

Salvadoran Spanish and Stylistic Practices of Indexicalization

This paper is about a metapragmatic-sociolinguistic investigation of linguistic processes of the construction of linguistic-variational features in Salvadoran Spanish – specifically in “El Niño de Hollywood” (2018) by Martínez and Martínez. In this work, the authors attempted to approach socio-cultural realities in rural El Salvador by, among other things, realistically imitating the speakers – and thus became social actors themselves, inscribing certain linguistic features as salient for specific rural varieties of Salvadoran Spanish among readers. This contribution qualitatively analyzes various features on the linguistic levels of phonetics, morphosyntax, and lexis in both works. However, the focus is on the pronominal forms of address *usted*, *tú* and *vos*, which are used in the works as part of the fictional linguistic varieties of the rural protagonists. It is not only between leaders and common gang members that a hierarchical structure is created through communicative acts. Between individual gang members, too, the otherwise predominantly solidary style of communication with *vos* is set aside and a differential hierarchical positioning is established linguistically through the use of the personal pronouns *tú* and *usted*. The metapragmatic processes lead to the inscription of (fictitious) rural language usage and are thus part of the enregisterment of rural varieties in El Salvador as “deviant” and “different” varieties of (urban) Salvadoran Spanish.

Keywords: Salvadoran Spanish, metapragmatic sociolinguistics, *enregisterment*, pronominal address forms

Salvadorianisches Spanisch und stilistische Praktiken der Indexikalisierung

Im vorliegenden Beitrag geht es um eine metapragmatisch-soziolinguistische Untersuchung sprachlicher Prozesse der Konstruktion sprachlich-variationaler Merkmale im salvadorianischen Spanisch – konkret in „El Niño de Hollywood“ (2018) von Martínez und Martínez. In diesem Werk probierten die Autoren, sich soziokulturellen Realitäten im ländlichen Raum El Salvadors unter anderem auch durch eine wirklichkeitsgetreue sprachliche Nachahmung der Sprecher:innen anzunähern – und wurden damit selbst zu sozialen Akteuren, die bestimmte sprachliche Merkmale als salient für konkrete rurale Varietäten des salvadorianischen Spanisch bei Leser:innen einschreiben. Zwar werden in diesem Beitrag diverse Merkmale auf den linguistischen Ebenen der Phonetik, Morphosyntax und Lexik in beiden Werken qualitativ analysiert. Der Fokus liegt allerdings auf den pronominalen Anredeformen *usted*, *tú* und *vos*, die in den Werken als Teil der fiktiven sprachlichen Varietäten der ruralen Protagonisten bezweckt verwendet werden. Nicht nur zwischen Anführern und einfachen Bandenmitgliedern wird durch kommunikative Handlungen eine hierarchische Struktur geschaffen, sondern auch zwischen einzelnen Bandenmitgliedern wird der sonst vorherrschende solidarische Kommunikationsstil mit *vos* aufgegeben und durch die Verwendung der Personalpronomen *tú* und *usted* eine differenzielle hierarchische Positionierung sprachlich hergestellt. Die metapragmatischen Prozesse führen zur Einschreibung eines (fiktiven) ländlichen Sprachgebrauchs und

sind somit Teil der Einschreibung ländlicher Varietäten in El Salvador als „abweichende“ und „andere“ Varietäten des (urbanen) salvadorianischen Spanisch.

Schlüsselwörter: Salvadorianisches Spanisch, Metapragmatische Soziolinguistik, *Enregisterment*, pronominale Anredeformen

Author: Jannis Harjus, University of Innsbruck, Innrain 52d, A-6020 Innsbruck, Austria, e-mail: Jannis.Harjus@uibk.ac.at

Received: 19.11.2024

Accepted: 18.1.2025

1. Introduction

While hardly any works on Spanish in Central American regions worthy of academic mention were produced in the 20th century (cf. López Morales 1999: 33–40), a dedicated linguistic-scientific study of linguistic variation in Central American Spanish in general and the Spanish of El Salvador in particular began in the 21st century (cf. Quesada Pacheco 2023: 374). In addition to relevant empirical work on phonetics (Azcúnaga López 2010), morphosyntax (Quesada Pacheco and Rivera Orellana 2013), politeness (Moser 2010), language attitudes (Quintillana Aguilar 2009) or holistic accounts of linguistic variation in El Salvador or Central America (Jodl 2021, Patzelt 2013, Quesada Pacheco 2023), the publications on Salvadoran linguistic atlas projects (Azcúnaga López 2012, Rivera Orellana 2011) are also worth mentioning. The results of these works form the basis for the considerations in this paper, which aims to uncover linguistic processes in “El Niño de Hollywood” (Martínez/Martínez 2018) from a metapragmatic-sociolinguistic perspective in order to analyze the intended function of the use of certain salient¹ features or even certain ways of using language by fictitious orality (Brumme 2008) in El Salvador.

2. Salvadoran Spanish

At the linguistic level of Spanish in Central America, there are similarities, such as a generalized *Yeísmo* (cf. Jodl 2021: 711) or the lenition of the phoneme /x/ as [h] (cf. Quesada Pacheco 2023: 375). El Salvador belongs to a north-central area of the Central American variety continuum, i. e., to a mesozone within the Central American zone with the Honduran and Guatemalan varieties of Spanish.

On a phonetic level, both certain vowel and consonant features in Salvadoran Spanish varieties are worth mentioning. While Lipski (2009: 276) registers vowel fluctuations from /e/ to [i] and /o/ to [u], Quesada Pacheco (2023: 378) only includes the change

¹ By salience of a feature, we mean the salient characteristic of a linguistic element within an overall linguistic context (cf. Lenz 2010: 92). Of course, this always raises the question of for whom a linguistic feature is actually salient and what (linguistic) concrete consequences the perceived salience has for the further realizations of such a feature (cf. Harjus/Peter 2025).

from /e/ to [i] among the rural Salvadoran Spanish varieties. The reason for the vowel fluctuations is considered to be historical language contacts between Salvadoran Spanish in these regions and Nahua-Pipil, which – similar to Indigenous languages in the Andean region – has a three-membered vowel trapezium in contrast to the five-membered system of many Spanish varieties. Apocope, which means a weakening of vowel syllables, is also an essential feature of rural varieties, such as in [notʃ̃] /notʃ̃e/ *noche* (cf. Quesada Pacheco 2023: 374). In the consonantal structure, various features are also considered to belong more to rural Salvadoran areas: Jodl (2021: 584), for example, assumes that the syllable-final realization of the phoneme /s/ as [ʃ] is a clear indicator for speakers from rural areas. Here, too, the reason is seen as historical contact with Indigenous languages (cf. Patzelt 2013: 584), which was intensive in rural Central America. The occlusive realization of voiced occlusions, for example [ablado] /ablado/ *hablado*, continues to be typical of many varieties in El Salvador. This type of realization of occlusives is in clear contrast to other varieties of Spanish, where occlusives become voiced fricatives after semivowels and consonants: [ablaʰo] (cf. Quesada Pacheco 2023: 374). In addition, a bilabialization of /f/ as [ɸ] is common among less educated speakers in rural areas (cf. Quesada Pacheco 2023: 378). Azcúnaga López (2010: 96) points out that aspiration of /f/ to [h] also frequently occurs within these groups of speakers. The phenomenon of aspiration is in itself a widespread linguistic element in rural Salvadoran varieties of Spanish and is by no means limited to /f/, but should be noted in particular with regard to sibilants (Rudorff 2009: 106). Rodríguez Prieto (2014) also points to the consonantal phenomenon of **je-jeo** [heheo]. With regard to the aspiration of /f/ or /s/ and /θ/ as [h], Lipski (2009: 277) makes it clear that this is a strongly sociolinguistically determined variable that occurs particularly among less educated speakers in rural El Salvador. In any case, Rudorff (2009: 106) points out that various varieties of Salvadoran Spanish show great variation with regard to the sibilants /s/ and /θ/ – in contrast to many other Latin American varieties of Spanish, less in favor of the so-called **seseo**, but rather in the direction of a **ceceante** realization, i. e. [elθalbador] /elsalbador/ *El Salvador*. However, while Quesada Pacheco (2023: 375) perceives a general tendency towards ceceo, Rudorff emphasizes a clear rural component of the consonantal phenomenon (2009: 106). Lipski (2009: 277), however, points out that there is no systematically verifiable use of [θ] in linguistic contexts in which [s] is often used for /s/ and /θ/ in other Spanish varieties in the Americas.

The morphosyntactic features are quite similar to the Guatemalan and Honduran varieties of Spanish – at least when they are not in current language contact with Indigenous languages. In terms of verb inflection, El Salvador has a **voseo auténtico**, which means that for the most part monophthongized verb inflections are present in the second person singular in the present tense *tomás, comés, vivís* and as imperatives (*tomá, comé, viví*) (cf. Moser 2010: 279). Diphthongized forms (*tomáis, coméis*) occur only very rarely and in speakers from rural Salvadoran communities (cf. Lipski 2009: 277). The pronominal form of address system of Salvadoran varieties of Spanish is tripartite in the second person singular in the informal domain, so that *tú, vos* and *usted* are used in a solidary-informal

function in communication (cf. Moser 2010: 280). In the formal-distanced domain, *usted* is generally used. With regard to the informal differences between *tú*, *vos* and *usted*, Quesada Pacheco (2023: 376) points out that an informal *usted* can also be used within a family or circle of friends due to social rank relations. However, while Lipski (2009: 277) insists that the pronoun *vos* expresses the greatest social closeness and *tú* a relatively balanced hierarchy between communication partners, Moser (2010: 2890) states that voseo can be used primarily for symmetrical communication relationships. In any case, both emphasize that the pronouns *tú* and *vos* are currently in a competitive situation and stand for pronounced familiarity, trust and closeness. On a dialectal and sociolinguistic level, both state that it is rather the lower-educated speakers in rural areas who stick completely to voseo or ustedeo and hardly use **tuteo**. They also state that the use of tuteo in El Salvador is definitely connected with the strategy of “aggressive facework” (Watts 2003: 259), in that the pronoun *tú* is used by Salvadoran speakers in certain sensitive communication situations, for example not only to deny respect to suspected criminals, but also to put them in a lower position (cf. Moser 2010: 281).

A specifically Salvadoran lexicon can hardly be separated from other Central American varieties (cf. Rudorff 2009: 106). Jodl (2021) and Quesada Pacheco (2023) list various lexical elements, such as *el andén* (‘the sidewalk’), *el bicho* (‘the little child’), *chele* (‘blond’), *el cipote* (‘the little boy’), *el cotón* (‘the shirt’), *el cuilio* (‘policía’), *el guaro* (‘the sugar cane liquor’) or *la pupusa* (‘the stuffed corn cake’), which contribute to Salvadoran lexis.

The features of Spanish in El Salvador presented here are subject to further regional and social variations. However, one point that is repeatedly taken up in the relevant literature is that of a dialectal urban-rural division: Patzelt (2013) and Quesada Pacheco and Rivera Orellana (2013: 184 f.) point to a geographical division between the urban area (San Salvador) and smaller, more rural speech communities. In both works, the lack of concrete salient features for both dialectal spaces is striking. What specific linguistic features on a phonetic and phonological, morphosyntactic and lexical level characterize the rural or urban varieties of Spanish in El Salvador? Both Jodl (2021: 715) and Quesada Pacheco (2023: 379) note that empirical sociolinguistic work on Spanish in rural El Salvador is still lacking and that this desideratum must be remedied before the question of a Central American and/or Salvadoran dialect continuum can be clarified at all. This paper cannot make a significant contribution to this question. Instead, we would like to show that the use of certain linguistic features can lead to linguistic elements being seen as **the** language use of certain (rural) figures and can thus contribute to (linguistic) stereotyping of entire groups of speakers in rural El Salvador.

3. Metapragmatic Sociolinguistics

Metapragmatic sociolinguistics belongs to the so-called “third wave of sociolinguistic analyses” (Eckert 2018: 123), which can be used to investigate the construction of social meaning in stylistic practices. With metapragmatic analyses, the reflexivity of

communicative actions is brought into the focus of sociolinguistic interest, i. e. communicative actions are examined whose subject matter is itself metalinguistic aspects and thus communicative actions (Johnstone 2016). The term “indexicality” is formative for this recent activity of sociolinguistics because (linguistic) signs can provide indications of communicative contexts and social actors involved in communication (cf. Spitzmüller 2022: 259). However, Silverstein (2003) has shown in various works that the concept of “indexicality” must be further differentiated. Specifically, Silverstein (2003: 203) refers to a tripartite arrangement of indexical signs, according to first, second and third order. The third order level is about the stylization of certain ways of using language, e.g. by fictitious orality in literary genres which serves as a linguistic portrait of the various characters and their social classes in the book’s dialogues (Brumme 2008). The stylizing use of knowledge about a certain contextual knowledge can be seen, for example, in parodic forms of communication about linguistic features, in that rural Salvadoran speakers are depicted in narratives with realizations of word-final [ʃ] for the phoneme /s/. With these variational stylizations, the authors would show that they assume the (fictional) audience knows something about this variational feature in the context of rural populations. If now not only individual (linguistic) signs, i. e. in the context of this paper not only individual variational features of Salvadoran Spanish, function as stereotypical stylizations in certain contexts, but fictitious dialects of rural speakers from El Salvador are repeatedly associated with a bundle of variational features with certain role and person conceptions, we leave the simple area of metapragmatic stereotype formation and enter the area of so-called discursive inscription, i. e. “register”. According to Agha (2007: 81), the term “register” refers to a cultural model of action that recurrently combines linguistic repertoires with stereotypical indexical values, is shaped by statements and is easily recognized in socio-historical societies. In other words, urban Salvadoran readers of certain narratives with dialogues of fictional rural speakers, phonographically represented, for example, by <vosh hablásh> *vos hablás*, know about the use of the phonetic element [ʃ] for the word-final /s/ and associate it with rural varieties of Salvadoran Spanish. Agha (2007: 148) defines the dynamic process of inscription, in which registers solidify as widespread ideas of the socio-historical and socio-cultural context of a specific language use with very specific types and/or groups of people, as “enregisterment”: entire modes of behavior and language use (styles, language varieties, etc.) are linked to specific groups of speakers, even to the point of social behavior (cf. Agha 2007: 235). This refers to various stylization practices, such as the creation of similarities or differences between groups of actors, but also the creation of (linguistic) authenticity (cf. Harjus/Peter 2025): Intentional parodies of the language use of rural speakers from El Salvador by urban speakers would be an example of such dynamic inscription processes, or the possibility of purchasing a coffee cup with variational features, which would simultaneously co-modify the stereotyped language form (cf. Johnstone 2016). Finally, if certain evaluations of social actors are also linked to stereotyping and dynamic inscription, i. e. “enregisterment” (cf. Agha

2007), we find ourselves in the realm of language ideologies (cf. Gal/Irvine 2019: 19). Although language ideologies can of course be positive and negative, the negative language evaluations seem particularly interesting, as these involve attempts to delegitimize certain social actors based on the use of certain variational features of Salvadoran Spanish (cf. Spitzmüller 2022: 270).

4. Corpus: Martínez and Martínez (2018): “El Niño de Hollywood”

The Martínez brothers, Óscar (1983–) and José Juan (1986–), attempt to address the challenges of everyday life in rural El Salvador – first and foremost with regard to Mara gang violence – in a reportage. In “El Niño de Hollywood”, the authors tell the story of the life and work of key witness and (former) “Mara Salvatrucha 13” gang member Miguel Ángel Tovar, whose nickname meanders between “El Payaso” and “El Niño de Hollywood”. The reportage is based on years of observation and hours of interviews to depict the dynamics of gang problems in rural areas and contains both narrative and dialogic elements. In the dialogic passages, the Martínez brothers attempt to recreate a realistic form of communication between the characters. This raises the question of which variational elements are used stylistically to depict rural varieties of Spanish in El Salvador.

5. Results

There are hardly any phonographic features for the linguistic-discursive construction of certain varieties in rural Salvadoran Spanish. The only allusion to phonetic variation that is noticeable and recurrent is the phonetic contraction and subsequent vowel fluctuation from middle-open /o/ to closed-velar [u] in the sound sequence *hijo de puta* (table 1).

Original	Transliteration	Translation
—¿Ya supiste? Miguel Ángel escucha la pregunta por el teléfono celular. Está en su solar. Son las nueve de la noche del 19 de marzo de 2012. —Ya sé. Cayó el viejo hijueputa —responde Miguel Ángel.	—¿Ya supiste? Miguel Ángel escucha la pregunta por el teléfono celular. Está en su solar. Son las nueve de la noche del 19 de marzo de 2012. —Ya sé. Cayó el viejo hijo de puta —responde Miguel Ángel.	“Have you heard?” Miguel Ángel hears the question on his cell phone. He is in his plot. It’s nine o’clock in the evening on March 19, 2012. “I already know. The old son of a bitch has died,” replies Miguel Ángel.

Tab. 1. Martínez and Martínez (2018: 153)

A youth and gang language lexis is noticeable that takes up elements of Spanish youth slang from the United States of America and Mexico and is less oriented towards a specific regional focus on El Salvador. In table 2, this is manifested in the words *el bato*, *la troca*, *la onda* or *la ranfla*, which are used in the jargon of all the Spanish-speaking regions in the Americas mentioned above. Specific Salvadoran lexis is rarer, although it is also present in the dialogs of rural speakers (*paloma*).

Original	Transliteration	Translation
—Putá, apareció Chepe Furia, y toda la mara viendo las trocas, el bato en su ranfla, bien enmorterado. El hijo de puta ya bajó embilletado, con su ranfla y con su buen tizón. Tenía aproximadamente su vientón de años. El loco vino deportado, pero ya tenía ondas aquí, y empezó a formar una estructura paloma.	—Putá, apareció Chepe Furia, y toda la banda viendo los carros, el hombre en su vehículo, bien armado. El hijo de puta ya bajó rico, con su vehículo y con mala fama. Tenía aproximadamente su vientón de años. El loco vino deportado, pero ya tenía amistades aquí, y empezó a formar una buena estructura.	“Fuck, Chepe Furia appeared, and the whole gang was watching the cars, the man in his vehicle, well-armed. The son of a bitch came already rich, with vehicle and bad reputation. He was middle-aged. The crazy guy came deported but had friends here and started to build a super structure”.

Tab. 2. Martínez and Martínez (2018: 107)

The use of various Anglicisms, which are also due to the youth and gang language orientation of most of the dialogues in the reportage and stylize the protagonists as members of these very groups, is particularly striking. The ubiquitous *homeboy* is a salient feature here, but other Anglicisms, such as *troca* (table 2) or *man* (table 3), are also recurring features at a lexical level in the text.

Original	Transliteration	Translation
—Decían que el maje era brujo y era cierto, porque esa pistola yo la fui a probar y nada, bien vergón disparaba. Luego con esa misma tronazones, <i>man</i> . Por eso a ese bato le quité la cabeza porque dicen a los brujos el pollo se les vuelve a unir.	—Decían que el hombre era brujo y era cierto, porque la pistola que probé disparaba magníficamente. Luego con esa misma hubo problemas, <i>man</i> . Por eso a ese hombre le quité la cabeza porque dicen que a los brujos el cuerpo se les vuelve a unir.	“They said the man was a witcher, and it was true, because the gun I tried shot great. Then there were problems with the gun, <i>man</i> . That’s why I cut off his head, because they say that witches’ bodies reunite”.

Tab. 3. Martínez and Martínez (2018: 118)

There are various morphosyntactic features that contribute to the stereotypical indexicalization of rural varieties of Salvadoran Spanish – for example, the elision of the conjunction *que* in the syntactic-evidential compound *dicen (que)* in table 3 or the specific diminutive use with the form *-illo* in *cholillo* in table 5.

In connection with the use of the common subject pronouns - *tú*, *vos*, *usted* - their pragmatic complexity is a useful object of analysis for stereotypical indexicalizations of rural speakers on a morphosyntactic level, since prototypical social and situational uses occur in the reportage. Using text excerpts table 4 and table 5 as examples for the entire work, it can be illustrated that the use of *tú* as a form of address is initially chosen for the communication of state employees as transmitter to gang members as receiver.

Original	Transliteration	Translation
El cabo Pozo, sabedor de que tenía que llevárselo o volver a perderlo durante meses o para siempre, abrió con cuidado aquella puerta metálica. Vio la espalda del sicario de 27 años que fumaba su quinta piedra de <i>crack</i> , quitó el seguro	El cabo Pozo, sabedor de que tenía que llevárselo o volver a perderlo durante meses o para siempre, abrió con cuidado aquella puerta metálica. Vio la espalda del sicario de 27 años que fumaba su quinta piedra de <i>crack</i> , quitó el seguro	Corporal Pozo, knowing he would take him or lose him for months or even forever, carefully opened the metal door. He saw the back of the 27-year-old hitman smoking his fifth crack rock, took the safety off his 9-millimeter colt and saw that

Original	Transliteration	Translation
<i>de su pistola 9 milímetros, vio los dedos del sicario encajados en una .357 y una .40. Respiró. Contuvo los nervios y, sobre todo, las balas, y dijo sosteniendo su nueve con las dos manos:</i> —Ey, calmate, ya vi que tú estás armado.	<i>de su pistola 9 milímetros, vio los dedos del sicario encajados en una .357 y una .40. Respiró. Contuvo los nervios y, sobre todo, las balas, y dijo sosteniendo su nueve con las dos manos:</i> —Ey, calmate, ya vi que tú estás armado.	<i>the killer's fingers were in a .357 and a .40. He took a deep breath. He kept his nerve and, above all, the bullets to himself and said, holding his nine with both hands: "Hey, calm down, I saw you were armed".</i>

Tab. 4. Martínez and Martínez (2018: 200)

Text excerpts in table 5 and table 6 clearly show that the forms of address between gang members are based on prototypical rural forms of address and, in contrast to state actors, the majority use *vos* between gang members.

Original	Transliteration	Translation
<i>X recuerda que la frase con la que el guardia se despidió de él antes de romperle los dedos fue:</i> —Te metemos de noche para que no hallemos tu cuerpo ligero, sino en la mañana, tú. <i>X fue designado para dormir en la celda 27 alta del sector dos. Su recibimineto fue una pregunta y un planazo de machete.</i> —¿Y vos, cholillo, qué ondas?, le dijo a la entrada de la celda un miembro de la Raza, y acto seguido le pegó un planchazo con una de las caras del machete.	<i>X recuerda que la frase con la que el guardia se despidió de él antes de romperle los dedos fue:</i> —Te metemos de noche para que no hallemos tu cuerpo rápidamente, sino en la mañana, tú. <i>X fue designado para dormir en la celda 27 alta del sector dos. Su recibimineto fue una pregunta y un planazo de machete.</i> —¿Y vos, pequeño cholo, qué pasa?, le dijo a la entrada de la celda un miembro de la Raza, y acto seguido le pegó un planchazo con una de las caras del machete.	<i>X remembers that the sentence with which the guard said goodbye to him before he broke his fingers was:</i> “We’ll lock you up at night so we won’t find your body so quickly, but in the morning then” <i>X was assigned to sleep in the 27th cell in sector two. He was greeted with a question and a machete slash.</i> “What’s the matter with you, little cholo ?” A member of La Raza said to him at the entrance to the cell and then gave him a blow with one side of the machete.

Tab. 5. Martínez and Martínez (2018: 147)

Text excerpts in table 5 and table 6 describe communicative situations in which gang members are at an equal eye level in arguments in which no clear hierarchy can be recognized and therefore *vos* is used as a form of address - *tú* or *usted* as further linguistic variants of personal-solidary address do not appear in the text in these communication situations.

Original	Transliteration	Translation
—Levantate la camisa, bicho hijueputa —Si me levanto la camisa te vas a sorprender, porque lo mismo que andas vos ando yo —¿Andas los números vos también? —No, respondió el Payaso, que ya había distraído la atención de los	—Levantate la camisa, bicho hijo de puta —Si me levanto la camisa te vas a sorprender, porque lo mismo que traes vos traigo yo —¿Tenés balas suficientes? —No, respondió el Payaso, que ya había distraído la atención de los dieciocheros. Le metió dos tiros	“Pull up your shirt, you son of a bitch” “If I pull up my shirt, you’ll be surprised, because I’ve got the same stuff as you” “Have you got enough bullets?” “No, I don’t.” replied El Payaso , who had already distracted the members of the Barrio 18 gang. He fired

Original	Transliteration	Translation
<i>dieciocheros. Le metió dos tiros al primer hombre.</i>	<i>al primer hombre.</i>	<i>two shots at the first man.</i>

Tab. 6. Martínez and Martínez (2018: 140)

The use of the forms of address *usted* and *tú* in the fictitious orality of gang communication is restricted to communicative situations in which hierarchical structures also exist between the individual characters. In table 7, gang leader Chepe Furia is addressed by a gang member with an informal *usted* as a person higher up in the hierarchy, thus communicatively establishing the social differentiation between transmitter and receiver.

Original	Transliteration	Translation
<i>—Mire Usted, Chepito, me quemaron mi carrito, dijo el compadre traidor al líder pandillero.</i>	<i>—Mire Usted, Chepito, me quemaron mi carrito, dijo el compañero traidor al líder de la banda.</i>	<i>“Look, Chepito, they burned my car”, the treacherous buddy said to the gang leader.</i>

Tab. 7. Martínez and Martínez (2018: 188)

However, it is not only between leaders and common gang members that a hierarchical structure is created through communicative acts. Between individual gang members, too, the otherwise predominantly solidary style of communication with *vos* is set aside and a differential hierarchical positioning is established linguistically through the use of the personal pronouns *tú* and *usted*. In table 8, this becomes clear in the scene of the dismemberment of a gang member by *El Niño*, in which the ceremonial victim is no longer addressed with *vos* but with *tú* and is thus linguistically degraded by aggressive facework (Watts 2003) – just as the state actors do with all gang members in the reportage. The communicative reaction of the victim, who now switches from the communicatively equalizing *vos* to a “submissive”, albeit informal *usted* towards his tormentor and murderer, even in great pain and in agony, underpins the hierarchy between perpetrator and victim, which is also established by the form of address.

Original	Transliteration	Translation
<i>—Hoy tú nos vas a decir a cuántos homeboys le has pegado, hijueputa, dijo el Payaso, entregado a su papel de maestro de ceremonias. Le pusieron torniquetes en los brazos y las piernas. Es sorprendente lo que pueden saber unos jóvenes pandilleros sobre la anatomía cuando se trata de matar. Los torniquetes eran para que no se desangrara con tanta rapidez. Le arrancaron a machetazos</i>	<i>—Hoy tú nos vas a decir a cuántos homeboys le has pegado, hijo de puta, dijo el Payaso, entregado a su papel de maestro de ceremonias. Le pusieron ataduras en los brazos y las piernas. Es sorprendente lo que pueden saber unos jóvenes pandilleros sobre la anatomía cuando se trata de matar. Las ataduras eran para que no se desangrara con tanta rapidez. Le arrancaron a machetazos</i>	<i>“Today you’re going to tell us how many homeboys you’ve killed, you bastard,” said El Payaso, who was enjoying his role as master of ceremonies. They tied his arms and legs. It’s amazing what young gang members can know about anatomy when it comes to killing. The shackles were to prevent him from bleeding to death too quickly. They chopped off his arms. They chopped off his legs. The bandits</i>

Original	Transliteration	Translation
los brazos. Le arrancaron a machetazos las piernas. A eso los pandilleros le llaman corte de chaleco. La Bestia pedía más. —Ya, homeboy, deme usted un bombazo en la cabeza, suplico lo que quedaba del Caballo. —¿Y a vos quién te ha dicho que nosotros somos tus homeboy? Te vas a morir como La Bestia manda, respondió el que por pocos minutos más sería el Payaso. Le quitaron la lengua.	los brazos. Le arrancaron a machetazos las piernas. A eso los bandidos le llaman corte de chaleco. La Bestia pedía más. —Ya, homeboy, mateme Usted con un tiro en la cabeza, suplico lo que quedaba del Caballo. —¿Y a vos quién te ha dicho que nosotros somos tus homeboy? Te vas a morir como La Bestia manda, respondió el que por pocos minutos más sería el Payaso. Le quitaron la lengua.	call that a vest cut. La Bestia demanded more. “Come on homeboy, kill me with a shot to the head”, begged what was left of El Caballo. “And who told you we were your homeboys? You will die as La Bestia commands”, replied the one who would be El Payaso for a few more minutes. They removed his tongue.

Tab. 8. Martínez and Martínez (2018: 167)

Thus, the use of certain forms of address is by no means arbitrarily chosen, but attempts to reflect the hierarchical use between state institutions and gang members as well as gang members among themselves. On the other hand, the variation in the pronominal form of address used in the text and its stylizing use by certain social actors on a third level indexicalizes the intended use of language (Silverstein 2003) and reinforces communicative stereotypes regarding the form of address in rural El Salvador among readers. Certain lexical variants in the text, which are assumed to be incomprehensible for the anticipated target audience, are constructed as different through translations into an “ideal” Spanish standard, as can be seen in table 9 as an example. This measure also indexicalizes lexical elements of the fictional variety for potential readers as salient features of rural Salvadoran Spanish.

Original	Transliteration	Translation
—Acá ha venido hace poco un cipote [niño] que fue chequeo [aspirante] mío en la clicla. Aquí ha venido el hijueputa con una señora a postearme. La otra vez que fui a traer tortillas me lo topé de frente. Con la vieja puta iba caminando. Ajá, homeboy, ¿qué pasó?, le dije yo. ‘Al suave’, me dijo él. ¡Le saqué la chimbomba! [granada]. ‘Deciles a los homeboys que aquí les tengo esta mierda para cuando quieran venir’, le dije al mono cerote y se fue cagado el pendejo.	—Acá ha venido hace poco un niño que fue aspirante mío en el grupo. Aquí ha venido el hijo de puta con una señora a vigilar me. La otra vez que fui a traer tortillas me lo encontré de frente. Con la vieja puta iba caminando. Ajá, homeboy, ¿qué pasó?, le dije yo. ‘Todo bien’, me dijo él. ¡Le saqué la granada! ‘Deciles a los homeboys que aquí les tengo esta mierda para cuando quieran venir’, le dije al mono cerote y se fue cagado el pendejo.	“A boy who was my prospect in the group came here recently. The son of a bitch came here with a woman to spy on me. The other time I went to get tortillas, I met him face to face. He was out with the old whore. “Aha, homeboy, what’s up,” I told him. “All good,” he said. I held the grenade up to him! “Tell the homeboys I got this shit for them whenever they want to come,” I said to the little monkey, and he walked away and pissed his pants, the idiot”.

Tab. 9. Martínez and Martínez (2018: 133)

Table 10 and table 11 also show that the constructional character of certain linguistic elements does not remain on a descriptive level, but that the ways of using language are also (negatively) evaluated.

Original	Transliteration	Translation
<i>Hay frases en el cuaderno que erizan la piel. Están escritas con letra apenas legible, enorme, el trazo de mano poco familiarizada con la grafía. Tienen casi todos los errores de ortografía posibles. Se lee: ‘En la pandiya se conose el visio de matar o derramar sangre sobre la tierra’.</i>	<i>Hay frases en el cuaderno que erizan la piel. Están escritas con letra apenas legible, enorme, el trazo de mano poco familiarizada con la grafía. Tienen casi todos los errores de ortografía posibles. Se lee: ‘En la pandilla se conoce el vicio de matar o derramar sangre sobre la tierra’.</i>	<i>There are sentences in the notebook that give you goose bumps. They are written in barely legible handwriting, unfamiliar with graphics. They contain all kinds of spelling mistakes. One reads: ‘In the gang, the vice of killing or bloodshed on the ground is widespread’.</i>

Tab. 10. Martínez and Martínez (2018: 144)

In table 10, reference is made to incorrect orthography that is clearly based on phonological variation, e.g. the yeísmo (*pandiya*) or the seseo (*conose, visio*). These linguistic ideological-normative discourses in the work become even clearer in table 11, when Martínez and Martínez (2018) point out the incorrect pronunciation of the character’s own gang name (*jaliwú*), which, as in table 10, is accompanied by an implicit negative assessment of the educational level of the character from the rural area.

Original	Transliteration	Translation
<i>Nunca conoció palabras en inglés ni estuvo nunca en la ciudad de Los Ángeles, donde nacieron las pandillas, ni tampoco supo pronunciar con corrección el nombre de su clica: ‘jaliwú’, decía.</i>	<i>Nunca conoció palabras en inglés ni estuvo nunca en la ciudad de Los Ángeles, donde nacieron las pandillas, ni tampoco supo pronunciar con corrección el nombre de su grupo: ‘jaliwú’ (Hollywood), decía.</i>	<i>He didn’t know a single English word, had never been to the city of Los Angeles, where the gangs were born, and couldn’t pronounce the name of his group correctly: ‘Jaliwú’ (Hollywood), he said.</i>

Tab. 11. Martínez and Martínez (2018: 9)

Overall, there are only a few negative evaluations of salient features or entire forms of language use in the sense of an “enregisterment”. Nevertheless, individual passages in the text are very much charged with linguistic ideology and point to the accompanying presuppositions and linguistic ideologies in the construction of salient forms of language use in (fictitious) rural El Salvador.

6. Conclusion

The central question of this article, how rural Salvadoran varieties are discursively constructed and stylistically indexicalized by means of salient features, could be answered. This is because the representation of linguistic variation creates social stratification: we were able to establish a reflection and stylization of salient features partly for rural speakers and above all a (simultaneous) stylization of certain bundles of linguistic features as slang on a social level. Consequently, there is a successful attempt to create differences between the protagonists and the narrator or readership through salient linguistic features and the use of transliterations of linguistic variation. This is an

attempt to create linguistic authenticity. In our opinion, however, hardly any negative linguistic ideological effect is created in the sense of delegitimizing rural varieties of Spanish in El Salvador. Nevertheless, the metapragmatic processes lead to the inscription of (fictitious) rural language usage and are thus part of the “enregisterment” (Agha 2007) of rural varieties in El Salvador as “deviant” and “different” varieties of (urban Salvadoran) Spanish.

References

- AGHA, Asif. *Language and Social Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Print.
- AZCÚNAGA LÓPEZ, Raúl Ernesto. “Fonética del español salvadoreño”. *El español hablado en América Central: nivel fonético*. Ed. Quesada Pacheco and Miguel Ángel. Madrid, Frankfurt: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2010, 83–114. Print.
- AZCÚNAGA LÓPEZ, Raúl Ernesto. “Atlas lingüístico-etnográfico pluridimensional de El Salvador (ALPES), nivel fonético”. *Bells* 4 (2012): 27–47. Print.
- BRUMME, Jenny (Ed.). *La oralidad fingida: obras literarias. Descripción y traducción*. Frankfurt a. M.: Vervuert Iberoamericana, 2008. Print.
- ECKERT, Penelope. *Meaning and Linguistic Variation. The Third Wave of Sociolinguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Print.
- GAL, Susan and Judith T. IRVINE. *Signs of Difference. Language and Ideology in Social Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Print.
- HARJUS, Jannis and Benjamin PETER. *Spanische Varietäten- und Soziolinguistik. Neue Ansätze am Beispiel des Andalusischen*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2025. Print.
- JODL, Frank. “Variedades centroamericanas”. *Manual del español en América*. Ed. Eva Martha Eckkrammer. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2021, 705–719. Print.
- JOHNSTONE, Barbara. “Enregisterment: How linguistic items become linked with ways of speaking”. *Language and Linguistic Compass* 10 (2016): 632–643. Print.
- LENZ, Alexandra. “Zum Salienz-begriff und zum Nachweis salienter Merkmale”. *Perceptual dialectology’ – Neue Wege der Dialektologie*. Ed. Christina Anders et al. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2010, 89–110. Print.
- LIPSKI, John. *El español de América*. Madrid: Cátedra, 2009. Print.
- LÓPEZ MORALES, Humberto. *América Central*. Madrid: Arco Libros, 1999. Print.
- MARTÍNEZ, Óscar and Juan José MARTÍNEZ. *El Niño de Hollywood. Como Estados Unidos y El Salvador moldearon a una sicario de la Mara Salvatrucha 13*. Mexico City: Debate, 2018. Print.
- MOSER, Katrin. “Las formas de tratamiento verbales-pronominales en Guatemala, El Salvador, Panamá (y Costa Rica): hacia una nueva sistematización en la periferia centroamericana”. *Formas y fórmulas de tratamiento en el mundo hispánico*. Ed. Martin Hummel et al. Mexico: El Colegio de México, 2010, 273–289. Print.
- PATZELT, Carolin. “El Salvador”. *Weltsprache Spanisch. Variation, Soziolinguistik und geographische Verbreitung des Spanischen. Handbuch für das Studium der Hispanistik*. Ed. Sandra Herling et al. Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2013, 577–592. Print.
- RIVERA ORELLANA, Erick. *Atlas lingüístico etnográfico pluridimensional de El Salvador*. San Salvador: Editorial de la Universidad Centroamericana, 2011. Print.
- RODRÍGUEZ PRIETO, Juan Pablo. “Ejemplos de jejeo salvadoreño en *Cuentos de barro* de Salarué”. *Onomázein* 29 (2014): 78–89. Print.

- QUESADA PACHECO, Miguel Ángel. “El español en las repúblicas centroamericanas (Spanish across the Central American Countries)”. *Dialectología hispánica. The Routledge Handbook of Spanish Dialectology*. Ed. Francisco Moreno Fernández et al. London, New York: Routledge, 2023, 371–382. Print.
- QUESADA PACHECO, Miguel Ángel and Erick RIVERA ORELLANA. “Morfosintaxis del español en El Salvador”. *El español hablado en América Central: nivel morfosintático*. Ed. Quesada Pacheco and Miguel Ángel. Madrid, Frankfurt: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2013, 141–190. Print.
- QUINTILLANA AGUILAR, José Roberto. “Actitudes de los hablantes de San Salvador hacia el tuteo y el voseo”. *Hispania* 92 (2009): 361–373. Print.
- RUDORFF, Hanna. “Varietäten des Spanischen: Karibik und Zentralamerika”. *Handbuch Spanisch – Sprache, Literatur, Kultur, Geschichte in Spanien und Lateinamerika*. Ed. Joachim Born et al. Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2009, 98–108. Print.
- SILVERSTEIN, Michael. “Indexical order and the dialectics of sociolinguistic life”. *Language and Communication* 23/3 (2003): 193–229. Print.
- SPITZMÜLLER, Jürgen. *Soziolinguistik*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 2022. Print.
- WATTS, Richard. *Politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Print.

ZITIERNACHWEIS:

- HARJUS, Jannis. „Salvadoran Spanish and Stylistic Practices of Indexicalization“, *Linguistische Treffen in Wrocław* 27, 2025 (I): 91–103. DOI: 10.23817/lingtreff.27-5.