Understanding the *je ne sais quoi* of mock language

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SALT 35
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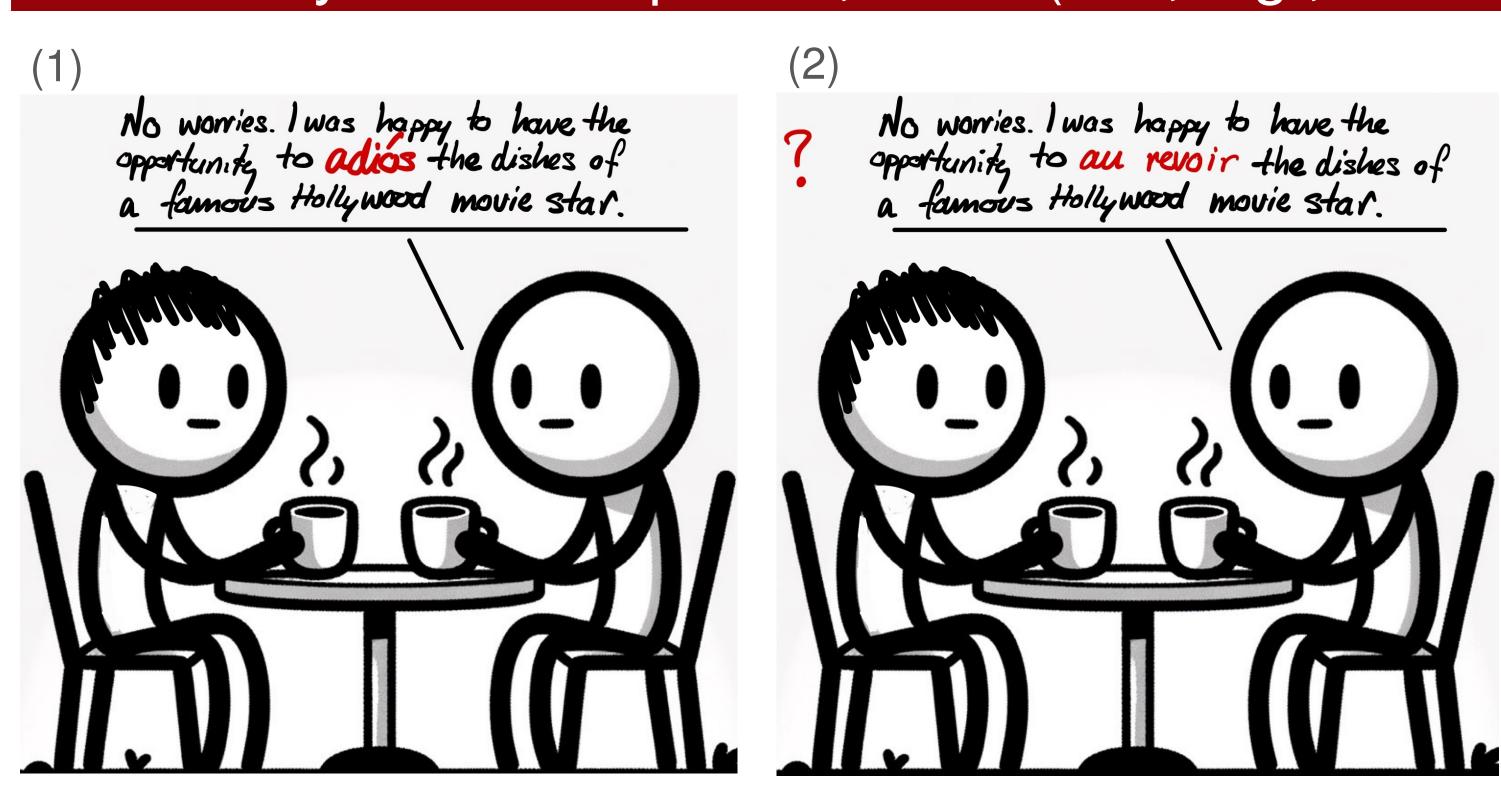
1. What is *mock language* (ML)

Social meaning: The content that linguistic expressions convey about the social identity of language users (Eckert 2008, 2012, 2019), e.g., their demographic profile, interactional positioning, and social affiliation.

Mock language: A way of using a language not spoken by or native to a speaker, of including words or phrases from other languages that the speaker thinks fit into the conversation. (It doesn't need to convey negative perspectives.)

Case study 1: Mock Spanish, S-ML (see, e.g., Hill 2009)

(1)

(2)

Common S-ML strategies: Mocking Spanish is a common practice (a recognizable **style**) enacted by US, Anglo, mono-lingual speakers. Common S-ML strategies include:

- reproduction of Spanish words with a hyperanglicized accent
- ungrammatical configurations (*no problemo* for *no (hay) problema*, ensuring that no one can get the wrong impression that the speaker indeed speaks Spanish.

> The speaker tries to make clear that they do not speak Spanish.

Effects of mock Spanish (Preliminary):
a. Create a humorous enough persona.
b. Evokes and perpetuates stereotypes of latinos in the US.
   - (1) associates latinos and service workers

Stereotypes of Latinos in the US through the anglo prevailing perspective
White/anglo ideologies in the US characterize latinos as racialized (brown) Spanish speakers occupying the low ranks of the socioeconomic scale; foreigners (regardless of citizenship) that embody stigmatized features of lazy, not rationally-driven people, working low-qualified jobs.

> **Take away 1:** Understanding the meaning of an utterance with mock language requires identifying the prevailing ideology and, thus, the presumed stereotypes of the community from which language is appropriated.

Intuitive idea: ML is a <u>meta</u>-metaphor (à la Camp 2017).
(3) (1) ≈ I was happy to clear out the dishes &
   - Evokes stereotypes of latinos and clearing out dishes &
   - There is a relevant feature in the stereotype of latinos that fits an object in the context (the speaker).
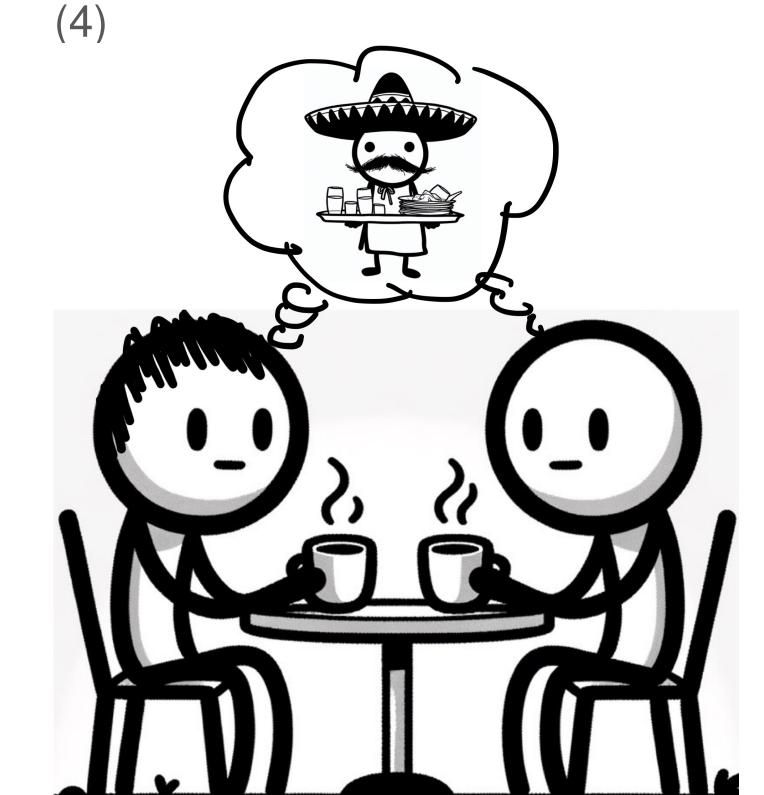   "I was happy to be like a latino, i.e., a service-worker."

Spanish in the US as an *emblem*: Speaking Spanish in the US is an emblem of *latinos*.

Camp's framing devices: Linguistic strategies that function not just to communicated factual information, but to suggest an intuitive way of thinking about their subjects (Camp, 2017).

ML and perspectives: ML is a *marked alternative*. It is a framing device expressing perspectives/ideologies à la Camp.
- **Perspectives** are open-ended dispositions to interpret and to produce characterizations/stereotypes.
- **Stereotypes** are structures of thought interconnecting the features that matter regarding particular subjects. They are informationally, experientially, and affectively rich structures integrating as much data as possible into an intuitive whole.

(4)

(5)

In (5) the speaker is comparing themself with latino service workers. The unexpected assimilation of the speaker to latinos (with respect to the relevant disparaging stereotype) is "humorous".

> **Take away 2:** Like metaphors, in ML the evoking of stereotypes trough the presupposed perspective is often *irresistible*, creating a complicity between interlocutors found in the understanding of speaker's presuppositions.

(6)
Mike Malone: Campazzo has big cojones, he doesn't care
01/FEB/21 19:37

- Using ML doesn't necessarily convey that the speaker is like the appropriated community regarding some feature.
- The speaker in (6) says of Campazzo that they are like (setereotypical) latinos with respect to how brash they are.
- Styles are ideologically mediated (Irvine, 2001) and by using S-ML, the speaker enacts a style and pledges alliance (Nunberg 2018) to the *community of practice* that does that: Anglos in the US, "whiteness" (Hill 1999, see Agha 2003 for *enregisterment*).

- Entities' style are bundles of interconnected features (*personal stereotypes*) including speech.
- Styles are updated, but style updates need to be *coherent*. Else, they fail, (7).

(7)   Scott & Borgman, *Zits*, July 5, 2004

> **Take away 3:** We keep track of the ideologies prevailing in the context of utterance, and thus of the stereotypes they produce, as well as of the individuals' personal styles (which include linguistic features; Podesva 2008), which are updated. Updates need to be *coherent*.
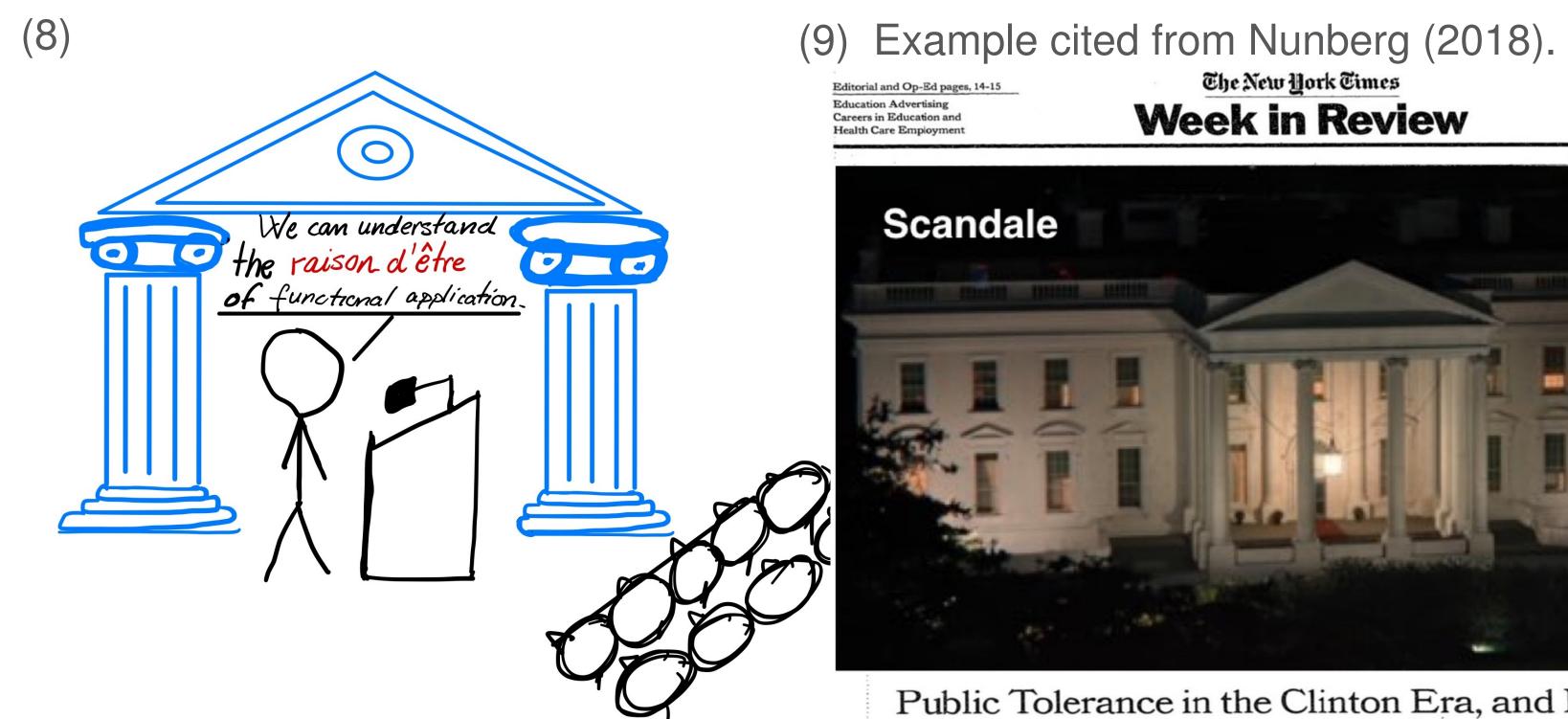
Case study 2: Mock-French, F-ML

Mock language is not necessarily derogatory.
The stereotype of French speakers in the US: Parisian French speakers (not, e.g., Quebec-quois). Stereotypes may be related to intellectual prestige, or, e.g., romantic reputation.

(8)

- The use of F-ML in (8) allows the speaker to signal allegiance to, e.g., the academic community (*speaker's style update*).
- F-ML allows the speaker in (9) (the editor) to identify as a sophisticated person (who can F-ML) and the *scandal* as being "about sex and not money" (Nunberg, 2018, p. 267).

(9) Example cited from Nunberg (2018).

> The speaker doesn't need to distance themself from the stereotypical French speakers.

> **Take away 4:** What feature from the stereotype is relevant emerges out of connections between the speaker, their possible identities, and the utterance situation.

Case study 3: Mocking and stereotyping (wrapping up)

(10)

(11)

- Understanding an utterance including ML requires that the addressee identifies the prevailing ideology assumed by the speaker, and the stereotypes it produces of the community of practice from which the language is appropriated. This creates complicity between interlocutors.
- What allows us to reconstruct the speaker's intended meaning is reasoning about the marked expression, the stereotype of the community of practice produced by the assumed ideology, and the utterance situation.
- The intended meaning is not spelled out, leaving room for *deniability*. ML introduces content in the conversational record without it being publicly acknowledged (it is not part of the common ground; Camp 2018).
- Like metaphors (Camp 2017), ML does not express a propositional thought, it reveals the assumed perspective.

> **ML always involves stereotyping:** ML reduces individuals to the produced stereotype of the mocked community of practice. When the stereotype does not agree with the individual it is addressed to, or is derogatory, ML is reductionist and offensive (see, e.g., Callahan 2010).

2. A minimal model for ML

Summary of General claims
- Utterances are interpreted with respect to the assumed (prevailing) perspective/ideology.
- Ideologies produce characterizations/stereotypes: Ideologies interpret bundles of features (including speech features) and produce stereotypes.
- An entity's style is their personal stereotype.
- The C-ML-phrase, r compares a relevant entity in the context with a relevant feature of the stereotyped C-community (Henderson and McCready, 2019; Burnett, 2019)
- ML is a marked alternative, and as such, its choice triggers social meaning (see, e.g., Acton 2021) updating the speaker's style.
- Ideologies are implicit and the features that are relevant are also implicit, allowing the speaker to have deniability (compare with insinuations; Camp 2018).

(12) **Social Utility of a feature from a mocked community of practice** C (modified from Henderson and McCready 2019)
$$U_S^{Soc}(m_x, L) = \sum_{q \in m_x} P_L^x(q|m) + v_S(q)P_L(q|m_x) + v_L(q)PL(q|m_x)$$
Utility value that, given the observed message m, a relevant entity x evoked by m has a feature q (where $q \in I(C) = \text{Stereo}_C$, the set of stereotypical features of C produced by prevailing ideology I in c). P_L (literal listener) gives the probability that the relevant entity x has feature q given m. v_S and v_L provide the speaker and listener's affective values of various qualities weighted by the likelihood x will be assigned that quality given m.

(13) Let $\Psi_{\text{C-ML}}$ be a sentence with a C-ML phrase m, and Ψ the de-mocked parallel. $c = \langle I, E, \ldots \rangle$, where I is the assumed prevailing ideology and E the set of **entities**. Entities are bundles of features. Ideologies are functions from features to characterizations/stereotypes.
  a. **Stereotype:** For a bundle of features e, where e is an entity or a set of entities forming a community of practice, $I(e) = \text{Stereo}_e$.
  b. **Style update:** For an entity x, an update of Stereo_x with feature y, $I(x + y)$ is defined iff $I(x)$ is **compatible** with $I(y)$.
  c. **Feature compatibility:** For bundles of features x and y, $I(x)$ is compatible with $I(y)$ iff for any feature $f \in I(x)$, $-f \notin I(y)$
  d. $\llbracket \Psi_{\text{C-ML}} \rrbracket^{\langle I, E \ldots \rangle} = \llbracket \Psi \rrbracket^{\langle I, E \ldots \rangle}$ defined only if
     (i) for s, the speaker, $I(s + \text{C-MOCKING}) = I(s')$ is defined, and
     (ii) there is a relevant x in E s.t. x is compatible with f, a relevant feature in Stereo$_C$.

Illustration
(14) $\llbracket(1)\rrbracket^{\langle I, E \ldots \rangle} = \llbracket \ldots$to clear out the dishes of$\ldots \rrbracket$ defined only if
  a. $I(s + \text{S-ML})$ defined   (s is WHITE)
  b. s was a SERVICE-WORKER like latinos are.

(15) $\llbracket$Wassup, dawg?$\rrbracket^{\langle I, E \ldots \rangle}$ undefined in (7):
  a. $I(\text{WALT}) = \text{Stereo}_{\text{WALT}} = \begin{bmatrix} \text{SUBURBAN} \\ \text{MID-AGE} \\ \text{WHITE} \\ \text{OLD-FASHIONED} \end{bmatrix}$
  b. $I(\text{AAL-MOCKERS}) = \text{Stereo}_{\text{AAL-MOCKERS}} = \begin{bmatrix} \text{YOUNG} \\ \text{WHITE} \\ \text{COOL} \end{bmatrix}$