I'd be like, 'you gotta say my name right'

Choosing which variant to introduce themselves with and which to accept in a given context is, therefore, an important component of their sociolinguistic styles and repertoires. The addressee or audience (in Bell's (1984) terminology), their corresponding social positionings, and the social relationships between the participants in the interaction are all considered to determine the name variant to be used. In some cases, the choice of the name variant could work as convergent accommodation (Bell 1984; Giles et al. 1973) to the addressee's language and social context. Zentella (1997), in her ethnographic study of a lower-working-class Puerto Rican community in East Harlem, *El Bloque*, argues that the linguistic practices of multilingual, multidialectal, and multicultural speakers are constantly accommodating to and resisting the pressures of their community's social context. These processes are flexible and dynamic and are actively part of the construction of individuals' positionings. Furthermore, as Bucholtz (2016) puts it, these strategies should not be taken as "either simple linguistic accommodation or coerced cultural assimilation. Rather, all such strategies are acts of ethnoracial agency that claim the right to name oneself as one sees fit in a given context" (278).

As comments (14)–(16) show, speakers determine a languaging strategy in the situated context, exerting their agency as multilingual speakers and individuals positioned within their communities. They are the ones who decide when it is acceptable for someone else to pronounce their name in the English form, which is primarily conditioned by intimacy. The pronunciation becomes trivial in a transitory social context or interaction, like at a doctor's office or when no significant relationship exists. However, when considering a closer relationship, the expectation is that the other person will pronounce their name according to the bearer's preferences. Nonetheless, accepting an alternative realization of their names is conditioned by individual phonetic boundaries that define a mispronunciation, triggering a correction, as in (17)–(18).

- (17) **Leyla:** yo sí claramente cuando lo escucho que es diferente, uhmm, les digo "ese no es mi nombre", like "mi nombre es ['lej.la], pero es con una <e> [e], not an <a> [ej]" (with 'not an <a>' [ej], she refers to the more common alternate form Layla)
 'when I clearly notice that it is different, uhmm, I tell them "that's not my name", like "my name is ['lej.la], but with an <e> [e], not an <a> [ej]"'

- (18) **Tristan:** every time they mispronounce it I correct them, so I guess it would be important, but whether the only reason they would quote unquote mispronounce it is because sometimes, like in English specially, there's a ['tɪs.tən] with like an <en>, or like sometimes it's spelled with an <i> or something. So that's when I would be like "no, it's ['tris.tən], with like uh, with <a>." That's the only time I would really correct them.

Wolf et al. (1996) note that mispronunciation is an individual concept that changes from speaker to speaker or for the same speaker depending on the circumstances. What counts as a mispronunciation for one name bearer is not necessarily taken as such for another, or some may view mispronunciation as the intentional frivolous distortions of their names and not failed attempts to pronounce it correctly based on lack of knowledge (419–420). Therefore, a combination of factors determines whether an individual takes the realization of their name as a mispronunciation that they need to address: the specific context where it occurs; the type of relationship they have with the person pronouncing their name; the phonetic deviation of the realization from any of the variants they accept, such as a different vowel or consonant phoneme; or the potential misnaming due to another name with a close phonetic realization. As such, the acceptability of the pronunciation of a name is not a static category but a dynamic negotiation influenced by the context of the interaction and personal stances. Internal and external factors, such as the individual's subjectivity, the social environment, and power dynamics, mediate the reaction to a mispronunciation. Consequently, responses to overt or covert aggressions based on someone's name may display conflicting sentiments.

- (19) **Alberto:** I used to work in this moving, it's like storage and I had another friend, he was [ro.'lan.do], [ro.'lan.do], they would called him [ɪou.'læn.dou], he wouldn't mind. Then one time he (their American boss) was like, "hey, Juan and Pablo, get off the truck," he was calling me and my friend Juan y Pablo. And I was like, "okay" (laughs). I got offended, but at the same time, I thought it was funny. He was just calling me Juan and Pablo. It was not my name (...) Maybe that was racist, racial, but like I found that funny, so I don't- I didn't really get offended

This short but forthright experience depicts how the racist practice discussed in Paredes (1993) (regarding the very name of Pablo) has persisted. Alberto's boss's action reproduces the benefits that power relationships (social and structural) bring to those on top. The intentional misnaming aggression that the boss exerted on Alberto and Rolando and the choice of two stereotypical Hispanic names depict the property of names as racialized signs (Smalls 2020). From a raciolinguistic (Rosa and Flores 2017) and raciosemiotic (Smalls 2020) perspective, Juan and Pablo are enregistered linguistic forms (Agha 2003), specifically racialized signs indexical of male individuals of ethnoracialized Hispanic communities in the U.S. In his retelling of the experience, Alberto shows a conflicting attitude towards his boss's intentional renaming. First, he expresses his discomfort and bafflement with the unexpected utterance (by saying 'okay' and laughing), subsequently stating that he felt offended. But next, he admits that it was funny and argues that, although it could have been a racist joke, it felt amusing at the time and, therefore, did not offend him. Without the right to condemn Alberto's reaction to the ethnoracial and demeaning aggression when it occurred, I argue that this casual encounter and its impromptu retelling prove that names are proxies for committing racial aggressions, which in day-to-day spheres are still unidentified as such. Despite the frequent justifications for these actions as being not racist but playful jokes, and as Hill (2008, 1993) describes in her discussion of Mock Spanish, these practices are part of strategies reproducing racial hegemonies (Bucholtz 2016, p. 278) and sustaining and propagating noxious language ideologies.

3.1. Summary

The accounts of these six Hispanic young adults in the U.S. whose names have at least two variants show that positionalities towards their given names are individual, complex, and dynamic.

As personal as every name is, the meaning of its pronunciation is subject to individual interpretation. The experiences here are a sample of the multiplicity of stances regarding name pronunciation preferences, which are motivated by personal stories and experiences. Some prefer the Spanish form and consider it the correct version of their name; others prefer the Spanish but do not attribute incorrectness to the English variant; others have no preference, and therefore consider neither variant incorrect.⁶ Accordingly, what constitutes a name mispronunciation is more a subjective deliberation than an objective and fixed categorization, and it is best not to overgeneralize the conditions that determine when someone would judge the realization of their name as a mispronunciation. Likewise, a Hispanic name does not necessarily imply that the bearer has a strict preference for the Spanish variant or that the anglicized version would be considered a mistake. Accordingly, out of respect, and as Bucholtz (2016, pp. 286–87) recommends, the best course of action is to make the effort to correct your ignorance by asking people how they prefer their names to be pronounced and then addressing them as such.

As all participants shared, the Spanish pronunciation of their names is tightly linked to their family heritage, in which Spanish is a significant language within their intimate circle of relationships. For this reason, the selection of a name pronounceable in Spanish indicates an enduring practice that displays more than just the well-known cultural significance of names. It also reflects a thoughtful familial concern with potentially disrespecting Spanish-dominant family members, like first-generation parents or grandparents, by giving English-only names to the next generations, as their pronunciation may pose difficulty for them. Thus, a name pronounceable in Spanish helps cultivate and preserve intergenerational relationships.

Among the outer social circles, educational contexts usually constitute one of the most significant environments where the Spanish and English variants of a name first find themselves in conflict. As mentioned by the participants, their attention was drawn to the two distinct pronunciations of their names at different stages of their educational journeys, and they reflected on and questioned them in elementary school, middle, or high school, or even later in college. Spanish classes, in particular, become a meaningful space because they facilitate an awareness of the pronunciation of their names parallel to home practices and in contrast to how teachers in other courses pronounce them. The next section centers on Elena's life story, showing how the school context is a crucial social sphere in which (mis)pronunciations of a name contribute to the negotiation and construction of positionalities.

3.2. Case Study: A Discourse Analysis of a Narrative of (Mis)pronunciation Experiences

In the following analysis of Estela's retelling of her experience with the (mis)pronunciations of her name, three main discursive strategies are considered: (1) metalinguistic commentaries on pronunciation, (2) reported speech throughout her narration, and (3) the usage of *just*. The interaction among these strategies constructs a narrative of the power of a name and shows the self-positioning dynamics toward its pronunciations. Before the analysis, a brief overview of *just* and its multifaceted values in the discourse is given to justify its selection for this case study.

3.2.1. A brief Overview of *Just*

Just is considered a polysemous form frequently used by young people (Tagliamonte 2005) that can syntactically function as an adverb as well as a discourse particle. As the adverbial form, it modifies a constituent corresponding to its primary semantic function of restrictive meaning (Lee 1987) and, accordingly, to its propositional meaning. In this case, it can be alternated with other adverbs such as 'exactly,' 'only,' or 'simply.' As a discourse particle, its function is to modify the illocutionary force of the whole utterance and, therefore, it reflects the speaker's involvement in the discourse event (Aijmer 2002). From a discourse-pragmatic perspective, *just* "has an indexical relation to the speaker's attitudes or emotions towards the discourse event," differentiating it from other particles with parallel semantic meaning. In this way, its usage implicates an instruction to the interlocutor to "interpret the utterance as the expression of an attitude" (158).

Molina and Romano (2012) proposed the pragmatic meanings of *just* as branching out in opposite directions: as a downtoning and as an uptoning marker. The former refers to readings of restriction, minimization—also described as the depreciatory meaning (Lee 1987)—and possibility, whereas the latter corresponds to readings of exactitude, emphasis, and agreement. Nonetheless, these meanings are not necessarily fixed and exclusive, and they may overlap. As such, the meaning of *just* depends on the interaction between the linguistic form and the context in which it occurs (Aijmer 2002).

In this study, the use of *just* and its downtoning and uptoning functions are analyzed as a means for marking two of Estela's stances with respect to the pronunciation of the variants of her name. Stance is a widely studied concept in sociolinguistics (Barnes 2018; Bucholtz 2009; Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Du Bois 2007; Jaffe 2009; Kiesling 2005, 2009; Ochs 1993, 1996), and for the purpose of this analysis I follow Barnes (2018, p. 2) and define stance as the way a speaker conveys their attitude or position towards the content and context of their speech. The ensuing analysis shows how the multifaceted *just* serves to deploy (1) a stance of resignation towards the English variant ['stɛ.lə]—corresponding to *just* as a downtoner—and (2) a stance of annoyance towards the pronunciation of the Spanish variant [es.'te.la]—corresponding to *just* as an uptoner.

3.2.2. Estela's (Hi)story and Discursive Strategies at Play

The following excerpt, expanding on (6), provides a clear picture of Estela's positionality, which is necessary to understand her personal story. Each variant of her name indexes complementary sides of her bilingual, bicultural, and binominal context. In (20), the interaction among phonetic realizations, languages, and ethnoracial identities is made explicit:

- (20) it's like it was two sides of me because it was either ['stɛ.lə], or the- the correct way that my parents would pronounce it, like they'd be like "[es.'te.la], ven para acá" or something like that (...) It's like at school when they called me ['stɛ.lə], it would be fine, because it sounds, it sounds American or whatever, and being at home, and then my parents speaking Spanish to me but calling me [es.'te.la] and then it's- I felt like I was like a whole new other person. Like this person that doesn't speak English at all. And I'm just like completely like Latino, but then I go to school, and it's like, "Okay, I'm not Latino anymore, I'm American," or in some ways, but then, but then people messed up my name and then I was just like, "oh no, yeah, I am Latina."

This excerpt encapsulates the complexity of the social meanings each variant of Estela's name holds. Estela is explicit and specific about the correct pronunciation of her name, corresponding to the way her parents pronounce it, [es.'te.la]. This directly relates to her family heritage and stresses the significance that her parents' pronunciation and linguistic practices have for her. Thus the Spanish variant of her name is tightly connected to the presence of the Spanish language in the home as a crucial component of the construction of a Latino family and, consequently, a Latino identity. In contrast, the English variant relates to a more public sphere in Estela's life where English is used: the academic context, which for Estela invokes a more "American" identity. Furthermore, she clarifies that in this social sphere, probably where she encounters Spanish speakers less frequently, her name is not pronounced in the way she considers correct.

For Estela, the variants of her name index distinct but intertwined social categories that construct her positionality. Social contexts and their linguistic practices mediate Estela's self-ascriptions to and navigation between American and Latino identities. Despite seemingly describing a compartmentalized presence of English (at school) and Spanish (at home) and an apparent corresponding pronunciation of her name in each context, Estela notes that when English speakers struggle with ("messed up") the pronunciation of her name at school, it is a signal of her Latino ethnicity. The social meanings of the (mis)pronunciations of her name are not fixed, but are rather in constant flux depending on the interactional context.

As previously discussed, the interpretation of differences between name variants is personal rather than strictly phonetic. In Estela's case, the difference resides mainly in the first phoneme of her name:

- (21) my family and I pronounce it [es.'te.la], but like making emphasis on the <e> like [es.'te.la], you know? (...) When I meet people and they think that it's complicated just saying [e]. So they just- I'll just be like:
 – "It's not hard"
 but they see they just forget so that normally they just call me ['stɛ.lə]

Estela metalinguistically refers to an "emphasis on the <e>." This phonological reference does not correspond to the word's stress but the actual realization of the phoneme /e/ at the beginning of her name. When contrasted to the English version, in Spanish, Estela's name includes what is commonly referred to as an *epenthetic* <e>. Spanish disallows syllable-onset consonant clusters such as /st-/ , /sk-/ , /sp-/ , and thus, various word pairs exist in English and Spanish where the presence of this /e/ is the salient distinguishing characteristic, e.g., *stress* ['stɪɾɛs] vs. *estrés* [es.'tres] or *Stella* ['stɛ.lə] vs. *Estela* [es.'te.la] (Hualde 2014, p. 64). The awareness of this phonemic rule gives Estela the tools to point out the /e/'s role and mark it as the differentiation between variants, hence the correct pronunciation vs. a mispronunciation. Using an indefinite 'they' or 'people,' Estela generalizes the assignation of the mispronunciation to anyone or any social group of non-Spanish speakers, given the common tendency among them to use the English variant. Still, Estela expresses her bewilderment at the use of English by suggesting that the realization of the initial phoneme /e/ should not be complicated yet seems infrequently achieved.

Moreover, excerpt (21) contains various instances of *just*. In the first instance, "they think that it's complicated just saying [e]," *just* serves to emphasize the requirement for pronouncing the Spanish variant. She uses reported speech to convey her reproach and dissent that adding the /e/ is supposedly difficult: "I'll just be like: 'it's not hard.'" This second *just* in the quotative complements the uptoning function of the previous one by emphasizing that the expectation of adding an onset /e/ is usually not met. These *justs* convey a stance of annoyance with others' inability to pronounce her name in Spanish. Immediately after, Estela justifies the mispronouncers, saying that "they just forget" and use the English variant ("they just call me ['stɛ.lə]"). These two downtoning *justs* convey a sense of Estela's minimization of her discontent about others not being able to pronounce her name the way she prefers, which shows Estela taking a stance of resignation towards the English variant ['stɛ.lə]. Excerpt (21) shows that stance marking is complex and continuously constructed throughout the discourse, which aligns with previous work (Barnes 2018; Bucholtz 2009; Eckert 2019; Jaffe 2009; Kiesling 2009) that highlights stancetaking as a multidimensional and dynamic process that takes part in the construction of social identities. In this excerpt, a tension between the two main stances is apparent: the stance of annoyance about the supposed difficulty that including an /e/ poses to non-Spanish speakers and the stance of being resigned to accept the English variant reside in almost parallel discourses. Shifting from one stance to another can occur as fast as moving from one sentence to the next, and the same linguistic device (e.g., *just*) can be mapped onto different stances. The following examples will continue to demonstrate how the interaction among these discursive strategies reflects the dynamicity of the stancetaking process.

In excerpt (22), Estela's conflicting attitudes are apparent when directly addressing how she negotiates the pronunciation of her name with others, usually failing to achieve an acceptable Spanish realization. Furthermore, this excerpt reveals the indexical meaning that has been ascribed, throughout Estela's lived experiences, to the "problematic" phoneme /e/.

- (22) I know a lot of people that are just... like when they hear my name, they know that I'm I'm Latino, just because of the [e], like they'll be like:
 – "Oh, [es.'te.la]"
 and then I'll be like:
 – "Yeah"
 and they try and say it kind of like in a... I don't know, like in a Latino

way, like they they *just* make so much emphasis on the [e] now and I'm *just* like:
 – “No, it's not so much emphasis, it's *just* [e] like [es.'te.la]”
 and they'll be like:
 – “[e::s.'te.la]”
 and I'm like:
 – “No, no.”

Estela explicitly states that the Spanish /e/ phoneme acts as a sociolinguistic index, differentiating the two variants and marking her Latino ethnic identity. Her metalinguistic commentary demonstrates her phonetic awareness throughout the excerpts included here. For example, in (22), she displays both her linguistic knowledge and sociocultural sensitivity as she confirms that the pronunciation of her name plays a defining role in constructing and negotiating her ethnoracial identity and positionality. This excerpt portrays a simulated interaction between Estela and non-Spanish speakers with whom she is negotiating the pronunciation of her name. It contains a chain of uptoning *justs* with which Estela takes a stance of annoyance towards the failed attempts of others to pronounce [es.'te.la]. First, in the statement “*just* because of the /e/,” *just* specifies the indexicalization of /e/ to her Latino ethnoracial identity. Then, after other people presume she is Latino because of the onset /e/ in her name, they attempt to pronounce it but do so in an exaggerated fashion. The *just* in “they *just* make so much emphasis on the /e/” conveys Estela's unease caused by the unnecessary vowel elongation, which she perceives as a performative attempt to pronounce her name in a “Latino way.” Although Estela may not frame her commentary as an affirmation that this practice carries an injurious intention, her remark shows that the Spanish variant is easily subjected to playful linguistic practices, as is the case of Mock Spanish (Hill 2008). The final two instances of *just*, in the quotative “I'm *just* like” and within the quote “it's *just* /e/ like [es.'te.la],” together with metalinguistic notes, indicate specifically how she expects her name to be pronounced and, at the same time, help construct a stance of annoyance towards others mispronouncing her name.

In Estela's personal story, the need to constantly negotiate the correct pronunciation made her disdain her name. This contempt reached a stage where she gave up on trying to educate others about the Spanish pronunciation, accepted the anglicized form that was easier and more common for non-Spanish speakers, and decided to use it herself when saying her name.

- (23) There was a while back, like I said, like, oh, when I was younger I hated my name. So when they would ask me how to pronounce it, I did *just* say ['stɛ.lə], like I wouldn't, I didn't bother on saying it right myself like I'm *just* like:
 – “No, it's *just* ['stɛ.lə]”
 So I've grown up with like my best friends. Uhm. They *just* called me ['stɛ.lə] until the point we were, we came to high school.

All four *justs* in (23) serve as downtoners, marking the stance of resignation toward the English variant and minimizing her discontent, which she would mask by limiting her explanations of the pronunciation of her name to “it's *just* ['stɛ.lə].” In this way, in spite of her preference for [es.'te.la], she opted for allowing people close to her, and even herself, to refer to her as ['stɛ.lə] until she got to high school. As mentioned in the previous section, the different stages of scholarly contexts are significant to an individual's reflection on the pronunciation of their name (Bucholtz 2016).

Estela describes a particular experience with a substitute teacher, who was the first person to call her attention to the significance of the pronunciation of her name and make her think critically about how she had been approaching the (mis)pronunciations. After this encounter, Estela decided to introduce herself as [es.'te.la] and to start correcting her friends' usual mispronunciation.

- (24) he (the substitute teacher) asked me how to pronounce my name and I was *just* like:

- “oh, it’s *just* [‘stɛ.lə],”
 and he noticed that my answer was kind of just like the same old- like it looked like I had been repeating that the- like my entire life, which I had. And I cou- I couldn’t believe he noticed because he came on to me and he was like:
 – “What do you mean it’s *just* [‘stɛ.lə]? like if- is it not correct?”
 And then I said:
 – “Well, yeah, it’s correct. It’s *just*. . . they, I mean, I *just* changed it a little”
 and he was like:
 – “Well, how do you actually say it?”
 and I was like:
 – “Well, it’s actually it’s, um, it is [‘stɛ.lə] it is *just* I make an emphasis on the <e> uhm and so it’s [ɛ:s.‘te.lə].”
 And then he was like:
 – “Oh, ok, I see. Well, you shouldn’t try and uhm change the way you pronounce your name *just* because other people can’t say, if I can say it I’m pretty sure everyone else can.”
 And so then I *just*, I *just* kind of took that in mind

While recalling and retelling this experience, Estela maintained the conversation style she had had throughout the interview, but she made use of more complex reported speech, with longer utterances and more elaborated content than in previous excerpts. The contrast between those familiar moments of mispronunciation in which others did not show interest in Estela’s name preference and this encounter with the teacher, which presented Estela with a new perspective, is reflected in how Estela constructs her narrative. As noted in previous excerpts, Estela usually does not specify whom she refers to when talking about people who do not use the Spanish variant of her name. In these cases, Estela employs a generic ‘they’ that, based on her situated sociocultural context, likely signals those who do not speak Spanish. In addition, when Estela attributes reported speech to interactions between her and the undifferentiated ‘they,’ it tends to be a simpler utterance simulating their regular attempt to pronounce her name, the way other people mispronounce it, Estela’s demonstration of how to pronounce it, or her discontent with the result. On the contrary, in the dialogue in (24), when Estela retells this significant experience with someone who expressed a view that differed from what she had anticipated, she makes the intervention detailed with elaborate explanations. This strategy allows for the significance of this moment to be highlighted in her personal story.

When the substitute teacher asks Estela how to pronounce her name, she immediately replies by giving her usual answer, the English variant, “oh, it’s *just* [‘stɛ.lə].” The *just* here plays a crucial role, as the teacher distinguishes its downtoning force and shows it by replicating Estela’s response and asking her elaborate on it: “What do you mean it’s *just* [‘stɛ.lə]? like if- is it not correct?” The teacher recognizes that Estela is not content with her answer because of the presence of *just*. Comparing the same utterance without *just* marks the difference:

- (a) oh, it’s *just* [‘stɛ.lə]
 (b) oh, it’s [‘stɛ.lə]

In (a), Estela’s usage of *just* functions as a mitigating device for the conflicting attitudes towards the pronunciation of her name. By employing *just*, she adopts a resigned stance and provides the English variant as her answer, despite her preference for the Spanish form. This contextual and discursive meaning is not present in (b) without *just*. From evaluating this utterance in isolation, had Estela not employed *just*, it is possible that the teacher would not have noticed her conflicting attitudes toward the pronunciation of her name. Accordingly, it is the presence of *just* that conveys the emotional load that the variants of her name hold for Estela. Throughout excerpt (24), instances of *just* demonstrate the way Estela deemphasizes the strategies she had employed to make the pronunciation of her name easier for non-Spanish speakers (“I *just* changed it a little”). Downplaying “changing a little” as an insignificant move aligns with the resigned stance that Estela had taken until

that moment. However, this is recognized by the teacher, and his commentary encouraged Estela to reconsider the way she had been approaching the (mis)pronunciation of her name. In the interview, she mentioned that she then began correcting people's pronunciation of her name, starting with her closest friends, who had always called her by the English variant. Although she still accepts the English variant, especially in trivial contexts, such as when she is called to pick up an order at a restaurant, she now mainly goes by the Spanish variant of her name, which is the pronunciation she uses to introduce herself.

4. Conclusions

This study has shown that a name is not *just* a referential form, but a complex indexical form that belongs to the linguistic repertoire of each individual, which is mobilized accordingly to accomplish different social and communicative goals in the situated contexts that people navigate.

The accounts of these six individuals whose names are produced with Spanish and English phonology demonstrate that metalinguistic (phonological) awareness is a crucial tool in defining the various forms of a name and that such definitions are based on personal criteria. The differentiation of name variants, such as Spanish and English forms, is highly significant in the ongoing process of self-positioning across multiple social contexts. Although the participants in this study share experiences of using different pronunciations of their names and encountering mispronunciations, their responses to such situations vary and are shaped by negotiation strategies influenced by multiple concurrent social factors, including power dynamics present in the respective contexts. Furthermore, these responses are informed by the different social meanings associated with names and their variants.

Research framed within the third wave of sociolinguistics contends that the social meanings of language are indeterminate, and they necessitate an understanding of the social and discursive contexts in which they are employed (Eckert 2008; Hall-Lew et al. 2021; Moore 2021; Podesva 2007). This current study posits that names, particularly the variants of given names with multiple pronunciations, such as Hispanic names in the U.S., are indexical forms that encompass a range of social meanings. For some individuals, multiple variants of a name are positively evaluated as indexes of multilingualism and multiculturalism, while in other cases, a Spanish variant, or even a particular phoneme in the name, serves as a direct index of a Hispanic ethnoracial identity, which may be construed positively or negatively depending on one's experiences, as discussed in Parada (2020). From a cultural perspective, a Hispanic given name transcends a mere cross-generational ethnocultural naming practice, serving as a sociocultural strategy for maintaining and facilitating intergenerational and familial relationships. The decision to pronounce a given name in a particular manner represents an act of agency that constitutes a meaningful linguistic practice, through which individuals constantly negotiate and present their positionalities.

The case study in this work has offered an initial discursive analysis employing a qualitative approach that contributes to the scarce scholarship on Hispanic given names. This analysis sheds light on how speakers utilize different discursive strategies, which are in constant interplay, to display fluctuating stances with respect to the variants of their names. Further analyses of this kind will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how names, the bearers' pronunciation of a name, and the pronunciations of others constitute sociolinguistic variables that are key in the construction of social identities and positionalities.

"When I see the people who have had the experience of having been given a name from their family, which is one of the greatest gifts that a family can give you, it is the first gift that a child, usually, when they enter the Earth, receives from their family, it is usually informed by tradition and love and the hope and aspiration the family has for that child. It is something precious and sacred, and it is a part of their identity. And when I see people fighting for the right for that to be respected and treated in a dignified way, I applaud and salute that."

Kamala Harris in Noah (2020)

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Notes

- ¹ Binominal here refers to having different pronunciations of a name, such as one corresponding to a minoritized language and the other to the hegemonic language in a given society.
- ² The concept of *linguaging* refers to the language practices exerted by language users, and it recognizes the speakers' agency in the interactive process of meaning-making, or the "simultaneous process of continuously becoming ourselves and of our language practices, as we interact and make meaning of the world" (García and Wei 2014, pp. 8–9).
- ³ Following Parada (2016) and Sue and Telles (2007), in this study, the label *Hispanic* is used to denote hispanized variants of names, which refers to the Spanish phonological realization of the name, rather than a Spanish/Latin etymology of the name. Because the Spanish language is central to this study, a clarification regarding the term *Hispanic* is in order. In this paper, *Hispanic* is employed as an overarching ethnonym referring to "being of Spanish-speaking background and trace their origin or descent from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central and South America, and other Spanish-speaking countries" (Lopez et al. 2022). Notably, the term *Latino* is solely employed when it is explicitly cited from a reference or when a participant used the term.
- ⁴ As one of the reviewers pointed out, it is necessary to recognize that considering a name as ethnic or nonethnic is problematic as all names are ethnic. This distinction is determined by who is labeling them as ethnic or nonethnic. Throughout this article, the usage of ethnic refers to the Hispanic ethnonym unless specified otherwise. Nonethnic is only used when reporting that other studies have used this specific label to establish the difference between names.
- ⁵ Excerpts transcription legend:
(text) - Clarification text
[IPA] - Phonetic transcription following IPA
<letter> - Speaker mentions the specific letter. If in a Spanish phrase/utterance, it is produced with Spanish phonology, and if in an English phrase, it is produced with English phonology.
- ⁶ In this case, none of the participants indicated having a preference for the English variant of their names. Likewise, none of the participants considered the Spanish variant as the incorrect form.

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