

## What's in an "x"?

An Exchange about the Politics of "Latinx"

*Catalina (Kathleen) M. de Onís*, Indiana University

Please note: Portions of this exchange can be found in the following article: de Onís, Catalina M. "What's in an 'x'?: An Exchange about the Politics of 'Latinx.'" *Chiricú Journal: Latina/o Literatures, Arts, and Cultures* 1, no. 2 (2017).

**Abstract:** From its origins in queer community conversations online, the term "Latinx" continues to gain wider circulation in various publics. This scholarly exchange examines the language and other politics of choosing to employ or to reject the "x" signifier. To engage a variety of perspectives on this topic, we invited five scholars with expertise in language, sexuality, gender, and latinidad from the continental United States and Puerto Rico to participate in an online exchange about what the "x" linguistic marker enables and constrains. Contributors do not always agree, and the tensions that arise point to broader discussions and strains unfolding beyond the pages of this journal. Ultimately, this exchange seeks to enliven ongoing conversations and to spark new ones among those interested in the politics, intersectional social locations, and exigencies implicated in discussions about "Latinx" and similar linguistic choices. As this exchange elucidates, the answer to "what's in an 'x'?" depends on whom you ask.

**Keywords:** Chicanx, heteronormativity, identity, language, Latinx, linguistic transgression.

*El uso o desuso de la palabra va a dictar su futuro.*

—Pilar Melero

This epigraph about the role that linguistic choices play in shaping the circulation and uses of a particular word resonates deeply with this *Chiricú Journal* issue focusing on “The Politics of Language.” As we reflect on this theme, readers may have noted that the title of this publication, *Chiricú Journal: Latina/o Literatures, Arts, and Cultures*, exhibits a few notable linguistic choices. These decisions include the fusion of the “CHicano,” “RIqueño,” and “CUbano” descriptors to create “Chiricú,” as well as plural references to “literatures, arts, and cultures” to acknowledge and encourage multiplicity, heterogeneity, and difference. Readers also may have observed that the subtitle contains the “a/o” ending in “Latina/o.” This signifier and other related linguistic markers—such as “@” and, more recently, “x”—invite reflection on the evolution, fluidity, and slipperiness of language.

Engaging questions about the “x” signifier and the extent to which the symbol advances intersectional social justice efforts is both urgent and vital. This issue’s focus on the complexities, challenges, and contours of language offers a forum for such a conversation, and the current US socio-political milieu further enjoins engagement with this topic. As Karma R. Chávez reminds us in her work documenting queer migration politics that resist heteronormativity, our language practices constitute social imaginaries about who we are as community members and who we might become.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Karma R. Chávez, *Queer Migration Politics: Activist Rhetoric and Coalitional Possibilities* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2013).

“Latinx” and other choices of linguistic transgression continue to gain wider circulation in various publics, including in academic journal essays, books, and online popular press articles.<sup>2</sup> As this term and other x-carrying signifiers (e.g., lxs, todxs) have spread beyond the online queer Latinx community where they originated, varying viewpoints about these linguistic moves tend to emerge, especially regarding whether “Latinx” should be used as a replacement for or a supplement to “Latina/o.” Some individuals and communities readily adopt and advocate for increased usage of “Latinx,” arguing for its transgressive sexual, gender, and language politics. Meanwhile, others express hesitancy or reject usages of “x” altogether, maintaining that the signifier symbolizes linguistic imperialism, poses pronunciation problems, and alienates non-English-speaking im/migrants.

To situate these different perspectives in conversation, I invited five Latina/o/x scholars from universities in the continental United States and Puerto Rico to engage several questions and to dialogue with each other on this topic.<sup>3</sup> The result was a lively discussion of diverse perspectives on uses of “Latinx,” including the term’s political possibilities and what it enables and constrains,

---

<sup>2</sup> Alternative signifiers to the “Latina/o” gender binary emerged in online, queer spaces. See Juana Rodríguez, *Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces* (New York: New York UP, 2003). Popular press articles on this topic include: Nancy Bird Soto, “¿Términos apropiados? El potencial latinx,” *Cruce: Crítica Socio-cultural Contemporánea*, January 29, 2017, <http://revistacruce.com/politica-y-sociedad/item/2255-terminos-apropiados-el-potencial-latinx>; Gilbert Guerra and Gilbert Orbea, “The Argument Against the Use of ‘Latinx,’” *The Phoenix*, November 19, 2015, <http://swarthmorephoenix.com/2015/11/19/the-argument-against-the-use-of-the-term-latinx/>; Raquel Reichard, “Why We Say Latinx: Trans & Gender Non-Conforming People Explain,” August 29, 2015, *Latina*, <https://www.latina.com/lifestyle/our-issues/why-we-say-latinx-trans-gender-non-conforming-people-explain#1>; Lissette Rolón Collazo, “De la @ a la x,” *80grados*, April 18, 2014, <http://www.80grados.net/de-la-a-la-x/>; María R. Scharrón-del Río and Alan A. Aja, “The Case FOR ‘Latinx’: Why Intersectionality Is Not a Choice,” *Latino Rebels*, December 5, 2015, <http://www.latinorebels.com/2015/12/05/the-case-for-latinx-why-intersectionality-is-not-a-choice/>.

<sup>3</sup> Regarding criteria for selecting contributors, I sought individuals with expertise in language, sexuality, gender, and latinidad, who also represented diverse institutions and departments.

for whom, and in what contexts. Hopefully, the themes, tensions, and turns of these scholars' arguments will be generative for continuing to examine and to practice linguistic choices that disrupt efforts to dehumanize, criminalize, and brutalize im/migrant, Latina/o/x, Black, queer, and trans communities and those who speak in "accented" ways. After all, language serves as an indispensable resource for imagining and enacting more just, livable communities.

### **On Method and Medium**

To collaborate across time zones and different institutional affiliations, I prepared a shared Google document with five questions and invited contributors to respond to the prompts and posts from other participants. Scholars were offered twelve days to reply and could post as many times as they wished. The most dissonant sections of the exchange were selected as excerpts for publication.

### **Latinx Exchange Participants**

- **Catalina M. de Onís**, editorial associate of *Chiricú Journal*, served as the discussion moderator. She completed her PhD in Communication and Culture at Indiana University and will join the faculty of Willamette University in summer 2017. Her research examines reproductive, climate, and energy (in)justices in Latina/o/x communities from a rhetorical perspective. Her scholarship appears in *Environmental Communication*, *Women's Studies in Communication*, and *Women & Language*.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> I wish to thank the five contributors who made this conversation possible with their energy, expertise, and enthusiasm. Also, thank you to the editorial team and board for being open to including this exchange in the pages of *Chiricú Journal*.

- **Pilar Melero** is a professor, researcher, and writer. Her books include *Mythological Constructs of Mexican Femininity* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), *From Mythic Rocks: Voces del Malpáis* (fiction) and *La Casa de Esperanza: A History*. Her research interests include the history and literature of and by Latinx and Latin American women.
- **Eric César Morales** is a PhD candidate in the Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology and an associate instructor for the Latino Studies Program at Indiana University. His research engages with Latino and Polynesian populations at home and in the diaspora, focusing primarily on large-scale cultural productions. His key sites of interest are film, festival, and foodways.
- **Roy Pérez** is assistant professor of English and American Ethnic Studies at Willamette University. His writing appears in *Women & Performance*, *Bully Bloggers*, *FENCE*, and *Narrative, Race and Ethnicity in the Americas*. His current book project, *Proximities: Queer Configurations of Race and Sex*, examines sexuality and cross-racial representations in US Latina/o narrative, visual art, and performance.
- **Sandra L. Soto-Santiago** is assistant professor in the Department of English at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez. Her current research foci are sociocultural aspects of education, translanguaging, and Puerto Rican transnationalism. Her essays can be found in the journal *HOW* and in the edited collection *U.S. Latinos and Education Policy: Research-Based Directions for Change*.

- **Stacey K. Sowards** is professor and chair of the Department of Communication at The University of Texas at El Paso. Her research interests are in environmental, intercultural, and gender communication, with specific focuses on Latin America, Indonesia, and US Latin@-x populations.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Conversation: What's in an "x"?**

**Catalina:** *In what venues have you encountered conversations about different terminations for the historically used and still dominant "Latino"? To what extent do you find these discussions relevant and worthwhile for our present moment?*

**Stacey:** I haven't seen too many discussions encouraging the abandonment of the term "Latino;" it's more that the term Latinx started appearing in so many places, ranging from news articles to social media to academic books and journal articles. And it immediately made sense as a way to gender neutralize the term Latino or to use Latina/o or Latin@.

**Eric:** I began seeing the term, "Latinx," being used at the Latino Cultural Center in Bloomington, [Indiana] and there have been some conversations springing from there. Mostly, however, I initiate conversations with people to gauge their reactions to the term. I have discovered that the term is more likely embraced by English dominant Latinos, while Spanish dominant are either neutral with it or find it offensive.

---

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Sowards thanks her colleagues Carlos Tarín, Karma Chávez, Sarah de los Santos Upton, and Jesús Valles for their insights.

**Roy:** Much like the @ ending in the late '90s, I first began seeing the term Latinx online, in virtual communities like Tumblr and Twitter. My sense is that the intervention gained momentum among North American trans/queer, anti-racist, and feminist youth searching for a way to make a valuable Spanglish label reflect an emergent politics of gender self-determination and anti-patriarchal language. While I'm ambivalent about policing the names we use, I think discussions about Latinx prompt immensely valuable questions about US cultural citizenship, legacies of colonialism, gender coding, and state power (Latino/a itself gained momentum through the US census, after all).

**Pilar:** We, at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, approved a new minor in Latinx/Latin American Studies, and our courses also carry the "x", as in Latinx 334. I first started seeing the use of Latinx in papers presented at conferences, as well as in social media posts by scholar friends who commonly engage issues of discourse and colonization, as well as issues on identity, sexism, homophobia, and other ways of Othering. The use of the "x" in Latinx seems more prevalent in academia, and yes, like my colleagues here, I also find it more prevalent among US Latinxs. Roy brings a very important point about "feminist youth searching for a way to make a valuable Spanglish label reflect an emergent politics of gender self-determination and anti-patriarchal language." I believe the discussions are highly relevant because, whether we agree with the term or not, discussing its use forces us to consider perspectives on gender, language, and privilege that may be foreign to those of us with privileged cisgender identities.

**Sandra:** I have not encountered conversations particularly discussing the term Latino or Latinx. However, I have participated in forums, conferences, and discussions about the purpose and importance of using “x” to be inclusive of different preferences, gender, identities, etc. These discussions are not only relevant but essential for those who arduously question normativity and seek social justice across different disciplines. From my perspective, it is our responsibility as academics to question and consider the terminology that is used across our disciplines in order to reflect the realities of spaces and contemporary social phenomena.

**Catalina:** *Varying viewpoints exist regarding uses of “x” in “Latinx,” “Chicanx,” “lxs,” and other identifiers and articles. The evolution from “Latino,” “Latina/o,” “Latin@,” and, more recently, “Latinx” signals different shifts in thinking about subject positions, constituting difference in language, ethno-racial, gender, and sexuality politics, and more. In light of these transformations and the different perspectives that respond to these moves, what is to be gained by the use of “Latinx” (or “Chicanx”), and what might be lost?*

**Stacey:** The benefit of Latinx or Chicanx and other related words (e.g., lxs) is to gender neutralize the terms, while also providing a term for those who are transgender or queer. These are important considerations given that Spanish and other romance languages are gendered through standard language conventions, particularly nouns, articles, indirect objects, and groups of people. For instance, in traditional Spanish language conventions to refer to “we,” one would use nosotros to refer to an all-male group or a mixed group of people. Nosotras would be used for a group of all females, and so on and so forth with other such words. As we all know, every noun in Spanish is gendered (e.g., la gente, la familia, la persona, el amigo, el grupo); to gender neutralize Latinx and

Chicanx is an attempt to create more inclusive and accepting language particularly for transgender and queer folks. However, attempting to neutralize such language may be impossible within a language in which every noun is gendered. Gender neutralizing words that refer to groups of people, such as past efforts including Latin@, Latina/o, and Chicana/o moves in that direction. Latina/o and Chicana/o still reflect a gender binary, so a term (or spelling) like Latin@ or Latinx addresses inclusion issues for queer communities of color.

**Eric:** Nothing is to be gained from using “Latinx.” Quite the contrary. The term does not correspond to Spanish syntax and this will prevent Spanish dominant people from identifying with it, creating a larger schism between recent Latino immigrants and American born Latinos. Additionally, there is something incredibly condescending for an English speaker to tell recent immigrants that Spanish is a gendered and patriarchal language but not to worry, because they can fix it with a term that does not conform to Spanish grammar.

On top of that, any interpretation of Spanish as a patriarchal language requires a very superficial reading of the language. For instance, “a” and “o” endings do not necessarily render a term as masculine or feminine. There are numerous words that don’t correspond to that structure: la mano, el día, la noche, etc. If anything, the argument can easily be made that Spanish is gender fluid even when it comes to people, as biological sex does not necessarily need to correspond with gendered nouns or adjectives. For instance, the simplistic statement, “El hombre Mexicano es una persona indígena,” has a male subject referred to with a feminine noun and adjective. As Stacey mentioned, the most common argument for “x” is that in a mixed gender group the masculine modifier is used, but, from my understanding, the Real Academia Española [RAE] says that it is

acceptable for the modifier to correspond with the dominant gender present, be it male or female. While this isn't largely practiced, it can easily be adopted.

**Roy:** What might be gained is a shift away from a casual and compulsory androcentrism, and the Spanish male/female linguistic bind Stacey describes. If we understand language as one medium among many for making political interventions, I think the instability of the -x is very useful. If I might reverse the question a little bit, I'm not sure what's gained from demanding proper Spanish syntax, as Eric does. Even though *género* in Spanish grammar is not always related to, or consistent with, biological sex, we do make a gendered *presumption* when we assign -a or -o to a person or a group in front of us. Even if the stakes of gendered language do not feel high to some of us, they do feel high to many vulnerable others. As a supplement and not a substitute, Latinx offers a decent alternative to that unnecessary imposition of gender. And while a person could certainly insist on Latinx in a condescending *tone*, I don't think the act of introducing Latinx into the lexicon is fundamentally condescending or imperialist—I've heard many folks in Lima, DF, and in Spanish-speaking online venues taking the term and all its baggage seriously, and using it, suggesting that immigrants are more diverse in their thinking than we might imagine. Indeed, I think many of the students and activists who advocate for Latinx seem to me to be quite Spanish literate, even if they may not always be Spanish fluent. I'm not sure we need to be terribly concerned with the prescriptions of the Real Academia Española (isn't that prescriptive impulse itself quintessentially imperialist?), but I do believe in using language to effect change and expand the social world. The Royal Academy does not seem to offer a good alibi for refusing a politics of inclusion.

As an important aside, I would like to offer that the cultural dominance of first-generation, English-dominant Latinx youth in the US (the population whose interests I believe are at stake here) is overstated, and the separation from their immigrant peers not so clean cut. If we're not careful to recognize the nature of contemporary transnational immigrant flows, both physical and virtual, we risk obstructing the empowerment of US-based Latinx subjects, in favor of Latin American, international interests (that aren't always so very disenfranchised), in the name of preserving some idea of proper Spanish. Moreover, in the US we lose Spanish for reasons that are often related precisely to economic mobility and educational access in a colonial system. Privilege and culture in this landscape we're talking about aren't so clearly divided between citizen and immigrant. But I do agree that there are some losses, most importantly the specificities of a broad spectrum of national, cultural, and racial identifications, including Indigenous and Black *latinidad*. I think this loss is mitigated if we understand Latinx as a supplement rather than an enforced replacement. Latinx can exist alongside Puerto Rican, Mexican, Cuban, and Chicana/o/x, as a tool in the discursive box. I tell my students that when we're talking about Latinx populations in general terms, it's perfectly alright to stumble through a chain of slippery signifiers, and I regularly drop some version of "Chicanx/Rican/Latina/o/x" when I'm speaking in class, refusing to impose and stick to a particular label unless specificity calls for one. Language offers that fluidity and we should take advantage of it.

**Pilar:** I agree with Stacey and Roy both in terms of what can be gained and what may be lost, and I am not going to repeat their eloquent arguments. But I'd like to expand on an idea expressed by Roy, the idea that Latinx is not an English-speaking imposition but a Spanglish version of the term that brings into the discussion social justice issues. In that respect, it is logical that the RAE

opposes it, as members oppose any changes that do not come from them. Ultimately, I would not worry too much about the RAE's insistence on Latino. (Excellent linguists they may be, but I am not sure they have been as exposed as Latinxs to post-colonial studies and matters of social justice.) I also would not worry too much about academia dictating the use of Latinx, because, ultimately, the term will be generally accepted or not, regardless of what the RAE or academics say. But we do have something very important to gain by engaging the term, and that is bringing into the discussion issues faced by marginalized communities within the binary o/a of traditional culture/language/society. This, to me, is worth any loss we face for using Latinx/Chicanx, etc. In my courses, I teach the o/a forms of gender in traditional Spanish, but I also make it a point to explain the use of the "x", and explain why. This alone has made gender-queer students more receptive to traditional Spanish grammar, as they feel there are ways to express their own identities if they choose to do so and do not have to conform to the one-size fits all o/a. At the same time, students, who traditionally have no exposure to issues facing genderqueer communities, have expressed that they are seeing the world under a larger gender light, regardless of whether they agree with the use of the term or not.

**Eric:** I'd like to make a clarification. My reference to the RAE was only in the idea that, from my understanding, it says it's acceptable for mix gendered groups to be referred to by the dominant gender present, be it feminine or masculine. This is relevant only in that it counters the argument of Spanish necessarily being androcentric. I do not know if they have made any statement opposing or approving of "Latinx," nor am I venturing to do so. Even without the RAE, however, there is nothing stopping people from referring to a mix gender group by using the feminine form. Over

the years, I have been in situations where it has occurred and this signifies that a shift from “a casual and compulsory androcentrism” can be made without using “Latinx.”

I must also advance that this isn't about preserving proper Spanish as much as it is respecting those who speak it as a dominant or sole language by recognizing the natural rhythm of the language. Using “x” and “lxs” in Spanish is extensively difficult, for while they seem manageable when written, in pronunciation they read more as “ex” and “lexes.” Try saying the phrase, “Mis amigexes en Indiana son lexes Latinexes.” The use of “x” interrupts one of the beautiful things about language—that its speakers give it a natural flow. This might sound like a minor issue to bilingual individuals established in the United States, but when Spanish is the only language a person speaks and they're already operating on the margins of society in this country, it's clear that “Latinx” was not meant to be inclusive of their spoken realities.

I advocate for a comprehensible and smooth Spanish syntax precisely because of transnational immigrant flows. I am the product of nearly a century of immigration, moving back and forth across the US-Mexico border with each generation of my family born on both sides. For those of us who straddle the border and its many cultures, there is a requisite need to code switch between languages. This is why my mother consciously bestowed upon all six of her children names that could be pronounced in English and Spanish with only changing the accent—this was especially relevant during the period of American history when Latino children would have their names Anglicized in schools. I navigate an identity where growing up I have been singled out as “other” in the US because my first language is Spanish, yet called a “pocho” in Mexico, because I am US born and English dominant. Having a term that encompasses both identities, that corresponds to English and Spanish syntax, that stays consistent even though the perception of who I am on both sides of the border fluctuates, is beautiful. And while I agree, having “Latinx”

be an addition to other labels is less obtrusive, that's not the way I'm seeing it manifest. As Pilar stated, "Latinx" is starting to be used, not in addition to, but instead of "Latina/o" in the titles of academic majors and minors.

**Sandra:** As Roy mentioned, at some point the terms "Latino/Latina" and "Latin@" became a way to achieve inclusiveness and gender neutrality. This discussion is particularly significant for Spanish, a language in which gender is differentiated with "a" or "o". At that time it served its purpose, but the use of the "x" goes beyond the issue of gender because it attempts to be inclusive of all those who identify as part of the super diverse Latinx population and to embrace our uniqueness within the Latinx community. This includes gender, sexual preferences, and transnationality, among many others. I feel that what we gain by using this term is the awareness of the complexities that come with individual and collective identities. This can also be perceived as an appropriation of the language so that it reflects the dynamic identities among the Latinx community rather than a prescriptive use of it, which would be more aligned with colonial ideologies that are still part of our Latino communities. I also agree with Roy that "Latinx" is an addition to our linguistic repertoire and that what is important is that we are aware, and that we make others aware, of what the term implies and why it exists and co-exists with other terminology.

**Catalina:** *To what extent do you agree, as some have argued, that the "x" termination advances social justice for transgender, genderqueer, and non-gender-conforming bodies, experiences, and perspectives?*

**Stacey:** I strongly agree that the “x” termination advances social justice for queer and non-gender conforming bodies; it’s a step in the direction of creating more inclusive language. Terms like this that refer to people can be neutralized (at least to some extent), especially in written usage; it is also important for reimagining the way in which language functions and how it evolves. While some might contend that to gender neutralize all derivative words from Spanish, French, Portuguese or Italian is impossible, language evolves and emerges in new contexts; it’s always at least worth trying to imagine new possibilities within language usage. Just because a word or a usage of a word is not in a dictionary does not mean it isn’t being used and isn’t widely accepted or even preferred. A dictionary or institution that documents language represents current or past usage, but does not create new imaginaries for language usage.

**Eric:** I completely disagree. The “x” termination is not about inclusivity but about making a public and political statement, which comes at the cost of further marginalizing recent immigrants who are increasingly vulnerable in this country. Additionally, the “x” termination is ripe with symbolism, interpreted as either “no more” or “a variable.” The fact one could read it either way makes it a violent change to language that can be easily misunderstood. It’s also unnecessary. English speakers seem to forget that for a good chunk of time, Latinos were referred to with the gender neutral “Latin,” as in: Latin lover, Latin food, Latin music, Latin looks—they could even go back to just being referred to as Hispanic. The adoption of “Latino” seemed to be predicated on its ability to be used by Spanish speakers. To then change it to something Spanish speakers can’t say, well, it runs counter to the very reason behind having the term.

If one were to try to use an inclusive gender neutral termination, it would be “e”. There is already precedent for this in the Spanish language. Words like “cantante” and “estudiante” are

neutral and rely on accompanying articles to denote gender. Since they exist currently in Spanish, occurring infrequently without challenging the dominant a/o construction, it would be relatively easy to just append the “e” termination to some more nouns while leaving the rest of the gendered nouns as is. By adopting “e” and introducing the article “le,” we would have a truly inclusive term that works within Spanish syntax. The fact that the “e” termination never gained traction might speak to the fact that people were more enamored with the ripe symbolism of “x” than its functionality. Ironically, this type of prejudice, through rendering the Spanish dominant immigrant population invisible, is exactly what the LGBTQ+ community has been rightfully fighting against for so many years.

**Roy:** I really like the “x” signifier as a reclamation of all kinds of erasure. By using the “x” we expose erasure and refuse it at the same time. I’m a nerd, so for me it invokes the X-Men, one of our most culturally visible and diverse narratives about xenophobia and fascism. It’s also not lost on me that Black slaves, denied literacy and proper names, were compelled to sign “X” on their freedom papers. When we cross something out, the original remains doggedly just underneath. The “x” also has a history in the borderlands that Stacey describes below. All told, the “x” has a complex transnational history that is much more rich and full of resistance than a simple story of erasure suggests. I think it’s great to be enamored with these linguistic possibilities—Spanish-speaking cultures are all about linguistic play and appropriation. That itself is a kind of freedom. To answer the question, though, I think the fact that we’re having this conversation in such a visible venue, with all its rich divergences, is itself evidence that the introduction of Latinx is effecting social change that advances trans/queer justice. So long as we’re obliged to grapple with these thorny linguistic problems, we find ourselves centering the experiences and demands of

trans/queer Latinx subjects—documented, undocumented, or US-born. This visibility itself and its new vocabulary, while double-edged, has made it easier for trans and queer thinkers and activists to articulate a movement.

**Pilar:** Again, I find myself in agreement with Stacey and Roy, but I'd like to engage Eric on a couple of points:

1. “The x is not about inclusivity but on making a public or political statement.” Isn't inclusivity gained through public and political discourse? In other words, would we have made the social gains we have made, precisely on inclusivity, were we to not engage in public and political discourse about it?
2. “The use of the ‘x’ comes at the cost of further marginalizing recent immigrants, who are increasingly more vulnerable...” This assumes all recent immigrants reject the use of the term, and it even implies that they are all heteronormative. On the contrary, I believe new immigrants, like other people, will make their own decisions on the use of the term, depending on their own socio-cultural background and identity needs. However, I think the option of having a gender-neutral pronoun liberates those immigrants who belong to non-gender conforming communities and feel the need to identify as gender-queer. I think the point is not should we use the x or not, but let it be an option. El uso o desuso de la palabra va a dictar su futuro.

3. The use of the “e”. I have made this same observation, that if we wanted a neutral term we could just go to “e” (doctore, enfermere, etc.). I am not sure if someone has proposed it, or if it simply has not been pointed out as an option, especially for Spanish speakers (as opposed to those comfortable with English or Spanglish). I think it is a workable alternative. I am sure, however, that we would find resistance there also, from those “enamored” with traditional Spanish, and especially those whose identities fit their use of language.

**Eric:**

1. Inclusivity is indeed gained through making a public or political statement—I never stated anything to the contrary. We should definitely have conversations about inclusivity and be public about them, but our movement towards inclusivity needs be cognizant of all vulnerable populations. If the political statement is made at the cost of a different marginalized group, it is not an effort at inclusivity, especially not when the gender inclusive English pronouns of Latin and Hispanic exist as well. When English dominant or bilingual speakers are imposing value judgments on the Spanish language and deciding that it needs to be changed, they are also making value judgments on the people who speak that language as their only linguistic vehicle for expression. Even looking at the term “Latinx” as a valuable Spanglish label is an exercise in privilege not afforded to monolingual Latin American immigrants who exist in this country and should be taken into consideration.

2. In preparation for a future article on this topic, I have been informally interviewing Latino individuals: monolingual Spanish speakers, all levels of bilinguals, and monolingual English speakers—including subjects who identify as queer, trans, and cis, and have varying levels of education, ranging from completion of a high school diploma or equivalent to the attainment of a doctoral degree. While I cannot make any definite statements at this point, I am seeing patterns starting to form. People who speak English at greater fluency and have attained a higher degree of education seem to be the most likely to look favorably at the use of “Latinx”; those who speak Spanish with greater fluency and have attained only a high school diploma or equivalent are at the other end of the spectrum, being more likely to be taken aback by the term. I am also not seeing trans and queer people universally accept “x” as a marker of self-identity either. One informant clearly stated to me that he worked hard to be seen as a male and to be referred to in gender neutral terminology undermines his true gender identity—while he does not deny anyone else the ability to be referred to as “Latinx,” it’s not a term he would use on himself. I do, however, need to speak with more trans individuals to even get a working hypothesis on how acceptance of the term in the community relates to education and English/Spanish fluency.

3. I have seen the term “e” suggested in a few online blogs and in the comments section of articles discussing “Latinx.” There would definitely be a pushback to using this as well due to points I bring up elsewhere and Pilar’s assertion that there are people enamored with Spanish or feel the language fits their current needs. None of the potentially positive aspects in the “Latinx” movement, however, would be lost with the “e”, and it would provide at least a symbolically important gesture at being cognizant of existing

Spanish syntax and conventions, thus enabling it to be more readily accepted by transnational populations.

**Sandra:** To me this is both about making a political statement against the exclusion of these individuals from language and policies. By doing so we are seeking social justice and equality. Using the “x” could be a way to empower these individuals and a way to shake up what is normal and appropriate. The “x” makes you think and questions who I included and opens the possibilities to basically everyone. In fact, the first time I engaged in a conversation particularly about the “x”, and even about other possibilities, was in a conference about gender, transgender, queer, and non-gender-conforming individuals. Deciding to use the “x” is taking a stance against the current prescriptive use of language that is often not aligned with our realities.

**Catalina:** *What is your response to claims that the “x” signifier marks an untranslatability in Spanish and a form of “linguistic imperialism”?*

**Stacey:** Claims about linguistic imperialism are certainly valid and such claims are important to consider. And Latinx is difficult to say, although I’ve only seen it in written contexts. The letter X might be considered an important letter at least in the Mexican and Mexican American contexts in representing culture and national pride. For example, I’m thinking of the giant red X that is supposed to represent mexicanidad in Ciudad Juárez, just across the border from where I live in El Paso, Texas. That red X can be seen from many parts of the city and may be considered a symbol of Mexican culture and pride (although there has been some controversy about the installation of this X, but that’s another story). On one hand, US usage of the term may in fact demand a gender

neutrality and fluidity that doesn't really exist in Spanish, and that can legitimately be considered linguistic/cultural imperialism. On the other hand, there is precedent for the usage of the term Latinx in Mexico. And the former president of Argentina, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, is known for attempting to use more gender-neutral language (although not with the x). So, there are currents of discontent within South American/Central American Spanish language communities; it's not just US Latinas/os who are interested in these changes. Now, I don't know how much demand for gender neutral language or terms like Latinx there is, but there is some.

**Eric:** In a December 2015 post on *Latino Rebels*, professors María R. Scharrón-del Río and Alan A. Aja argued that Spanish is already “the most blatant form of linguistic imperialism for Latin Americans.” I find this position to be short-sighted. Imperialism and the accompanying colonialism are inherently acts of control predicated on an outside powerful group imposing itself on another group. In this instance, a term designed for English speakers being thrust upon Spanish speakers with little concern of existing syntax and reliant on a superficial interpretation of grammar is an act of colonialism—one that is not negated simply by arguing that Spanish is already a colonizer language. Nahuatl is also a colonizer language, seeing as the Aztecs were imperialistic and already colonized a large part of MesoAmerica before the Spaniards arrived, but that does not negate the impact of Spanish colonialism on the Aztecs.

Living in an imperialistic nation like the United States, we need to be doubly aware of how our incriminations against other cultures and their languages affect the global discourse. If we are saying that we are adopting “x” in order to advance inclusivity, we need to be absolutely sure that “x” is the best way to do that. I am not remotely convinced. By choosing a term that is untranslatable and using it to impose our “morals” onto a less powerful population, what are we

saying? That we are somehow better than they are? Are we not lessening the Spanish-speaking Latin American population to the world by accusing them of patriarchy and using that to justify our attempts to change their language? Why even engage in this conversation when we could more easily go back to the terms of “Latin” and “Hispanic”? This is not just linguistic imperialism, it IS imperialism. We have a president who refers to undocumented Mexican immigrants as rapists and murderers, and to then have the educated masses accuse the very Spanish language of toxic masculinity only furthers that disturbing discourse and justifies discrimination against Latino immigrants.

**Roy:** I think we dangerously misunderstand how imperialism works when we fail to differentiate between grassroots cultural interventions that gain popular momentum among diverse brown, trans, queer and feminist activists, and forms of state imperialism enacted through military invasion and exploitive economic policy. The suggestion that Latinx originates exclusively in the English-speaking US misunderstands the internet, transnational immigrant flows, and the nature of trans/queer solidarity and activism. Let’s not forget that all US terms—including Latina/o and Chicana/o—have roots in English-speaking activism and present the same problem of cultural imposition as Latinx. I think the idea that we are morally imposing Latinx on an innocent and vulnerable immigrant population is couched in dubious immigrant family stereotypes (assimilated children rejecting salt-of-the-earth parents), and insults the intellectual and political capacity of transnational immigrant subjects. I don’t think recognizing Latinx is a moral question—in this light it would be immoral to ask laborers to adopt the language of US worker’s rights that is necessary to resist labor exploitation. It is a political question, which is not the same thing. The term Latinx does not deny anyone anything, because other identities and labels remain. For

example, I continue to identify as Latino, and feel no moral obligation to identify as Latinx, even while I identify as queer and recognize the political exigencies to which Latinx points. Instead, I think the term Latinx brings *new*, diverse, politically resistant subjects into existence against imperialist containment. We're asked to stand alongside them.

**Pilar:** I concur with Roy.

**Eric:** The idea that Chicano/a presented the same type of cultural imposition as Latinx fails to take into consideration the fact that Chicana/o denotes one specific subgroup within the US Latino diaspora. It is, by nature, not directly engaging with transnational identities, not making any larger commentaries on the Spanish language, and its use as a marker of identity is restrictive. Additionally, Chicana/o is a term that has been in use in a pejorative way since early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The accompanying Chicano Movement of the 1960s was, in part, reclaiming the term during a larger activist effort, and turned it into a source of pride. In this context, the importance of the label Chicano has much more in common with the term “queer” and its history in the LGBTQ+ community than it does with “Latinx.”

Using “Latinx” as a supplement to existing labels, as I see Roy using it, definitely does not deny anyone anything. When used as a replacement to “Latina/o” or “Latin@,” along with the accompanying discourse of being inclusive, it sets up a false binary. It assumes that those who reject the term are, in fact, rejecting the mantra of inclusivity—when, in fact, they may be responding to various other problems presented by the term. That conversation is detrimental and has more potential for division than for unity. When presented as “Latina/o/x,” however, there is a platform to argue a conscious effort at inclusivity by acknowledging varying identities.

**Sandra:** I also concur with Roy and restate that the use of “x” is a way to appropriate language, it is a bottom-up proposition that seeks to question and move away from the existent rules that are imposed on us by the RAE or by Academia. Those rules I see as a form of imperialism and colonialism. The “x”, the “@”, and whatever may come after this, are an invitation to question language and those who impose those rules upon us. Communication and how we engage in it is an everyday practice and that cannot be predetermined by any group because it is an organic process that is ongoing. I also believe that the untranslatability of the term is what makes it more empowering. It does not seek to create a new rule but rather to dismantle what exists and invites us to re-think how individuals with different ideologies, perspectives, and identities are included or rejected from different spaces or communities through language.

*Catalina: In your reading of the “@” and “x” endings (e.g., “Latin@” and “Latinx”), what do these language moves enable and constrain?*

**Stacey:** The difficulty is in the pronunciation and the problems created when speaking outloud. Many people say Latina/o when they mean Latin@, but with Latinx, people have to revert back to the old referent term Latin + X (Latinex). In spoken or written Spanish or even English, this is disruptive and US Americanized, but not necessarily impossible. One of my colleagues says La Tinks (ironically) to address the difficulties of pronunciation. I don’t know a good solution to this pronunciation difficulty.

**Eric:** The “@” sign is a different creature in its entirety. Because it is not phonetically pronounced in English or Spanish, it functions simply as a placeholder, capable of representing masculine, feminine, or intersex identities up until the moment it is vocalized, when the differing possibilities collapse. Essentially, from my understanding, the “x” termination functions similarly when used in blogs in Latin America. They don’t tend to vocalize the word as “Latinex” as Americans are doing, but rather just use “x” in place of “@” and still say “Latina” or “Latino.” It is vocalizing the term as “Latinex” that is creating discord in the Latino community, but it is also what allows people to say it includes gender fluid identities... even though, Latin and Hispanic arguably did the same thing.

**Roy:** I like to use them in historically reflexive ways. I might use Latin@ when I’m teaching the history of queer and feminist Latin@s using the internet in the 1990s to organize, create community, stage intellectual exchange, get laid, and all sorts of new kinds of cyber/social possibilities of the kind Juana María Rodríguez describes in her touchstone book *Queer Latinidad*, which introduced the @ to academia. The @ points to a very particular moment of political and cultural emergence. I use Latinx when I want to invoke contemporary ideas about queer liberation and visibility, and when people I speak about ask me to use it, or when I’m uncertain about a gender designation (in this way the “x” can work precisely as a placeholder, too). The different endings allow me to express solidarity, historical consciousness, and self-determination. Despite the annoyances of pronunciation, I think these slippery signifiers allow us to acknowledge the limits of language (a social construct) as we try to articulate a new vision of a liberated social world in which language always serves us great one moment and terribly the

next. I suppose language is itself a social constraint (why is it so hard to let the rules go?), and these new signifiers enable resistance to social constraints.

**Pilar:** I too use Chicano, Latino/a, Latin@, Chicax in different historical contexts. For example, when I teach the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, I use Chicano, because the term is accurate to reflect the moment. The Chicano Movement, for all its positives, was a social movement that valued men's contributions over women's. Likewise, I use Latinx when the terms occurs in a contemporary historical context, and I may use the terms Latina and Latino (written with the lower-case "l" in my Spanish classes and with the upper-case L in my English courses), when historically appropriate. I agree with the rest the opinions expressed here that both the "x" and the "@" can be unpronounceable and at times burdensome. Still, I believe it is the best we have to bring about issues of inclusivity, despite the problems they present. I also think this is an unfinished conversation. The "x" may be a transitional moment, as was the "@", in our search for inclusivity. And we in academia, or la RAE, will not be the ones dictating whether they survive or perish. But the conversation has started and there is no reason to stop it.

**Sandra:** Although I agree that there is difficulty with pronouncing or verbalizing the terms I also feel that this is why they serve its purpose. These have made us question how we use language and how our choices reflect our ideologies. The idea behind it should not be to simply exchange one term for the other but rather to raise awareness on what these choices entail and to break away from traditional ideas of what language is. It even questions the need for a set of specific codes and rules that form a language. For instance, I have heard some people say "todis" or

“todes” instead of “todos” or “todos y todas.” These are words that do not exist in our Spanish/English repertoires but we know the abstract meaning of them and understand our purpose for using them. That is a revolutionary way to use terms and contest the current “proper” terms. Likewise, I am also regularly in spaces where “todas” is purposely used to address the audience regardless of the gender of those present as a way to eradicate the importance of an “a”, “o”, or an “e”. Again, this parting from the idea that language is dynamic, that it should not be prescriptive and that it is what we make of it. More importantly, that we are entitled to do so and that makes it an empowering process. I agree with Pilar that these terms have started a conversation that is necessary and more than there not being a reason to stop it, I think at this point it is impossible to do so and that is a wonderful achievement.