

**THE LINGUISTIC EXPERIENCE OF ITALIANS IN BUENOS AIRES,  
ARGENTINA, 1890-1914: LANGUAGE SHIFT AS SEEN THROUGH  
SOCIAL SPACES**

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## ABSTRACT

From 1890-1914, Argentina received a large influx of Italian immigrants who wanted to “*hacer la América*”, or live the American dream of economic prosperity. With Italian immigrants representing nearly half of all immigrants entering Argentina, the government strived to create a new sense of Argentine pride and nationalism. The objective of this dissertation is to investigate and analyze the linguistic experience of Italian immigrants in Buenos Aires, Argentina, applying Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of social space and linguistic markets, and contact language theories to explain the attrition and shift of the Italian language.

This study identifies three relevant social spaces that contributed to the linguistic experience of Italian immigrants in Buenos Aires: 1.) *conventillos* or immigrant housing 2.) school community, and 3.) mutual aid societies. Within each social space thrived a linguistic market which language played a key role in the way people interacted and identified with each other. First, the *conventillos* were part of an alternative linguistic market in which *cocoliche*, a transitional language, thrived as a way for Italians to communicate with immigrants from different countries. Second, the school community formed part of the legitimate linguistic market because education was mandated by the government. Third, the mutual aid societies formed part of the alternative linguistic market that not only helped immigrants adjust to their new home, but it also fostered a sense of common identity by renewing their traditional ties to their home country in

addition to teaching standardized Italian to Italian immigrants who often spoke their own regional dialects.

A comparison of the three social spaces and the role that the linguistic markets play in each of them shows that all three spaces, whether legitimate or alternative linguistic markets, were integral in the linguistic experience of the Italian immigrants and important factors in the attrition and shift of Italian to Spanish.

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## PREFACE

People have often asked me why I chose to study Spanish instead of Italian, especially since as a first generation American I grew up speaking Sicilian. In college, I started studying Spanish as my secondary language but soon fell in love with the language and switched it to my major. Years later, as a student at Temple University, I took a Dialectology course with Dr. Lorenzino and wrote my first paper about *cocoliche*, the transitional language of Italians in Buenos Aires as they learned Spanish. That got me to thinking about using the dialect of Buenos Aires as a foundation for my eventual dissertation. A few semesters later I took an Ethnolinguistics course and was introduced to the works of Pierre Bourdieu. It was evident that I had come across an interesting hypothesis – the linguistic experience of Italians immigrants in Buenos Aires was impacted by various social spaces. And I was able to reconcile my Sicilian heritage with my love for the Spanish language and Hispanic culture.

Upon researching the census data of Argentina and the theories of Pierre Bourdieu, the three social spaces that I settled on were *conventillos*, school communities, and mutual aid societies. Each of these social spaces represented an aspect of the Italian immigrant's life that created an atmosphere for cultural assimilation and language shift. And each of these social spaces was part of either a legitimate or alternative linguistic market in which a language was a form of prestige in the social spaces. Of particular importance was the prestige that was associated with the Spanish language. It became evident that the prestige associated with Spanish, the legitimate linguistic market, made

Spanish desirable to acquire. Not only was the Spanish the language of the legitimate linguistic market, it was also seen by the Italian immigrants as a way to advance in the culture of Buenos Aires. Shifting to Spanish gave them limitless educational, social, and economic potential.

## INTRODUCTION

Buenos Aires was the point of entry for millions of immigrants who entered Argentina between 1890 and 1914. In this dissertation, I will use Bourdieu's theory of social space and linguistic markets as well as contact linguistics to show that one needs to look beyond demographics to understand the linguistic experience of Italians in Buenos Aires.

Bourdieu (1989) theorized that social spaces and linguistic markets directly impact the way a group is viewed by other groups within a society. His theories focus on the symbolic representation of language as power and its identification within groups and society in general. He identifies two linguistic markets that are important in the way a group is perceived. The first is the legitimate linguistic market and it is intrinsically linked to its official status in society and legitimized by its use in the spheres of government, education, high literature and upper social classes. In Buenos Aires, the legitimate linguistic market has been Spanish. On the other hand, alternative linguistic market is excluded from the official functions of Spanish to which it is subordinated. In Buenos Aires, immigrant languages like Italian make up the alternative linguistic market.

Chapter 1 focuses on language contact in Buenos Aires during the period of intensive immigration (1890-1914) in the context of language shift and its underlying processes as one speech community (e.g. Italian immigrants) learns the target language (e.g. Spanish). There are three main works identified in this chapter that are important to this study: Thomason (2001), Thomason and Kaufman (1988), and Weinreich (1968).

Each of these works offers insight to language shift as well as to possible effects associated with it, for example, language interference. I also discuss in this chapter the question of language and identity as another constraint for language changes within speech communities.

Chapter 2 introduces Pierre Bourdieu's theories of social spaces and linguistic market in order to explain how the social spaces assisted and/or hindered the Italian immigrant in their assimilation to the Argentine culture and its instrumentality in fostering language shift to Spanish. In implementing Bourdieu's theory, I have identified three influential social spaces: 1.) *Conventillos* or communal immigrant housing, 2.) Education, and 3.) Mutual Aid Societies.

In Chapter 3 the sociohistorical and demographic data used in this thesis will be presented. Especially relevant to the linguistic analysis will be housing information centered on the *conventillos*: who were its tenants and where they came from, how many lived per *conventillo* and communal links that fostered kinship among its people. The *conventillos* are viewed as part of the alternative linguistic market in that much of the transitional Italian-Spanish mixes were likely to be due to close proximity of Italians and immigrants from other nationalities. In this chapter, Nemesio Trejo's popular play or *sainete* in Spanish called *Los inquilinos* ('The Tenants'), written in the early 1900s, is thoroughly analyzed with a dual purpose: 1) it depicts some of its Italian characters as attempting to speak Spanish with Italian transfer, giving rise to what later was known to

be as *cocoliche*, and 2) it shows Italian immigrant' in-group identity as they organized to effect a tenant that strike swept across Buenos Aires in 1906.

The second social space in Bourdiean terms identified in chapter 3 is the school community. Data on school curricula in Argentina and the government's nationalistic educational policies for promoting a common history and common Spanish language are contextualized as part of the legitimate linguistic market.

The third social space presented in Chapter 3 is represented by the mutual aid societies and the role they played in promoting the economic and social advancement of Italians in Buenos Aires. Unlike the other two social spaces, the mutual aid societies are unique in that they were part of both the alternative linguistic market and the legitimate linguistic market. With the assistance of the Italian government, the mutual aid societies promoted schools that taught the standardized Italian language in order to compensate for Spanish-only language educational policies mandated by the Argentine government.

Chapter 4 interprets in sociolinguistic terms the various social spaces by showing their common influence on the linguistic experience of the Italian immigrants in Buenos Aires. It identifies the types of language interference that are found in *Los inquilinos* and examines as representative phonemic and lexico-semantic features that made up the Italian-influence Spanish spoken by immigrants, i.e. *cocoliche*. It also uses the *sainete* to illustrate how the *conventillos* functioned as a social space by giving a voice to the Italian immigrants to promote a positive change in their economic and social standing within the host community.

Chapter 5 is the conclusion and provides a summary of this study. It also sketches areas for future research that can be conducted based on this study. One such possibility is to study the linguistic experience of Italian immigrants in the United States by identifying whether or not Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social spaces and linguistic markets as used in this thesis would be applicable to this country.

## CHAPTER 1

### LANGUAGE CONTACT IN BUENOS AIRES

As languages come in contact they may begin a process of language attrition, a language shift, which ultimately results in assimilation. Language shift is the process in which a speech community shifts to another language. The community of speakers of one language becomes bilingual in another language and then shifts its loyalty to the second language, generally favoring the language of the prestigious norm. This is what occurred in Buenos Aires. The Italians did make an instinctive, albeit survivalist, decision to shift their language to Spanish. When a decision is made in favor of one language over another, the “other” language suffers and eventually isn’t spoken anymore. In the case of immigration, this process can take several generations. The immigrants have children who are considered first generation and they learn to speak the language of their adopted country. By the second generation, the language begins its act of attrition and, generally, by the third generation, the language ceases to be spoken by that community.

In the case of language attrition, with the loss of one language in favor of another language, there are cases in language contact situations when the language of the immigrant affects the language of the dominant group, in this case the Argentine elite, who are politically and socially superior to the Italian immigrants. Thomason and Kaufman (1988) identify two types of languages. First, there is the superstratum language, or the language of the invaders who then shift to the language of the conquered. Second is the substratum language, the language of the socio-politically

inferior group. Through contact with the prestigious language of the Argentine elite, the substratum language of the Italian immigrants eventually sifted to Spanish.

## 1.1 Language Shift

There are several phases that languages go through before language attrition takes place. The first that will be discussed in this chapter is language shift. Sarah G. Thomason (2001) defines language contact in these terms, “the use of more than one language in the same place at the same time” (p. 1). In the case of Buenos Aires, a large number of immigrants lived together in a community. With several different languages coming into contact, it became necessary for the immigrants to learn to communicate in a mutual language. There was also pressure from the dominant linguistic group, the Argentines, for the Italian immigrants to become bilingual. Once this group became bilingual, the process of language attrition was well under way, meaning that the subordinate group was preparing for a language shift towards the dominant group’s language. The immigrant language shifts towards the dominant language, but often the dominant language’s structure is influenced by the subordinate group’s language. This is generally the case when the shift occurs over a relatively short period of time. As stated in by Thomason and Kaufman (1988):

A population may come under such heavy cultural [...] pressure from another group that the entire pressured population becomes bilingual in the dominant group’s language. The bilingual population may then actually shift completely to

the second language, while retaining the lexicon of the original language for use, with the other language's grammar, as an ethnic-group code or jargon. Children born to members of that group might then begin to learn, not the whole original ethnic-group language, but only its vocabulary, in addition to the entire language of the dominant group. (p. 10)

The shorter the process of language shift is, the higher the possibility of interference from the shifting language to the target language, in the case under study, Spanish. Also, the shorter the process of language shift, the higher the occurrence of an imperfect learning. In this case, the Italian immigrants do not learn the target language perfectly.

Interference through imperfect learning generally begins with phonology and syntax. Since the immigrant learners of Spanish are interested in learning Spanish quickly, it is only natural that the sounds and morphosyntactic structures of their own language influence their peculiar manifestation of Spanish. In the case of Buenos Aires, Italian and Spanish, two languages that are similar in structure, came into contact. Italians began to learn Spanish but maintained the sounds of their native language. As Italians began to communicate in Spanish, *cocoliche*, a transitional language, was created. This transitional language had no formal written structure, and, in the strictest sense, it was a transitional language used until many Italians were able to shift entirely to Spanish.

As a transitional language, *cocoliche* became a symbol of the struggles that the Italian immigrants were facing during their transition to speaking the target language and

becoming assimilated into the culture of Buenos Aires. *Cocoliche* is a term that bears both linguistic and physical denotations and is a phenomenon truly unique to Argentina. It has its roots in a character from a visiting carnival, a clown, who spoke Spanish with an Italian accent and also mixed the two languages. This gave way to a physical representation of *Cocoliche* during Carnaval, and later, it became the term for the transitional language of the Italian immigrants as they were learning to speak Spanish. As a transitional language it was a spontaneous language and it was possible to have as many *cocoliches* as speakers (Cara-Walker 1987). From a linguistic perspective, it was a highly variable linguistic system.

Although interference through shift implies that a transitional language could be maintained through various generations, this was not the case for *cocoliche* because of its lack of linguistic system. Cara-Walker (1987) found that the similarities in the language and culture of Spanish and Italian often made it impossible to delineate which language was being influenced:

When an immigrant Italian's speech reaches a certain level of linguistic confusion, it is difficult to establish at what moment they speak an Italianized Spanish, and it is therefore impossible to clearly isolate the respective influences of Spanish and Italian in their speech. The phenomena of contact and contamination between them become overlaid, crossed, complicated to such a point that one *cannot speak of an absolute boundary between the two languages.* (p. 54).

It is this lack of boundaries that permitted the Rioplatense dialect to be influenced by Italian. For Italians in Buenos Aires, the pressure to learn the dominant language was greater than the sense of nationality that they may have felt for their mother tongue. Ultimately, the transitional language fell to the pressure of the dominant language (Lorenzino, 1996, p. 381).

It is important to note that language shift is an intergenerational process by which the process of acquiring a new language takes several generations to be completed. There are several factors that go into the process of language shift. The rapidness with which one group acquires the target language often has to do with the “belief in the superiority of the dominant language” and “more possibilities of social advance with the dominant language” (Thomason, 2001, p. 24). The more prestige that is associated with the target language, the majority group’s language, the more incentive there is to acquire the target language.

Given that language plays such an integral role in social advancement, immigrants are seduced by the prestige that comes with the target language. In Buenos Aires, learning the language of the majority would allow the Italian immigrants to advance socially, politically and economically in their newly adopted country and also provide them with a common language that could be used to communicate with each other as their dialects oftentimes were mutually unintelligible. Living in the *conventillos* with people from different backgrounds meant that Spanish was the common language.

As the Italians were learning to communicate in the target language, it was only natural that interference through shift took place, especially because of the proximity of the two languages; however, proximity of the languages was not the only contributing factor to interference. A second contributing factor was the large population of the Italians immigrating to Buenos Aires. The following table shows the number of Italians entering Buenos Aires between the years 1861 and 1920:

Table 1: *Italian Immigration to Argentina, 1861-1920*

<b>Time Period</b>	<b>Total Immigrants</b>	<b>Italian Immigrants</b>	<b>Percentage of Italian Immigrants</b>
1861-1870	159,570	113,554	71
1871-1880	260,885	152,061	58
1881-1890	841,122	493,885	59
1891-1900	648,326	425,693	57
1901-1910	1,764,103	796,190	45
1911-1920	1,204,919	347,388	29
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4,878,925</b>	<b>2,270,525</b>	<b>47</b>

Baily, Samuel. (2004). Immigrants in the Lands of Promise: Italians in Buenos Aires and New York City, 1870-1914. Cornell University Press, p. 64.

As Table 1 indicates, a total of 2,270,525 documented Italian immigrants entered Buenos Aires during the years between 1861 and 1920. Those numbers represent 47% of the total population of Italians entering Argentina during that time frame. The numbers of Italians were a determining factor in language interference and the linguistic

experience of the Italian immigrants. The larger the group of immigrants the more influence that this group is likely to leave on the majority group's language. As Thomason (2001) pointed out:

The probability that shift-induced interference will become fixed in a target language is crucially dependent on the relative sizes of the two speaker groups. If the shifting group is large relative to the population of target-language speakers – either of the target language as a whole or of a subcommunity that is forming a single new speech community with the shifting speakers, isolated from the TL shifters' interference features will become fixed in the target language. (p. 78)

The total population of Argentina rose from 4 million in 1895 to 7.9 million in 1914, and Italians comprised a significant portion of that population, facilitating the spread of the interference features in the target language. For example, the Rioplatense dialect shows phonological features similar to the Neapolitan dialect of Italy in its pronunciation. These similarities will be discussed in Chapter 4.

## 1.2 Impact of Language Interference

Thomason's claims of the impact of interference on the target language had been studied earlier by Uriel Weinreich (1968). Weinreich identified several features of bilingual groups that are relevant to the study of interference. Of the twelve features discussed by Weinreich, there are four that are germane to this discussion. The first

factor that pertains to this discussion is “size of bilingual group and its socio-cultural homogeneity or differentiation; breakdown into subgroups using one or the other language as their mother-tongue, demographic facts; social and political relation between these subgroups” (p. 3). As discussed previously, the Italian immigrants in Buenos Aires made up 47% of the total immigrant population.

The second factor as identified by Weinreich is the “stereotyped attitudes toward each language (“prestige”); indigenous or immigrant status of the languages concerned” (p. 3). The language concerned, Italian, held an immigrant status while Spanish was the prestigious language. Being able to communicate in the target language of Spanish became a source of social status and it enabled the immigrant to be a member of the cultural majority. Through Spanish, immigrants were able to obtain better jobs, housing units and overall improvement of their status within the society.

The third factor as is the “attitude towards the culture of each language community” (p. 3). Italian immigrants spoke the dialect that was peculiar to the area of Italy from which they came, many being unable to speak the standardized Italian. It is important to note that many Italian immigrants went to Argentina with the intention of staying in Argentina, seeking a better life in a country that was very welcoming to the skilled laborer from Europe. It is only logical that the Italian immigrant would want to assimilate to the language and culture of Buenos Aires.

The final factor that by Weinreich is the “relation between the bilingual group and each of the two language communities of which it is a marginal segment” (p. 3). As

previously stated, the Italian immigrants were welcomed into Argentina to help create a new infrastructure using their skilled labor. The similarity of the cultures also created the illusion that there was a harmonious relationship between the two groups. Subsequent chapters of this dissertation will demonstrate that the conditions in which the Italian immigrants were forced to live were extremely undesirable as well as how these conditions led to the Italian immigrants having their voices heard through the popular *sainetes* of the time period.

### 1.3 Types of Language Interference

Weinreich (1968) goes on to establish several types of interference that occur in language shift: phonemic, lexical, and morphemic interference. Phonemic interference targets the sound system of the two languages that are in contact. Lexical interference has to do with the interference of borrowed words from the shift language to the target language. The third type of interference, morphemic interference, concerns the smallest meaningful unit in a language and its relation to grammar. Some of these interference types are found in the *sainete* of Nemesio Trejo, *Los inquilinos*.

Weinreich (1968) cites several subcategories of phonemic interference: under-differentiation, over-differentiation, reinterpretation of distinctions, and phone substitutions. Under-differentiation is the confusion of sounds of the target language whose sounds are difficult to distinguish from the primary language. Over-differentiation is when the speaker imposes the sounds of the primary language on the sounds of the

target language when it is not required. Reinterpretation of distinctions is when the bilingual speaker distinguishes certain sounds that are relevant to his language but not to the target language. Phone substitution is, in the conventional sense of the term, that which “applies to phonemes that are identically defined in two languages but whose normal pronunciation differs” (p. 19).

Lorenzino (1996) identifies several types of phoneme substitutions that were prevalent in the speech of the Italian immigrant. Among the substitutions are:

- omission of the final –s: *addio* for *adiós*
- yeísmo: *ayí* for *allí*
- vocalic changes: /u/ for /o/, *lus* for *los*; /i/ for /e/, *pior* for *peor*

The second type of language interference that was experienced in Rioplatense Spanish was lexical interference. Lexical interference is found, most commonly, in languages that are genetically related as in the case of Italian and Spanish. In many cases, lexical interference leads to the simplification in the immigrant language.

Weinreich (1968) distinguishes three basic types of lexical interference. The first type is loan translations. This would be the situation when the speaker of the shifting community translates literally, word for word, from Italian to Spanish. The speaker doesn't take into account the nuances of the language and the communicative goal is simply to get his point across, borrowing the structure of his own language. In loan translations, the words that are used make sense and have the same meaning, but there would have been a better way that the native speaker would have expressed the same phrase.

The second type of lexical interference is loan renditions. This is when the words chosen to express items or phrases in the target language are not quite right.

The third type of lexical interference is loan creations, a term “applied to new coinages which are stimulated not by cultural innovations, but by the need to match designations available in a language in contact” (p. 53). The speaker of the shifting language creates a new term in the target language in order to express a concept that is found in the native language but not in the target language.

Among the types of lexical interferences there are several that have been identified by Lorenzino (1996):

- hybrid of Spanish and Italian: *hasta domani* for *hasta mañana*
- borrowing: *fato (fatto)* for *hecho*

When lexical interference is manifested, it is usually done so by the speaker of the shifting community. Lexical interference can turn into a form of borrowing, defined by Thomason (2001) as “the *adaptation* of lexical material to the morphological and syntactic (and usually phonological) patterns of the recipient language” (p. 134). When loanwords are established in the language they have full linguistic integration and widespread diffusion. It is interesting to note that when Italian immigrants contributed lexicon to Spanish, there was a certain level of prestige associated with the shifting language, Italian. For Rioplatense Spanish, one can surmise that while the Italian immigrant population did not have the highest prestige in society, they did represent a large enough population to influence the Spanish spoken in Buenos Aires.

The linguistic experience of Italians in Buenos Aires is unique because of the close proximity of the languages and the motivation Italian immigrants had to learn the language. As previously mentioned, Italians went to Buenos Aires with the intention of forging a better life as they saw Argentina as the land of opportunity. Thus, learning the Spanish language to the Italian immigrant meant better opportunities in addition to becoming a means to advance socially and economically.

How the incoming population of non-native speakers assimilates to the target language will be dependent upon the accessibility of education for the incoming population. Where they settled geographically, whether urban or rural, will also determine the integration of the person learning the new language. Their geographic location determines how well the language is learned and how well the immigrant assimilates into the society since access to education, community services, cultural activities and public transportation is more readily available to a person living in an urban environment versus someone living in a rural environment. It will determine if they learn the language, leaving no traces of their native tongue or whether they learn the language imperfectly, imposing aspects of their language in the target language.

While language shift is intergenerational, taking place over several generations, language attrition is intragenerational, occurring within a generation and pertains to changes, or loss, in language proficiency. Language shift gradually gives way to the loss of the speaker's native language, which occurs over a more defined and limited period of time.

The children of the Italian immigrants were particularly relevant to the process of language shift and attrition because they learned Spanish in school, but were still speaking an Italian dialect in the home with their immigrant parents. As that generation reproduced and the immigrants began to die off, the Italian language was lost to subsequent generations.

#### 1.4 Speech Communities

A factor that must be addressed is the role that language plays in the identity of a community. The Italian immigrants identified with their spoken dialect, but they began to appreciate the need of the language spoken in their adopted country since becoming bilingual granted them access to their host community. The two languages served different needs that the immigrant identified. Suleiman (2007) sees language as an ingredient of identity when he constructs identity on two levels, “*interior*” and “*exterior*” (p. 51). “Constructing linguistic identity [...] links that which is *interior* to the self in the realm of the personal identity with what is *exterior* to it in the social domain or professional and collective identity” (p. 52). In other words, the native language conveys the personal identity while the target language gives meaning to the societal identity. Although the Italian immigrant identifies with his language, culture and traditions, he also recognizes that there is a new collective identity that is intrinsically linked to the language of the host society. Learning Spanish gives the immigrant a new sense of a

social identity that identifies with the host language, culture and traditions and the values associated with the host society (Llamas, 2007).

Winford (2003) speaks of a repertoire of speech, which brings to mind various speech communities:

The speech communities can also be defined in terms of social criteria such as ethnicity, social class, gender, and so on. ...its members share certain linguistic repertoires and rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech. Essentially, it is social interaction within and across speech communities that leads to diffusion of linguistic and other cultural practices. (p. 26)

The personal and the collective identity, in terms of language use and choice, are also parts of the different speech communities in which the immigrant takes part. Winford (2003) identifies speech communities by many different levels, from the local neighborhood to the nation. For Italian immigrant, the speech communities equate to the *conventillos* being the local neighborhood and the host society being the nation state.

#### 1.4 Concluding Remarks

When an immigrant community begins the process of choosing a new language over their native language, the first language undergoes many changes. As it begins to shift in favor of the language of the host society, the question that arises is: What effect, if any, will the shifting language have on the target language? These types of language

interference through shift impacted the Spanish spoken in Buenos Aires. In subsequent chapters, I will discuss how these changes have manifested themselves in Rioplatense Spanish. I will use Pierre Bourdieu as a theoretical framework to demonstrate how the Italian immigrant used three fundamental social spaces as a conduit for language shift.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews both historical and current research as it draws on multiple theories of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to establish a theoretical framework for this study. The two fundamental theories significant to this dissertation are: 1.) Symbolic Power and its relevant concept of habitus and 2.) Social Spaces (*conventillos*, school and mutual aid societies) and how they are pertinent to the language experience of Italians in Buenos Aires. First, I will discuss the concept of habitus and how it relates to language attrition in Buenos Aires. Secondly, I will discuss the three social spaces germane to this dissertation, the *conventillos*, schools and the mutual aid societies. Within the discussion of the social spaces, I will provide an historical overview of Buenos Aires at the turn of the twentieth century. This history of Buenos Aires from 1890-1914 will establish the significance for the social spaces selected for the purpose of this study and demonstrate the way in which Italian immigrants took root in a country that was in need of laborers and created a new identity through various networks which, using Pierre Bourdieu's terms, I have defined as social spaces.

Next, by discussing the theories of social space and social capital, I will demonstrate how the three influential social spaces that I have identified, the *conventillos* (SocSp<sup>1</sup>), the school communities (SocSp<sup>2</sup>) and the mutual aid societies (SocSp<sup>3</sup>) contributed to the attrition and shift of the Italian language and identity while

simultaneously converting the prestigious linguistic norm from that of the oligarchy to one that is decisively Italian in flavor.

Relevant to the language attrition of Italians in Buenos Aires is Bourdieu's concept of the power of groups within a society. His theory relates to the interaction between different groups within a society. According to Bourdieu, every society has a dominant group that dictates the norms and practices of any given aspect of a culture, be it educational reform, or, more specific to this study, language dominance. By discussing Bourdieu's theory on symbolic power and its implications, I will be able to illustrate how this theory can be applied to explain the language experience of Italians in Buenos Aires.

## 2.1 Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Habitus

According to Bourdieu (1977), all individuals have their own habitus, "a way of being, a habitual state" (p. 72). The importance of the habitus is that it instills perceptions and thoughts that are consistent with certain socio-cultural conditions.

Bourdieu (1990) defined habitus as:

... a system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious

aiming at ends or express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (p. 53)

All individuals have experiences, habits, traditions, and beliefs that shape the way that they, as individuals and collectively, perceive their surroundings and how they respond to the present and the future (Swartz, 1997, p. 69). The concept of habitus, on the surface, seems to be at odds with the relation of the individual to his community. However, the fundamental notion of habitus is that all the ideas and thoughts that a person has are directly influenced by the values and the traditions of his community. In other words, the habitus not only reflects an individual's way of being, but, collectively, that of a given community. The way a person perceives himself is very often related to the world around him, the neighborhood he lives in, his career choice, and academic success. The driving force behind the habitus is that it can develop and change throughout a person's life, especially when a life-changing event has occurred, such as immigration and being introduced to another set of habitus. This is of particular relevance to this dissertation because it helps provide a frame of reference as to the habitus of the Italian immigrant community in Buenos Aires at the turn of the century.

Swartz (1997) found that habitus is "a structural structure that derives from the class-specific experiences of socialization in family and peer groups" (p. 102). When the input changes, the habitus then evolves to a different expression of self and community. Therefore, habitus is the way a person perceives the world around him based on socio-cultural input.

In the case of the Italian immigrant community of Buenos Aires, peer groups play an important role in the change of the habitus of this tight-knit community. As will be discussed in fuller detail later in the chapter, the Italian community endeavored to make a better life for the immigrant population. Firstly, mutual aid societies assisted the Italian immigrants in all aspects of their daily lives. Secondly, Italian newspapers were instrumental in disseminating information that was essential to the Italian immigrant, such as housing availability and travel information. As these peer groups became prominent members of the community, the habitus of the Italians began to shift from wanting to maintain their national sense of identity through language and traditions to wanting to be considered a part of the Buenos Aires community.

The Italian immigrant sought to assimilate to the Buenos Aires culture and community through better housing, better wages and recognition as productive members of the community. Once their habitus changed and Italians began to culturally assimilate to the Buenos Aires community, the process of language attrition began.

## 2.2 Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Social Spaces

Significant to the occurrence of language attrition were the networks or social spaces used by the Italian immigrant population to advance in the community. As previously mentioned, the three social spaces that will be examined for the purpose of this dissertation are the *conventillos*, the school communities and the mutual aid societies. Social spaces are relevant to the community because they, as Swartz (1997) stated,

“create and maintain unity and thereby perpetuate or improve their position on the social order” (p. 7). It is through these social spaces that the immigrant pursued enhanced integration in to the culture and society. Through the advancement of the three social spaces, whether perpetuated by the immigrant or the Buenos Aires elite, the Italian immigrant was able to change the social order through workers’ strikes, renters’ strikes, as well as advanced education opportunities that were provided by the government. In agreement with Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of habitus, these social spaces restructured the habitus and ceded a new habitus (p. 87).

Once the social spaces were established within the Italian immigrant community, they became powerful and accumulated symbolic capital. “Individuals and groups draw upon a variety of cultural, social, and symbolic resources in order to maintain and enhance their positions in the social order” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 375). Symbolic capital is a theory proposed by Bourdieu that treats certain interests as capital. The immigrants were able to organize themselves and became institutionalized through the mutual aid societies and immortalized through literature. They had symbolic social power because the Italian immigrant deemed himself a valuable resource to the economic and social fabric of the community.

According to Pierre Bourdieu (1985) in “The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups”, “The social world can be represented as a space (with several dimensions) constructed on the basis of principles of differentiation or distribution by the set of properties active within the social universe in question, i.e. capable of conferring

strength, power within that universe, on their holder” (p. 724). This is applicable to the linguistic experience of Italians in Buenos Aires, particularly, between the years of 1890 – 1914 when migration hit its peak. The *conventillos*, the school community and the mutual aid societies are all representative of the various social spaces of the Italian immigrants. The Italian immigrants unconsciously formed a resilient network when they were forced to live together in the *conventillos*. The Italian immigrants lived together in close quarters and it was in these very *conventillos* that the Italian worker began to demand fair wages and fair rent. In so far as the school communities, the government exerted social control by mandating the rules of immigration, housing laws and school curriculum. The mutual aid societies also contributed a large part to the social network of the Italian immigrants and gave the Italian immigrants a group that they could belong to and that benefited them in their everyday lives. In this sense, the mutual aid societies were a form of social capital because they helped to ensure that the Italians in Buenos Aires were treated fairly. The growing membership of these societies is directly related to the notion of “what can I get out of it?” or “How will this benefit me?” Although the mutual aid societies didn’t guarantee success, they helped the immigrant obtain housing, work, health benefits and more so, they provided legitimacy to the Italian immigrants and were an influential social network and gave value to the immigrants, providing them with a form of social capital.

Italians in Buenos Aires networked through these social spaces and, in this way, they were able to assimilate into the culture of that time period. The *conventillos*, the

school communities and the mutual aid societies functioned as institutions that involved rules and membership. Bourdieu (1991) referred to institutions as a form of social network whose existence is:

[...] the product of an endless effort at institution, of which institution rites – often wrongly accused as rites of passage – mark the essential moments and which is necessary in order to produce and reproduce lasting, useful relationships that can be secure material or symbolic profits. In other words, the network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term, i.e. at transforming contingent relations, such as those of neighborhood, the workplace, or even kinship, into relationships that are at once necessary and elective, implying durable obligations subjectively felt (feelings of gratitude, respect, friendship, to “make the acquaintance” of all their “acquaintances”); they are known to more people than they know, and their work of sociability, when it is exerted, is highly productive. (249-50)

The school communities helped the children of the Italian immigrants become useful members of *porteño* (Buenos Aires) society and allowed these children to forge relationships with their Argentine peers. Education became an institutional rite to which all children, once education became mandatory, were subjected. The mutual aid societies

functioned as a network that fostered social relationships between the Italians who came from many different regions of Italy and spoke different dialects.

The social spaces, in addition to serving as a social network for the Italians, also helped them attain a certain value within their social spaces. Bourdieu (1991) defined his concept of social capital as “membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various sense of the word” (p. 249). The Italians were able to organize themselves within their social spaces. For example, *conventillos* became a place where people from similar backgrounds, language, and beliefs came together and underwent similar social and economic pressure. It is in these *conventillos* that Italians were able to organize and create a new way of life while attempting to maintain their own identity. The children of immigrants were members of a school community whose curriculum was designed to foster a sense of Argentine nationalism that conflicted and competed with the Italian immigrants’ attempt to maintain their own sense of self, of their identity. On the other hand, the mutual aid societies served as a bridge, connecting the *conventillos* and what they represented, the Italian identity, with the school community and what it represented, the Argentine identity. This bridge provided a powerful way in which the Italian immigrant in Buenos Aires was able to insert himself into the society to create a new identity.

The first social space studied is the *conventillos* (SocSp<sup>1</sup>). These were government subsidized housing, or tenements, where the immigrants lived upon their

arrival to Buenos Aires. It was here that the transitional language of the Italians began to take shape. It is an important social space because of the role that the *conventillos* played in the Argentine society, from tenant strikes to carnival's *cocoliche*. The playwrights of the time also used the *conventillos* as settings in their *sainetes* and tangos. These literary works are rich in *cocoliche*, the transitional language of the Italian immigrants. In the *conventillos*, the Italians remained a close-knit group, keeping traditions and dialects alive.

The government's initial plan called for mass immigration to help populate and industrialize the country. While the plan was a success, it came with a price as most immigrants decided to remain in Buenos Aires, the port of arrival. As a result, housing for the large influx of immigrants became an issue. The wealthy elite of Argentina decided to convert their homes into boarding houses that became known as *conventillos*, large homes where the wealthy elite of Argentina lived. Many of the elites left Buenos Aires and as a result the homes became dilapidated. As a result, the business decision was then made to turn these homes into boarding houses for immigrants of whom the majority was single men. This SocSp<sup>1</sup> is important to investigate because it was a place where a very large number of immigrants from different dialects, countries, and cultures lived and socialized.

The *conventillos* were colonial-style houses that were converted in boarding houses that several hundred people called home. The following figure shows how the *conventillos* were designed:

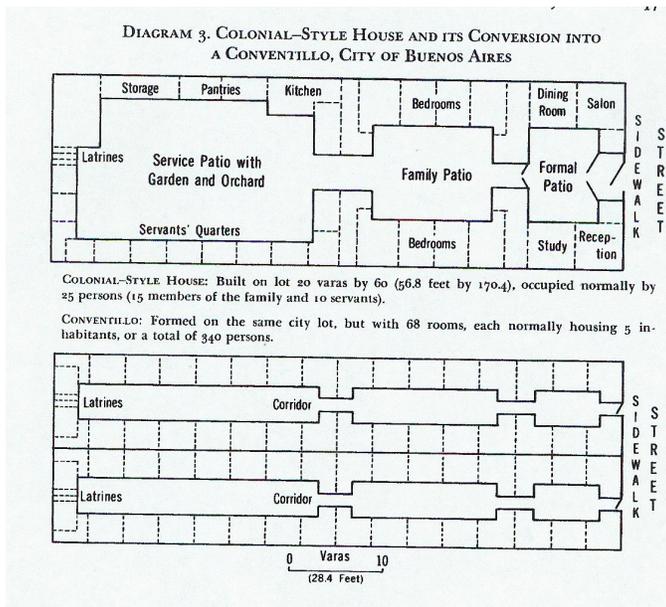


Figure 1: *Typical Conventillo*

Source: [people.cohums.ohio-state.edu/guy60/history534.04/Immigration.ppt](http://people.cohums.ohio-state.edu/guy60/history534.04/Immigration.ppt)

The top blueprint shows the original layout of the home. There was a large service patio that was used by the servants; the servants' quarters, kitchen, and pantry surrounded that patio. There were two other patios: the family patio surrounded by the various bedrooms, and the formal patio, surrounded by the dining room, salon, and study and reception area. Twenty-five people, both family members and servants, typically occupied this type of home.

The bottom blueprint shows the conversion from family home to *conventillo*. Here, the three patios were converted to rooms in order to maximize earning potential. This particular *conventillo* was converted to sixty-eight rooms that housed, on average, five people per room, for a total of three hundred and forty people. The close proximity

of the people living in these *conventillos* had the potential to create an environment that was dangerous. Yet, what the proximity did do was invite a feeling of solidarity between the persons living there, allowing them to work together to fight for their rights. This solidarity created a social network that became strong in its own right, as evidenced by the *carnaval cocoliche* and the tenant strikes that took place in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Table 2 shows the how the *conventillo* can impact the demographics of not just a particular neighborhood, but of a particular block within that neighborhood in Calle Perú. It is of particular significance because it shows the great number of immigrants that were housed in the *conventillo* located in 356 Calle Perú. Ninety-six people were housed in 356 Calle Perú, compared to one hundred and twelve total people in twenty-three other buildings, not including number 356:

Table 2: *Comparing Residents of 300 Block of Calle Perú*

	300 Block w/o no. 356	No. 356
No. buildings	23	1
No. people	112	96
Country of origin		
%Argentina	41%	34%
% foreign-born	59%	66%
(% Spain)	(27%)	(51%)
(% Italy)	(14%)	(10%)
(% France)	(13%)	( - )
(% Uruguay)	(2%)	(5%)
(% misc.)	(3%)	( - )

James A. Baer, James A. (1994). Street, Block, and Neighborhood: Residency Patterns, Community Networks, and the 1895 Argentine Manuscript Census. *The Americas*. 51(1): 99.

Although it could be argued that having a large grouping of people with a similar cultural background would hinder cultural and linguistic assimilation, a better argument could be made for a faster, more comprehensive assimilation progress. The living conditions in the *conventillos* were not ideal since people lived in small, cramped quarters, sharing a bathroom with other people. Also, there were several languages spoken in the *conventillos*. Given the less than ideal living conditions, the *conventillos* became places of faster assimilation because the immigrants wanted to save money so that they could obtain better housing outside of the *conventillos*. Language acquisition

was facilitated given that Spanish was the common language among the various immigrant groups. In the case of Calle Perú, 356, Spanish and Italian came in close contact since not only were there Argentines living with Spaniards who spoke different varieties of Spanish, but in the *conventillo* also lived Italians with their particular dialects. Thus, the *conventillos* became a linguistic locus for language interference and ultimately, language shift. According to Lacroix and Adams (1950):

... when the immigrants and their social organizations are not unfavourable to assimilation or even are actively interested in it, geographical concentration may be a factor of more rapid assimilation. It also tends to facilitate the existence of new immigrants and may thus have a favourable influence on their adaptation to conditions in their new country of residence and on their assimilation of the culture of that country. (p. 78)

The “geographical concentration” of the immigrations did indeed foster a strong sense of community. It was a space where the alternative linguistic market, the transitional language, flourished. What is interesting about this alternative linguistic market is that it gave birth to a transitional language, known as *cocoliche*. *Cocoliche* is a term that possesses both linguistic and physical denotations, a phenomenon truly unique to Argentina. The term has its roots in a character from a visiting carnival, a clown, who spoke Spanish with an Italian accent and also mixed the two languages. This gave way to a physical representation of the *Cocoliche* character during *Carnaval*, and later, it became the term for the transitional language of the Italian immigrants as they were learning to

speak Spanish. What Cara-Walker (1987) has noted as unique about *cocoliche* as a transitional language is that it was a spontaneous language, and from a linguistic perspective, it had no consistent linguistic system. In fact, it was possible to have as many *cocoliches* as speakers.

Through the cultural figure of *Cocoliche*, Italians mocked themselves during the festive time of carnival, the three days that proceed the Roman Catholic holy time of Lent. *Cocoliche* was also used as a literary tool to express the way that Italian immigrants spoke, including in the *sainetes* of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. These are a useful linguistic resource for this study because they show how the *cocoliche*'s speech trickled into the language of the theater of that time period.

The early 1900's were a period of negative sentiment against the working-class, trade unionists and anarchist immigrants. Siegel (2000) said that carnival extended "a site for the negotiation and contestation of shifting national boundaries" (p. 56). The Italians found themselves imitating and ridiculing social elements of the bourgeois. Each *conventillo* designated a resident to act as the *cocoliche* for that *conventillo* and being the *cocoliche* became a symbol of prestige and honor among the Italians. They were figures that often overstepped the boundaries bestowed upon them by the ruling elite as they parodied the political climate and often these parodies would place the societal elites in a position of inferiority to the Italian immigrants. In addition to parodies, the *cocoliche* utilized improper speech (broken Spanish), "offering funny accents and garbled grammar for comic value" (p. 63). Italians embraced the opportunity to mock themselves, all the

while making a political statement. Not only was this representative of the transitional language, it was a seemingly innocuous way to make a political statement against the elites.

The elite of Buenos Aires felt politically threatened by the emerging power of the immigrants. The perceived threat caused by Carnival *cocoliches* manifested itself through violence against immigrants. By 1910, Carnival had to be suspended due to the amount of violence against the immigrants. When Carnival was cancelled, the Italians lost their platform to present their political and social arguments and the bourgeois used their elite hegemony as a means to an end. Although it was later reinstated, the political battle lines had been drawn. *Cocoliche* then began to appear in other venues, namely in theater, the *sainetes*, as a linguistic representation and valuable to the preservation of *cocoliche* are the Argentine *sainetes*.

The Argentine *sainetes* are one-act plays with three scenes that mirrored the struggles of the immigrant working class as well as their struggles of assimilation and acculturation (Evans, 1979, p. 49). Many of the *sainetes porteños* featured the immigrants in their natural habitat, the *conventillos*. As Casadevall states:

The national theater – realistic, costumbrista, and sociological – not only documented the evolution of the country at the turn of the century, but also influenced that same social reality and made the public acquire consciousness of itself, in order to correct its own defects, reflected in dramatic or satiric form by the writers and actors of the national stage” (qtd. in Evans (1979, p. 52).

The *sainetes porteños* played a pivotal role in the assimilation process of the immigrants because they brought to light their social reality and immigrants' desire to be treated fairly in their new society.

While there were many recurring themes of the *sainete*, both personal and political conflicts, the *sainete* that will be explored for the purpose of this study is *Los inquilinos* (The Tenants) written by Nemesio Trejo. *Los Inquilinos* imbibes many of the elements of a typical *sainete*. In her article Evans (1979) referred to Alberto Vacarezza, a famed *sainetista porteño* of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. According to Vacarezza, in Evans (1979), all *sainetes* share similar elements, the *conventillos* as a backdrop, Italian and Spanish immigrants, a pretty lady and a *machista*, a lovers' spat, passion, envy, a fight, challenges, knives and flight. *Los inquilinos* possesses all the elements as delineated by Vacarezza, but with a twist since it incorporates the sentiments of the working class in regards to their living conditions and their wages. Trejo uses the *sainete* as a platform to speak about the circumstances that much of the working class was confronting, increasing prices for goods, a rise in rent, and unsanitary living conditions in the *conventillos*.

The first scene of *Los inquilinos* takes place in the patio of a typical *conventillo* and features an Italian vegetable vendor. The second scene takes place in the streets and follows the striking tenants. The third and final scene takes the *sainete* full circle, once again in the courtyard of the *conventillo*. The common thread throughout all the scenes is the discussion of the strike and who will take part in it.

*Los inquilinos* demonstrates the social space of the *conventillo* as a critical space where the immigrants organized the tenant strikes. Luis Ordaz (1963) explained the significance of this living space:

... en el patio del conventillo coincidían los tipos que llegaban de las orillas y los mil destinos ansiosos de quienes habían arribado con las raíces al aire y procuraban una nueva tierra que cobijara y nutriera sus esperanzas. El conventillo, [...] equivalía de pronto a una circunstancia trascendente del fabuloso desarrollo del país. (p. 10)

The second social space is the school community (SocSp<sup>2</sup>) and the reforms imposed by the government. For example, the government designed the school curriculum so that Argentine history and culture were of particular importance in ensuring that children of immigrants would grow up with a sense of Argentine nationalism.

An important factor in both adaptation and assimilation was the Argentine government itself. Assimilation did not happen with the speed and ease that the government had anticipated. Despite the similarity of the language and culture, problems arose between the *porteños*, the ruling class of Buenos Aires, and the Italians. Spalding (1972) has demonstrated the quick action of the government to instill Argentine values among the immigrants. In the 1880's lawmakers mandated the singing of the national anthem and the saluting of the flag and in 1884, President Roca passed laws that regulated the placement of the Argentine flag. Later, in 1889, the *Consejo Nacional de*

*Educación* established patriotic celebrations in schools. The politician Miguel Cané unsuccessfully proposed a law in 1899 for the expulsion of foreigners. Instead, a law passed that declared all school courses in Argentine history to be taught by citizens of Argentina, and all language courses in schools to be taught by citizens of Argentina. The educational plan called for a "comprehensive educational program for natives and immigrants to make them useful citizens" (p. 33).

The school curriculum was very nationalistic for its time as the government intended to teach Argentine nationalism to its students. The ruling class of Argentina, also known as the "Generation of 1880", proposed a plan to "europeanize" Argentina through immigration. As Spalding (1972) indicated, many immigrants took advantage of the education that was being offered to their children because that education opened positions in lucrative fields. In fact, "sciences often provided an entry for outsiders in developing societies, particularly in prestigious fields such as law" (p. 56).

The 20th century brought the nationalist writer Ricardo Rojas, who believed that foreigners could be assimilated into Argentine culture because, "the Argentine nationality was primarily spiritual rather than racial, and there was something about the Argentine soil which had a beneficent influence on all people and which in time would transform them into true Argentines". Glauert (1963) believed that Rojas played a major role on popularizing recurrent themes of nationalism, "the necessity of nationalizing education, the rehabilitation of the Spanish and Indian heritages, the importance of the study of folklore, the importance of the provinces in the life of the nation, the cult of the gaucho,

and the cult of the "spirit of May" (p. 4). The curriculum of primary schools in particular were designed to teach all children all aspects of Argentine history and culture, from the meaning of the flag in first grade to the current events in the sixth grade.

Given the nature of the school curriculum, education played a very important and decisive role in the assimilation process of Italian immigrants. Mandatory education forced nationalism upon the immigrant children by including national holidays and celebrations in the standard curriculum. This can be demonstrated in the celebration of national holidays, particularly the 100th anniversary of Argentine independence on May 25, 1910 when "students forced foreigners to bare their heads while they sang the national anthem; those who did not join in the chanting of patriotic slogans risked violence" (Spalding, 1972, p. 44). The Argentine students would publicly humiliate those who did not chant along with them and those who did not demonstrate proper reverence to the celebration. One can easily surmise that foreigners would not want to be singled out and humiliated in public. As a result, they attempted to assimilate.

It is interesting to note that these two social spaces, the school community, and the *conventillos*, were at odds during the time of *carnaval*. The *conventillos* used *carnaval* as a time to establish their dominance over the elite by showing the ruling class that they too, the immigrants, were a ruling class within their social network. The *carnaval cocoliche* was used by the Italian immigrants to acknowledge how the Argentine elite perceived them. By mocking themselves, the Italian immigrants demonstrated solidarity. The school community, contrary to the *conventillos*, forced their dominance

over the foreign counterparts by making them chant along or risk violence at the time of *carnaval*.

The third Social Space to be investigated is that of the mutual aid societies (SocSp<sup>3</sup>) that were formed to protect the interests of the Italian immigrants. The mutual aid societies provided everything from medical clinics to job placement and are also where the organization of labor unions first took place. They not only protected the social and economic interests of the Italian immigrants, they also were the defenders of the Italian language and culture. From a workers standpoint, the mutual aid societies helped immigrants to find jobs that were suited to them. Nearly half of all immigrants came from Northern Italy, namely the regions of Piedmont and Lombardy. The northern regions were more developed and industrialized than the south and, as a result, many immigrants came from a literate background. These immigrants chose to emigrate in order to become more economically prosperous in a country such as Argentina that was in the beginning stages of industrialization and where jobs would be abundant. In 1887, according to Baily (2004), "two-thirds of Italian males in Buenos Aires were literate, and over the next twenty-seven years, this figure increased to 70 percent" (p. 65). What is so significant about the literacy rate of the Italian male in Buenos Aires is that literate people were generally educated and skilled industrial laborers.

The literacy rate of the skilled and educated laborer had many ramifications. Firstly, being literate perpetuated the power that newspapers had over the community.

Thus, the newspapers become a part of SocSp<sup>3</sup>. Baily (2004) found that these immigrants brought with them:

Relatively high occupational and organizational skills, greater expectations that migration was to be permanent, and the well-developed informal social networks of kin and paesani that played such a critical role in helping immigrants find jobs and housing and in developing the institutional structure to protect their interests (p. 220).

Newspapers played a critical role in disseminating the integral information needed to find jobs and housing. Newspapers helped the social networks come together by protecting the interests of all Italian immigrants, regardless of where in Italy they came from.

Secondly, as skilled laborers, the Italian immigrants demanded fair and equal wages the same as those of the Argentines. As a result, they organized and created successful labor unions. The labor unions, very much like the mutual aid societies, served to protect the working class immigrant.

By 1910 in Buenos Aires there were seventy-five mutual aid societies with approximately 52,000 members out of an Italian population of some 280,000. The purpose of the societies was to provide services such as insurance and social benefits to their members. The mutual aid societies were a social network designed with the immigrants' well-being in mind. They aimed to make the transition to a new culture as seamless as possible while attempting to remain true to the Italian identity.

The first mutual aid society, *Unione e Benevolenza*, was founded in 1858, and by the end of 1860, totaled more than 2,800 members. Another influential mutual aid society was *Nazionale Italiana*, founded in 1864 after a split from *Unione e Benevolenza* due to political differences (*Unione e Benevolenza* wanted to be apolitical). The mutual aid societies formed an alliance with the Italian newspapers and they worked together to disseminate information that was pertinent to the immigrant. In Buenos Aires, that newspaper was *La Patria degli Italiani (La Patria)*. Baily (1978) states that *La Patria* was:

...the most important defender of the Italian immigrants. It was a self-appointed guardian of the Italian language and the Italian culture in general. It was an important transmitter of information about and interpreter of Argentine society. The paper also served to break down the provincial loyalty of the Italians and to help develop a new sense of identity. (p. 328)

The newspaper defended Italian immigrants, strived to obtain better housing and education for the immigrants. *La Patria* wanted to encourage adaptation, and not social assimilation although the paper "undoubtedly hastened the immigrant's adjustment to his new environment" (p. 338).

### 2.3 Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Social Capital

Pierre Bourdieu (1991) believed that groups could have social capital. Social capital can best be described as the value that a group can contribute to an individual.

Bourdieu (1991) posited that there was a connection between language and social capital. The connection between language and social capital is evidenced when people talk to each other and in their choice of words and expressions. According to Bourdieu (1991) everyday linguistic exchanges are:

...produced in particular contexts or markets, and the properties of these markets endow linguistic products with a certain 'value'. On a given linguistic market, some products are valued more highly than others; and part of the practical competence of speakers is to know how, and to be able, to produce expressions which are highly valued on the markets concerned. (p. 18)

The way in which a person speaks to another is determined by the relationship between the two interlocutors. When speaking to someone who holds power, one's speech accommodates to the prestigious norm, in other words, one 'watches his p's and q's'. Conversely, when speaking to a peer, slang may be deemed appropriate in certain situations. Immigrants would speak their language variety among friends, but attempt Spanish when speaking to a *porteño*.

With respect to linguistic markets, Bourdieu (1991) differentiated between two types of linguistic markets, the legitimate market and the alternative market. The legitimate market was that of the oligarchy and it was established and looked upon as the prestigious norm. The oligarchy mandated the type of education children received, held government positions and were relatively wealthy. In regards to the Spanish language it

was to be taught in schools only by Argentine citizens, which gave the language of the elite a prestigious and legitimate value. The social space identified as the school community was the legitimate linguistic market.

However, there existed an alternative market where the linguistic value was placed on Italian, and not Spanish. The Italians were part of two other social spaces, the *conventillos* where they lived and the mutual aid societies, where they played. They spoke a different language, weren't as educated as the *porteños*, and they lived in tenements. And they organized themselves first through mutual aid societies, and then through the labor unions, which became powerful political forces and eventually garnered the respect of the *porteños*. As a result of their organizing a group that spoke for their rights, the descendants of Italians in Buenos Aires went on to hold positions of power, as presidents of banks, unions, and many other organizations.

The alternative markets that the Italians formed became powerful political, economic and social forces. When the social forces became politically, economically and socially recognized by the elite of Argentina, the Italian immigrant held power in the society. For Bourdieu (1989) this was a form of symbolic power, and symbolic power is achieved through symbolic capital that is attained within a social space when that space has prestige and honor. The large Italian immigrant population gave the Italians the ability to organize in different spaces. The social spaces whether socially or officially sanctioned by the government provided the Italian immigrants with the necessary tools to

band together and demand improvements in their standing, forming their own symbolic capital through the various social spaces.

## 2.4 Immigration

Argentina's history is full of political and economic instability. In the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, after a long period of political and economic unrest, the government proposed a plan to modernize the country through the construction of railroad lines as well as other means. It was determined that the best way to do this was to open the borders and allow an influx of immigrants, many of whom were Italian. While approximately 5,077,000 Italians chose to immigrate to the United States, Samuel L. Baily (2004) found that nearly 2,192,000 chose to immigrate to Argentina where the immigration laws passed by the Argentine government favored European immigrants.

Article 25 of the Argentine constitution of 1853 states that, "The Federal Government shall foster European immigration; and may not restrict, limit, or burden with any taxes the entrance into Argentine territory of foreigners who arrive for the purpose of tilling the soil, improving industries, and introducing and teaching arts and sciences" (<http://www.biblioteca.jus.gov.ar/ArgentinaConstitution.pdf>). Indeed, "Argentina offered settlers such concession as assisted passage, quick citizenship, and exemption from military service. Although assimilation was not seamless, it was not a major obstacle to overcome, for the two major groups of newcomers had the same religion and ethnic background as the Argentines" (Robbins, 1958, p. 106). As a result of

the government's initiative to make migration a relatively easy process, the population of Buenos Aires doubled between 1890 and 1914. According to John Lipski (2004) in his article, "El español de América y los contactos bilingües recientes," 2.3 million Italians arrived in Argentina between 1861 and 1920, and more than half of them arrived after 1900. Italians made up 60% of all immigrants and 30% of the entire population of Buenos Aires. Table 3 shows the geographical origin of Italian immigrants in Argentina, providing the percentages of Italians in Argentina by their regions over the course of fifty years, from 1876-1915:

Table 3: *Italian Immigration to Argentina, 1876-1915: Leading Regions of Origin by Decade (Regions with 5 Percent or More of Total Immigration)*

Regions	Total				
	For period	1876-1885	1886-1895	1896-1905	1906-1915
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Piedmont	16.9	21.1	22.3	16.5	15.3
Calabria	13.2	7.3	10.9	15.3	12.9
Sicily	11.1	.2	.0	7.4	19.5
Lombardy	10.4	19.8	14.9	.5	8.7
Marche	8.2	3.0	4.0	11.2	9.4
Campania	7.5	4.9	10.0	10.9	5.1
Veneto	7.2	10.3	11.4	3.6	3.9
Abruzzi/Molise	6.4	.4	5.3	8.5	.6
N of Immigrants	(2,192,000)	(188,800)	(415,600)	(490,800)	(718,700)

Source: Baily, Samuel L. (2004). Immigrants in the Land of Promise: Italians in Argentina and New York City, 1870-1914. Cornell University Press, (62).



Figure 2: *Regional Map of Italy*

Source: [osia.org/publi](http://osia.org/publi)

As Table 3 indicates, a total of 42.7% of the immigrants were from the North of Italy, whereas 38.2% were from the South. The remaining 19.1% are comprised of several regions whose total immigration population represents less than 5% of the total immigration population. The immigrants from the northern part of Italy (Piedmont, Lombardy, Veneto and Marche) came from regions that were industrialized and, according to Baily (2004), were often skilled workers and were considered literate, able to read a minimum of 40 common words in their language. Those from the Southern regions (Calabria, Sicily, Campania and Abruzzi/Molise) were for the most part unskilled workers and were considered to be illiterate. The moderate literacy rate of the

immigrants might have helped facilitate the cultural assimilation of Italians in Buenos Aires.

## 2.5 Assimilation of the Italian Immigrant

Baily (1978) postulated that there were two types of assimilation processes that the Italians underwent in Buenos Aires: adaptation or cultural assimilation, and social or structural assimilation. Adaptation occurs when the immigrant adopts certain cultural aspects of the host nation, such as language and even the type of clothing they wear. It enables the immigrant to 'fit in' with the host society and develops over a short period of time whereas social assimilation tends to be a longer process in which the immigrant develops a new identity based on the host society:

Adaptation indicates the acquisition of the basic values and behavior patterns of the host society such as language, clothes and attitudes toward work, which enable the immigrant to function effectively in his new environment. Social assimilation, which follows adaptation, refers to the large-scale involvement of the immigrant in primary group relations with the members of the host society. Social assimilation would be reflected specifically in such things as intermarriage and the development of identity based exclusively on the host society. (p. 322)

Italians and Argentines shared a similar Latin culture whose values, religion and language were akin. Hence, Italians were able to adapt to their host society with relative ease with cultural assimilation coming about through various means. First, the mutual aid societies ensured that the basic needs of Italian immigrants were met. Second, newspapers written by and for immigrants brought to light many of the social injustices against immigrants. And third, the Argentine government itself, who, through legislation and policy, created a nationalism that was truly unique to Argentina, especially with the promotion of immigration and the accessible citizenship policy that was instituted by Article 25 of the Constitution of 1853. All these factors were essential in the cultural assimilation of the immigrants.

Robert F. Foerster (1919) claims that marriage played a role in social assimilation. He also affirms that the children of immigrants were an important factor in foreigners becoming recognized as Argentines and thus a part of the national identity. Children who were born of immigrants in Argentina held an important role in the social assimilation of the immigrants. "For each ten marriages of Argentines there had been by the census year 1887, thirty-two children; for each ten foreign, fifty-one children" (p. 353). Not only is this figure a telling sign of assimilation, Foerster goes on to state that while thirty-one percent of the all marriages in Buenos Aires were between Italian men and women, ten percent of all marriages were between Italian men and Argentine women because there were simply not enough Italian women to marry and a larger population of Argentine women over Argentine men. Overtime, the marriages between Italians and Argentines

decreased. Baily (1980) credited this increase in homogenous marriages following 1903 to the simple fact that second generation immigrants were officially called Argentines and counted as citizens during subsequent censuses (pp. 42-3). Regardless of the fact that they were of Italian descent, they were in fact first generation Argentines and they were the ones who initiated the assimilation process as well as the process of language shift.

## 2.6 Concluding Remarks

Assimilation, whether cultural or social, was brought about by the effects that the social spaces such as the *conventillos*, the school communities and the mutual aid societies had on the everyday lives of the immigrants in the form of providing the immigrant with a form of social capital. By creating various social networks individuals benefit from what each network can provide for them. The *conventillos*, the school communities and, the mutual aid societies all formed their own variety of social networks that provided the Italian immigrant with resources that they wouldn't otherwise have. The *conventillos* served as a common meeting ground for the immigrants and it was within their walls of these *conventillos* that the immigrants were able to organize the first tenant strikes. Secondly, it is also the *conventillos* that were represented in the *sainetes* of the time period where *cocoliche*, a transitional language, was represented.

The mutual aid societies in particular can be considered a form of social capital because, for a nominal membership fee, members had access to health care, pensions and

education, among other resources. This is of particular interest because it will demonstrate how the various social spaces created a social network that allowed the Italian immigrants to assimilate to Argentine culture, which ultimately led to language shift and the eventual attrition of the Italian language and identity on Argentine soil.

The historical analysis examined in this chapter along with Pierre Bourdieu's theories on social spaces and social capital provides a framework for the linguistic experience of the Italian immigrants and the effects that the social spaces had on the linguistic experience of Italians in Buenos Aires. In the *conventillos*, Italian immigrants came in contact with different dialects and languages. This contact was essential in the language shift from Italian to Spanish because Spanish was the common language among all immigrants in the *conventillos*. Also, the *conventillos* were a physical space that, through the literary *sainete* became a symbolic social space where immigrants of all ethnicities, particularly Italian, congregated to exploit the difficulties of the immigrants' working and living conditions with the hope of improving their circumstances. The school community, with the aid of the Argentine government, taught a new sense of nationalism to all children, Argentine born and immigrant children. The government obligated all schools, whether public or of the mutual aid societies, to teach Argentine history and Spanish language, beginning at a very young and impressionable age. The mutual aid societies served the function of supporting the immigrants during their transitional period by providing services such as job placement and housing that were essential to a newly arriving immigrant population.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

In the first section of this chapter I will use census data that will provide a snapshot of the demographics were in Buenos Aires. The data shows the number of inhabitants in the various barrios in relation to the numbers of *conventillos* in each of those barrios. Information that was provided in the census of Buenos Aires from 1904, 1909 and the national census of 1914 will be analyzed in regards to the total population of Buenos Aires and the number of inhabitants in the various *conventillos* themselves. Following the census data, there will be a discussion of the *conventillos* as Social Space<sub>1</sub> and will address their importance in the linguistic experience of the Italians. Here the *sainete, Los inquilinos*, by Nemesio Trejo will be used as evidence of the linguistic experience of the Italians as they communicated with the people from the *conventillos*, from fellow residents to the greengrocer as the *conventillos* provided a backdrop for the lives of the Italian immigrant.

After presenting the *conventillos* and the role they played in the linguistic experience of the Italians, the section to follow focuses on the school community as Social Space<sub>2</sub>. It will highlight use of the *Monitor de la educación común*, a manual that was first introduced in September of 1891 to demonstrate the pedagogical approach that teachers needed to take, what they needed to teach and even went so far as how to teach each subject. The significance of the *Monitor de la educación común* is that its writers recognized the changing landscape of Argentina and responded by creating a curriculum

that taught everything from arithmetic and writing to the history and culture of Argentina in order to instill in the immigrants a sense of national pride.

Once the role of education in the linguistic experience of Italians in Buenos Aires has been established, this chapter will continue to the final social space, the mutual aid societies as Social Space<sub>3</sub>. These were organizations that were formed to protect the interests of the Italian immigrant. The mutual aid societies worked with the newspapers to disseminate information that was pertinent to the lives of the immigrants by providing information on every aspect of the Italian immigrants' life from jobs, housing, and school to banking. Mutual aid societies intended to keep the Italian tradition alive, but by providing easy access to the society of Buenos Aires, the societies effectively facilitated the integration of the Italians into their new culture which favored the shift from Italian to Spanish.

### 3.1 Census Information

The first Census of the City of Buenos Aires, conducted in 1887, indicates that there were approximately 55, 251 registered marriages and 16, 749 births. The following Figure shows the distribution of the data:

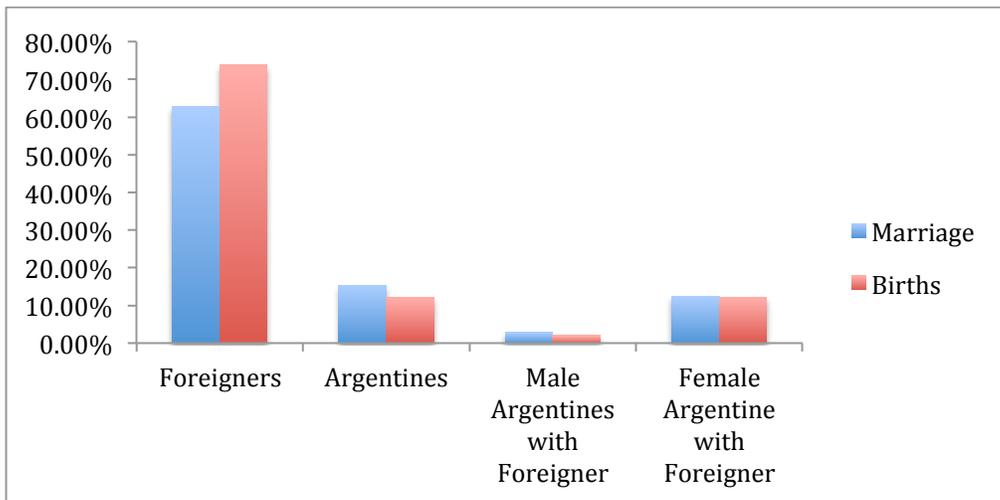


Figure 3: *1887 Census of Buenos Aires*

According to the 1887 census of Buenos Aires, more than 60% of all marriages recorded in 1887 and 73.8% of all recorded births were between foreigners, or 38, 233 marriages and 12, 360 births. Between Argentines, the marriage rate was much lower at 8, 509, or 15.4% of all marriages, and 2, 026 or 12.1% of births. The marriage of male Argentines with female foreigners comprised 1,602, or 2.9%, of all marriages and 335, 2.0%, of births. Argentines female with foreigner 6, 907, 12.5%, of all marriages and 2, 028, 12.1%, of all births are registered. The important aspect to be taken from these early figures is that the first wave of immigration produced 84.6% of all documented marriages and 87.9% of documented births. In other words, out of the 55, 251 documented marriages, 46, 742 involved marriages with foreigners that produced 14, 722 of the documented births.

The National Censuses conducted in 1869 and 1895 provide even more staggering results in regard to marriage:

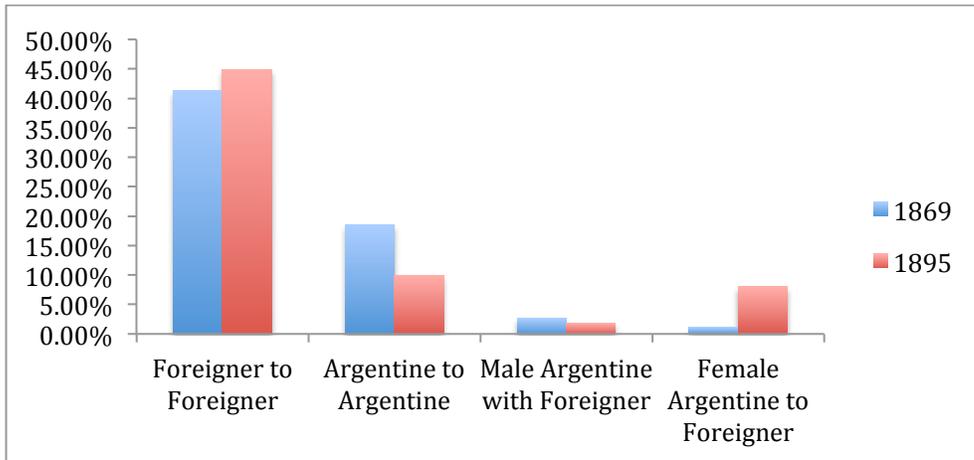


Figure 4: *National Censuses of 1869 and 1895*

Of the documented marriages in 1869 41.4% were between foreigners while only 18.5% were between Argentines. The Census of 1895 gives 44.9% of marriages between foreigners and a mere 10.0% of marriages between Argentines. Given the high number of marriages between foreigners, Vedoya (1973) speculates that assimilation was very difficult for the foreigner because they maintained their familiar cultures, habits, traditions, and “siendo muy superiores las uniones entre sí y su natalidad, ese seno familiar solamente contribuyó a mantener las costumbres y tradiciones que los padres habían traído desde sus países de origen. No existió, pues, asimilación” (33). Naturally, the immigrants’ children grew up in homes where parents practiced those traditions and spoke a certain language, which were part of their identity. However, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 4, when those children were school-age, the school communities

had a hand in indoctrinating these children to Argentine history and the Spanish language by requiring these subjects be taught in all schools.

In addition to information about population, immigration, marriages and births, the National Census of 1895 also provided data on education during that time period. The following table shows the numbers of Teachers and Aides, according to the National Census of 1895 (Baily (2004)):

Table 4: *Nationality of Teachers and Aides According to the Census of 1895*

<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Public School</b>	<b>Private Schools</b>	<b>Totals</b>
	<b>Teachers and Aides</b>	<b>Teachers and Aides</b>	<b>Teachers and Aides</b>
<b>Argentine</b>	331 (54.8%)	142 (58.9%)	473 (56.7%)
<b>Foreigners</b>	262 (45.2%)	99 (41.1%)	361 (43.3%)
<b>Totals</b>	593 (100.0%)	241 (100.0%)	824 (100.0%)

As Table 4 clearly indicates, a large portion of teachers and aides were foreign born. Foreign-born teachers and aides comprise nearly half (43.3%) of teachers and aides in both public and private schools. Also, it stands out that in a country that attempted to nationalize its education system in the 1880's, it would have such a large portion of

foreigners in its public schools teaching, according to the census, a school age population of 120, 039 students ages six to sixteen.

Another piece of data relevant to education and immigration of Buenos Aires is the high rate of illiterate people in Buenos Aires. By illiterate, it is meant that the person cannot read more than forty common words. The following table compares the number of illiterate people from the National Censuses of 1869 and 1895 in the Capital, Buenos Aires (Baily, 2004).

Table 5: *Illiteracy in Buenos Aires According to Censuses of 1869 and 1895*

<b>Illiterate Older Than 15 Years Old</b>		<b>Absenteeism from School</b>		<b>Total Population Without Formal Education</b>		<b>% Of Population Older Than 6 Years Old</b>	
<b>1869</b>	<b>1895</b>	<b>1869</b>	<b>1895</b>	<b>1869</b>	<b>1895</b>	<b>1869</b>	<b>1895</b>
51,184	133,783	7,540	49,634	58,724	183,417	38.1%	32.7%

As Table 5 demonstrates, there was a large spike in numbers of illiterate people older than fifteen years old from the 1869 census to the census conducted in 1895. In 1869 51, 184 of the population was illiterate, more than doubling to 133, 783 in 1895.

Absenteeism from school shows a similar trend: in 1869 there were a reported 7, 540 cases of absenteeism from school. That figure increases to 49, 634 for the 1895 census.

While it appears that illiteracy is on the rise, the fact is that there was a population boom between the two censuses. In fact, according to the same censuses, the school-age population of six to sixteen increased by 94, 793 between 1869 and 1895. The increase

of illiteracy rates nevertheless is directly related to the increase of the immigrant population.

Census data provide a snapshot of the way a particular country or city looked at a particular time. They can provide valuable information on economic status, education level, and marriage just to name a few social indicators. The following tables were created using census information from 1904, 1909, and 1914 for the City of Buenos Aires:

Table 6: *Population of Buenos Aires in 1904, 1909 and 1914*

<b>Census</b>	<b>1904</b>	<b>1909</b>	<b>1914</b>
Total Population	950,891	1,231,698	1,575,814
% increase	NA	23%	65.70%

Table 6 looks at the total population in Buenos Aires during the years 1904, 1909 and 1914. The 1904 census shows a population of 950,891 people. The following census of 1909 shows a 23% increase in population to 1,231,698 and the census of 1914 again sees a significant increase of population from 1909, increasing 21.8% to 1,575,815. As shown in Table 6, the population of Buenos Aires exploded during a ten-year time frame (1904 to 1914) by 65.7%, or 624,923 people.

The censuses of 1904 and 1909 demonstrate how the increase in population meant an increase in the population density in a given *conventillo* and neighborhood. Table 7 shows the demographics of the most densely populated areas of Buenos Aires:

Table 7: *Most Densely Populated Areas in Buenos Aires*

Number of Conventillos	Neighborhood	Population per Hectare	Population per Hectare	Population per Hectare
		1904	1909	1914
10	Balvanera Sur	319	391	NA
11	Balvanera Norte	291	362	NA
8	San Cristóbal	273	315	NA
12	Concepción	232	249	NA
14	San Nicolás	227	208	NA
9	Balvanera Oeste	227	252	NA

It provides information on the population relative to the *conventillos*, or government subsidized housing. The first column shows the number of *conventillos* in each neighborhood (represented in the second column). The table represents the barrios that had a high number of inhabitants per hectare, a metric measure equivalent to 2.47 acres. From 1904 to 1909, there is an increase in the population of the neighborhoods of Balvanera Sur, Balvanera Norte, San Cristóbal, Concepción, and Balvanera Oeste, with a

slight decline in the population of San Nicolás, from 227 to 208 inhabitants per hectare.

The census of 1914 does not provide the information in regards to *conventillos*.

Table 8 also shows an increase in the population of various neighborhoods.

However, the areas are not as densely populated as the ones shown in Table 8:

Table 8: *Least Densely Populated Area*

Number of Conventillos	Neighborhood	Population per Hectare	Population per Hectare	Population per Hectare
		1904	1909	1914
2	San Cristóbal Norte	43	151	NA
5	Flores	30	57	NA
17	Palermo	18	44	NA
16	Belgrano	12	22	NA
15	San Bernardo	5	13	NA
1	Vélez Sársfield	3	9	NA

Table 8 illustrates, similar to Table 7, the number of people relative to the *conventillos*.

There is a significant increase in the number of inhabitants per hectare in the barrio San

Cristóbal Norte, from 43 to 151, nearly tripling in numbers. While there is a clear

increase in the number of inhabitants per hectare in all the *conventillos* from 1904 to

1909, the barrios of San Cristóbal del Norte, Flores, Palermo, Belgrano, San Bernardo

and Velez Sársfield all boasted fewer and less densely populated barrios than those represented in Table 7.

Although the Census of 1914 does not provide specific figures with regard to the population of the various neighborhoods and the *conventillos*, it does, however, provide marital status, which is relevant to language shift among Italian immigrants, as shown in the following table:

Table 9: *Population of Argentine and Italian Men and Women of the age of 15 and Above (Census of 1914)*

	<b>Population of Single Men 15 years old and older</b>	<b>Population of Single Women 15 years and older</b>	<b>Population of Married Men 15 years old and older</b>	<b>Population of Married Women 15 years old and older</b>	<b>Widow</b>	<b>Widower</b>	<b>Total</b>
Argentine	121,821	109,021	61,154	72,484	15,743	3,692	383,915
Italian	63,652	16,015	111,225	78,024	17,097	8,196	294,209
Total Population /Including other Nationalities	307,539	189,167	285,117	245,909	1,195	539	1,029,466

Argentines in Buenos Aires that are fifteen years old and older comprised 37.3% of the total population of Buenos Aires while Italians fifteen years old and older made up 28.6% of the total population of Buenos Aires. These two nationality groups, those that are native to Argentina and the Italian immigrant population, made up 65.9% of the total

population of fifteen years old and older. Given the large population of people in barrios with high numbers of *conventillos* in the 1904 and 1909 censuses, we can surmise that in 1914 the majority of Italian immigrants were still living in the *conventillos* at that time since it was the only housing option available to the immigrants.

In addition to the high population of Italian immigrants during 1904-1914, the numbers of single Italians during that time were also significant. There were 63, 652 single men, not including widowers, who were of the marrying age, in contrast to 16, 015 single women of marrying age. The demographic relevance of this is that when they married it would likely be to a Spanish speaker since there weren't enough Italian women for all the Italian male immigrants in the population. Assuming that all the women married Italian men, the remaining Italian men would therefore marry non-Italian speaking women and therefore Spanish would be the common language. In the case of a mixed nationality marriage, there wouldn't be a household where Italian is the common language so it can be inferred that Spanish would displace it and the children of these mixed marriages would speak Spanish before entering school. Mixed nationality marriages were important in language shift. The Italian men who married women that were not Italian needed to learn Spanish in order to communicate with their wives. As the traditional primary caregiver, the woman would impose her language on her children so that these children would grow up speaking Spanish at home. Their Italian fathers would use Spanish to communicate within their family unit.

### 3.2 Social Space<sub>1</sub>: *Los conventillos*

*Conventillos* were government subsidized rooming houses where foreigners lived when they first arrived in Buenos Aires. Initially, rent was relatively inexpensive and the newcomers lived together, often sharing a common bathroom, living area and patio. It is not a surprise, then, that *conventillos* often served as a backdrop for the *sainetes* of the time period, particularly *Los inquilinos* (*The Tenants*) written by Nemesio Trejo. This *sainete*, a one-act play that parodied life in the *conventillos*, opened on October 21, 1907, just six short weeks after the first tenant strike occurred in Buenos Aires. Evans (1979) found that *Los inquilinos* responded directly to the daily struggles and concerns of the immigrants to be treated fairly and equally. It was written during a time when tenant strikes were becoming prevalent. More than 2,000 *conventillos* were on strike by the first week of October 1907, totaling 10% of the population, or nearly 120, 000 people. *Los inquilinos* was written in a short time and represented the striking working class.

The time period of Nemesio Trejo's *Los inquilinos*, in addition to including the actual tenant strike of 1907, also corresponds to the a period of affirmation of *cocoliche*, the transitional language spoken by the Italian immigrants of Buenos Aires. According to Eva Golluscio de Montoya (1981), in the article, "El cocoliche escénico en un sainetista rioplatense de fin de siglo: Nemesio Trejo," the language that is spoken in the *sainetes* is a representation of the transitional language that was spoken during the time period. "Con el cocoliche escénico, el autor busca no sólo documentar y testimoniar sobre la realidad, sino que emprende, valiéndose del lenguaje, una búsqueda estilística" (104). The *sainetista* used his works as a way to communicate the transitional language that was

spoken in the patios of the *conventillos* when the process of urbanization of Buenos Aires was well under way. Thus, the *cocoliche* that is represented during this time period is an urban manifestation of the language and the growing Buenos Aires. As Golluscio points out, the *cocoliche* of this time period became an important vehicle of ideas.

Nemesio Trejo gave voice to the immigrants and their plight with the production of *Los inquilinos* while the conflict was not resolved and by performing the *sainete* during a full-blown tenant's strike. Trejo was aware of how influential his *sainete* was going to be by giving a voice to the strikers, affirming the strikers' political presence and made them relevant to society.

The *conventillos* were the city of Buenos Aires's response to the need to provide housing to the immigrants. The southern zone of the city, the area closest to the port of entrance, had been the residential center for the upper class of Argentina. When the upper class moved to the northern part of the city, the mansions they lived in were subdivided into several rooms, converting the mansions into *conventillos*. The rent charged for rooms in these *conventillos* was, according to Evans (1979), at least eight times the cost of comparable housing in London. Once the upper class realized that the influx of immigrants guaranteed a steady rental income, more mansions were converted into *conventillos* as well as the construction of new *conventillos*. Scobie (1974) estimated that the rents averaged \$21.69 a month, whereas the average monthly wages of the skilled laborer averaged \$80. The figures reflecting the monthly wages are, according to Scobie, misleading because it presumes that the average skilled worker worked at least

25 days a month. Most workers worked considerably less than that, and, as rent increased, the frustrations of the workers increased.

The *sainetes* of the time period often reflected the climate of the immigrant's plight and the author of the *sainete* was always biased in favor of the working classes. In 1907, the struggle of the immigrants was the high cost of renting rooms in the *conventillos* and their deplorable conditions. In August of 1907, the municipality of Buenos Aires increased property taxes by 30% and to offset the cost, the rich owners of the *conventillos* passed on the tax increase to the renters, who were already struggling to pay their rent.

The renters of one of the largest *conventillos* at Ituzaingo 279 went on strike and they refused to pay the rental increase. The anarchist paper *La Protesta* was the first to report on the strike,

"One fine day, one supposes, the neighbors of a *conventillo* resolved not to pay the rent for their quarters when the landlord refused to lower the rents. The tenants' resolution was taken as a joke by half the city. Very rapidly the laughter stopped. From *conventillo* to *conventillo* the idea of not paying rents gained adherents and in a few days the proletarian population in mass had joined the strike." (quoted in Evans, 1979, p. 55).

The real life strikes quickly became the subject of Nemesio Trejo's *sainete*, *Los inquilinos*. In addition to the psycho-sociological aspect of the *conventillo*, the linguistic

experience of the Italian immigrant is accurately portrayed, as the interaction of the Italian greengrocer and Filomena below shows, the language of Verdulero and Filomena reflects how the people of the *conventillos* communicate in Italian and Spanish respectively, yet they are able to understand each other without much difficulty:

*VERDULERO. Bon giorno, marchanta.*

*FILOMENA. Buen día.*

*VERDULERO. ¿Cosa voglie?*

*FILOMENA. Papas, zanahorias y apo.*

*VERDULERO. (Dándole la verdura.) Eco, cui, cincuenta centavi.*

*FILOMENA. Pero, ¿por qué tan caro, marchante?*

(Trejo in Ordáz 57)

After more banter, the Verdulero, Greengrocer, alludes to the high rent that he must pay in the *conventillos* and the impact it has on him as well as the fees that are imposed on him by various government agencies:

*VERDULERO. Se anno acabato cielo tiempo de la sanagoria y del apio grati, marchanta.*

*Oggi ni lo perequilo se danno se yapa. Bisogna pagare lu alquiler caro de lu conventillo;*

*pagare la sisa, pagare la patente de lu carro, pagare a lu compadritu de lu ispetore y*

*pagare anque la copa a lo vigilante per restare lu caritu a la porta. ¿Avete compreduto? A*

*me, marchanta, me ne encaja la municipalitá lo imposto; io se lo cobro a las marchantas.*

*¿Qué voglio que fa?*

(Trejo in Ordáz 57-8)

This excerpt demonstrates the frustration of the client, Filomena, and the greengrocer, or Verdulero. The consequence of the high rent is felt by everyone, and influences various aspects of the tenants' lives, including their overall living expenses.

In addition to foreshadowing the impending tenant's strike, the discourse in the *sainete* shows an important part of the linguistic experience of the Italian immigrants. As aforementioned, the Verdulero, in his dialect, is able to understand and, more importantly, be understood by Filomena.

The linguistic experience of the characters portrayed in *Los inquilinos* is expressed not only in the interaction between the Verdulero and Filomena, but also in the interaction between Don Manuel, the man in charge, and Pedro, the baker (*panadero*). During their discourse, Don Manuel transitions from Spanish to his *cocoliche*. For example, in the first scene, Don Manuel transitions from using the word *entonces* to *entunces*. This is a result of the two languages coming in contact and contributes to the linguistic experience of Italians in Buenos Aires.

The patio of the *conventillo* serves as the backdrop of many *sainetes*, including *Los inquilinos*. The patios were a space that “podía obrar como un espacio de rearticulación de las identificaciones políticas...” (Legrás 64). In Trejo's *sainete*, the patio of the *conventillo* serves as the place where the strike is discussed and where ideas of fairness are learned and discussed. The patio of the *conventillo* brought together the people who lived there and provided a platform for the *sainetistas* to portray life in the

*conventillos* and also perform in the language that was spoken by the immigrants as they were learning to adapt and assimilate to the modernization of Buenos Aires. The language used in the *sainetes* conveys the social class of the immigrant and is the most powerful symbol of an ethnic group because it represents all that is special and unique about that ethnic group (Giles, 2006). More generally, the *sainetista* uses language to distinguish the people living in the *conventillos*.

### 3.3 Social Space<sub>2</sub>: School Communities

Education played a pivotal role in the language experience of the Italian immigrants of Buenos Aires. As Table 6 demonstrates, many Italians chose to settle in the urban milieu of Buenos Aires for its access to more civil services and education. Education to the Italian immigrant represented a means for their children to advance socially, culturally, and economically. Furthermore, to the government of Argentina it meant that the immigrants would assimilate faster by learning the Spanish. In fact, the government implemented an educational plan that called for a "comprehensive educational program for natives and immigrants to make them useful citizens" (Spalding, 1972 p. 33).

The official publication of the *Monitor de la educación común* (National Council on Education) was first released in September of 1881. It was created with the recognition that education in Argentina had to be formalized and consistent. However, it was a document that was constantly evolving based on the pedagogical approaches that

were relevant during a period of time. The September 1901 edition prioritizes “solidaridad de origen, historia y destino futuro de la sociedad nacional, en la cual deben comprenderse los extranjeros que adoptan táctica o expresamente la nacionalidad argentina” (p. 122), which may be translated as *solidarity of origin, history and future destiny of the national society, in which foreigners should be understood that they specifically adopt tactics of Argentine nationality*. The government was aware that opening its borders to foreigners would require a concerted effort to create a sense of nationality within Argentina and viewed education as a means to ensure that all children would be indoctrinated in the “history and future destiny” of Argentina.

In addition to discussing the curriculum that was supported by the government, the first edition of *El Monitor de la Educación Común* (1891) researched the way other countries were approaching education in order to find a model that was appropriate for Argentina. For example, the writers for the journal discussed the length of the school year in various states of the United States of America, realizing that the length varied from four months to six months of instructional time, from 110 days in New Hampshire to 192 days in New Jersey (p. 11). The document also talks about the economics of teaching. For example, it details the costs that go into educating young people, from teachers’ salaries to the cost for desks.

As the years progressed, subsequent issues of *El Monitor de la Educación Común* (1901) continued to research how students were being educated in various countries then critiquing their own methods, trying to find ways to improve. In July of 1901, Andrés

Ferreira was put in charge of visiting schools in Buenos Aires in order to observe how languages were being taught in the primary schools. According to Ferreira, the particular lesson he observed had the instructors teaching pupils about verb conjugation. He observed that the instructors at the primary level were teaching verbs but were not implementing terms to which the young student could relate. Upon observation on the superior grades, Ferreira noted that the instruction focused on the structure of the language even if the students were already able to read and write. The following quote describes the primary lesson observed by Ferreira and suggests how that lesson could be improved by requiring students to use those words to create original sentences, based on terms those students could relate to:

*Los maestros en los primeros grados, especialmente, tienen cuidado de que sus alumnos conozcan las palabras que expresan acciones, seres ó cualidades, pero no ejercitan suficientemente al niño en la forma de frases sobre tales palabras, ni fomentan debidamente en él la expresión del pensamiento y la exposición de ideas originales[...] Conversaciones hábilmente dirigidas sobre los objetos que rodean al niño, muebles, útiles escolares, etc., culaquier objeto y aún el mismo alumno, sirven perfectamente para la enseñanza del lenguaje sin necesidad de apelar siempre al empleo de una ó dos laminas más ó menos adecuadas, de más o menos gusto artístico y que casi nunca representan hechos ó escenas familiares al niño (106).*

The September 30, 1901 issue of *El Monitor de la Educación Común* began with a discussion of solidarity as part of the government's civil and moral responsibilities. As Table 10 shows, the history curriculum created in 1901 was very nationalistic for a country whose population was made up of a large percentage of foreigners. One can surmise that the reason it was so nationalistic was directly related to the fact that there were many foreigners in Argentina and the government wanted to indoctrinate the new members of the society to the Argentine way. The information in Table 10 was taken from *El Monitor de la Educación Común* (September 1901, p. 203) and has been translated from Spanish to English:

Table 10: *Primary Schools, 1901: Legal Minimum of Topics in Argentine History*

Grade Level	Topic
1 <sup>st</sup> grade	National holidays, the national anthem, and the national flag and coat of arms.
2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	The meaning of national holidays and other patriotic symbols.
3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	Moralizing anecdotes about Argentines who have distinguished themselves in teaching, science, art, and statesmanship. The structure of local, provincial, and national government. A rudimentary explanation of the Constitution.
4 <sup>th</sup> grade	A historical synthesis of events leading to the Constitutional Period (1853). The origins, solidarity, and common destiny of the Argentine people.

Table 10, continued

5 <sup>th</sup> grade	An interpretive presentation of the transformation of Argentine society from the conquest to independence and the consolidation of the nation.
6 <sup>th</sup> grade	The Conquest, the Viceroy, political and economic errors of the conquerors. Argentina's present situation and its future destiny.

The government recognized that teaching history was only part of the instruction that was necessary to create a sense of solidarity among all citizens, even those that were children of foreign-born members of society. As a result, the same year (1901) the government also designed a curriculum for language instruction in the various grades. The chart clearly shows the progression of the language instruction throughout the formative years of a student.

Table 11: *Primary Schools, 1901: Legal Minimum of Topics in Spanish Language Instruction*

Grade Level	Topic
1 <sup>st</sup> grade	National language, poetry, short stories and illustrations.
2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	National language, oral and written exercises using verbs in the present, past and future tenses, free composition, reciting poetry, short stories and fable.

Table 11, continued

3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	Oral recitation and writing complex sentences, punctuation, accents marks, poetry, excerpts from national writings.
4 <sup>th</sup> grade	Write about labor topics, exercises on subject/verb agreement, rewriting sentences by changing subject and/or verb tense, punctuation, accent marks, free composition, reciting selections from national writings.
5 <sup>th</sup> grade	Write about social topics, rewriting sentences by implementing all possible subject and/or verb tense, combinations, punctuation, accent marks, reciting and discussing selections from national writings.
6 <sup>th</sup> grade	Creative writing, synonyms and antonyms, sentence structure, reciting and discussing selections from national writings, use of dictionary.

The Department of Education believed that a holistic approach to education, educating all aspects of the student, in language and history to physical education, was the way to create a sense of solidarity among the youth. It engineered the assimilation of the children born to foreigners with their contemporaries born to Argentine nationals.

In 1869, 41.4% of all documented marriages occurred between foreigners and cultural assimilation did not happen with the speed and ease that the government had anticipated. President Roca believed that education was the way to promote a common

identity. As a result, in 1880 lawmakers mandated the singing of the national anthem and the saluting of the flag with the intention of promoting a common Argentine nationalism. In 1884, President Roca passed laws that regulated the placement of the Argentine flag and, most importantly, the government passed what became known as *La ley de educación común, No. 1420*, or The Law of a Common Education. This law was in direct response to the first wave of immigration (Spalding, 1972) and was instrumental in the linguistic experience of Italians in Buenos Aires.

Law 1420, according to Manuel H. Solari (1972) in *Historia de la educación argentina*, was based on four basic principles. The first is that education is mandatory for primary school, from the ages of six to fourteen. This ensured that the children would be indoctrinated into the history of the nation at a young age. The second principle of Law 1420 was that education would be provided for free. Third, education would be gradual, or take place over the course of several years. The fourth principle is that the education is not based on any religious instruction.

Law 1420 served to create a national sense of pride within the country. In creating this law, the government recognized the importance of an education that is nationally comprehensive and teaches the sciences and mathematics, but also focuses on the education of society, not just the individual. Solari (1972) stated that the law, “consideraba que en material educacional no era fundamental la transmisión de conocimientos ni la disciplina, sino la comprensión de lo que sería en el futuro la sociedad, puesto que esa comprensión era indispensable para lograr la adaptación del

niño de hoy” (p. 197). In order for the individual child to adapt to his society, he needed to understand what the future society would hold.

Education was a way to create a national conscience. In fact, Article 1 as shown in Paz’s discussion in *La educación argentina* (1979) states, “La escuela tiene por único objeto favorecer y dirigir simultáneamente el desarrollo moral, intelectual y físico de todo niño de seis a catorce de edad.” (p. 102). Article 10 goes on to declare that, “La enseñanza primaria para los niños de seis a diez años de edad, se dará preferentemente en clases mixtas bajo la dirección de maestras autorizadas” (p. 102).

Law 1420 was just the beginning of a series of laws and regulations that helped create a national consciousness. In 1889, the *Consejo Nacional de Educación* established patriotic celebrations in schools. That same year, politician Miguel Cané unsuccessfully proposed a law for the expulsion of foreigners. Instead, a law passed that declared all school courses in Argentine history to be taught by citizens of Argentina, and all language courses in schools to be taught by citizens of Argentina (Spalding, 42). The educational plan called for a "comprehensive educational program for natives and immigrants to make them useful citizens" (p. 33).

The 20th century brought Ricardo Rojas, a nationalist revolutionary in the concept of nationalism through education. Rojas believed that foreigners could be assimilated into Argentine culture because, "the Argentine nationality was primarily spiritual rather than racial, and there was something about the Argentine soil which had a beneficent influence on all people and which in time would transform them into true Argentines”.

He believed that immigrants could be assimilated as long as nationalism was taught. Undeniably, he played a major role on popularizing recurrent themes of nationalism, "the necessity of nationalizing education, the rehabilitation of the Spanish and Indian heritages, the importance of the study of folklore, the importance of the provinces in the life of the nation, the cult of the gaucho, and the cult of the spirit of May" (Glauert, 1963, 4).

### 3.4 Social Space<sub>3</sub>: Mutual Aid Societies

Mutual aid societies played a huge role in the lives of the Italian immigrants. Since 1858, mutual aid societies were formed to protect and represent the new immigrants as they forged a new life in a new country. The mutual aid societies functioned as protector of the Italian customs, traditions and, above all, its language. The societies were the defenders of the Italian language, ensuring that schools were founded to maintain the Italian language and to teach the Italian language to the Argentine children of these new immigrants. Unbeknownst to the founders of the mutual aid societies, the very thing that they were trying to maintain, the sense of identity among the Italian immigrants, was the one that the Italians resisted because they did want to assimilate to the host culture.

According to Baily (1983), mutual aid societies provided "schools, medical clinics, hospital care, pharmacies, restaurants, and, in some cases, job placement services" (p. 293). Baily (2004) stated that their success hinged on one important factor:

a holistic approach to serving the Italian immigrant and his family in which the immigrants were served in all aspects of their lives. The mutual aid societies were:

...national and cosmopolitan in that they supported the unity of Italy and opened their membership to people from all parts of Italy. In addition, both developed extensive programs that served the educational and health as well as the insurance, legal and social needs of their members. Using this model of organization, the rapidly growing Italian community of Buenos Aires created ten new mutual aid societies during the 1870's. By 1879, the seven largest, wealthiest, and most influential Italian mutual aid societies to be created in Buenos Aires before World War I had been established as nationalist institutions with extensive functions to all Italians. (p. 177)

Munck (1998) identified the Argentina of the turn of the century as a country of immigrants and observed that the mutual aid societies were unique in the sense that they were almost all founded by immigrant workers. So, they were both an association of immigrants for immigrants and an association of workers. One of the first societies to be formed in Buenos Aires was *Unione e Benevolenza*, which formed in the 1860's at the onset of immigration. Its mission was to base its association on "patriotism, morality and progress, and its objectives are the mutual aid between the members and the education of its members" (qtd. in Munck, 1998, p. 577).

The mutual aid societies had a large membership. According to Munck (1998), membership in *Unione e Benevolenza*, was restricted to Italian immigrants and their

families, and approximately 85% of all mutual aid society members were male. By 1914, 18% of all Italian immigrants were members of a mutual aid society. It was necessary for a large portion of Italian immigrants to create a network of support that would help them find jobs and put a roof over their heads. It became, however, increasingly difficult for the Italian immigrant worker to have his expectations met and the mutual aid societies:

...were not unique in seeking to establish the social position of their members. As immigrants, upward social mobility was an integral part of the artisan culture but this did not preclude conflict however. On the contrary, the often frustrated expectations of the immigrant worker could lead in the direction of anarchism with its individual discourse (p. 581).

The mutual aid societies were formed to “establish the social position of their members” (p. 581). The benefit of organizing within the mutual aid societies was that the Italian immigrants had a platform to express their frustrations over the lack of social mobility. Even the unfair hike in rent that led to the tenant strike in 1907 could be attributed to the frustration felt by needs not being met by the mutual aid societies.

The government responded to the dissatisfaction felt by members of the mutual aid societies as it began providing more services to the public. For example, as early as 1904 discussions began of a law providing for more worker rights, an eight hour workday, hazard pay, as well as social security, and although the law didn't pass, it gave root to the idea of improving worker conditions. In 1915, a year that, due to World War

I, marks the end of the wave of immigration, the railroad workers, who were unionized, achieved a law that granted social security compensation based on age as well as disability insurance.

### 3.5 Concluding Remarks

The social spaces that have been explored in this chapter, the *conventillos*, the school community and the mutual aid societies, were facilitators of the assimilation of Italian immigrants in Buenos Aires. All these social spaces played an important role in the linguistic experience of the Italian immigrants, especially the case of the *conventillos* and mutual aid societies because they provided Italian immigrants with a means to express themselves within their host society.

The language that is expressed in Nemesio Trejo's *Los inquilinos* serves to show how the transitional language spoken by the Italian immigrants was manifested in the everyday life of the *conventillos*. It is in the very *conventillos* that the Italian immigrants banded together to protest the rent increase. The language used in the *sainete* is of particular importance because it illustrates how the transitional language was used to discuss moments that were life changing for all immigrants. It authenticates the linguistic experience of the Italian immigrants because of the very power that this marginalized group held in their surroundings.

The school community played an important role in the linguistic experience of the Italian immigrants because it is where the children of these immigrants learned what it meant to have an Argentine identity that was carefully crafted by the educators and politicians of the time period. The children of the immigrants completed the mission that the politicians had begun when the borders were opened to foreigners by populating the country by becoming the new Argentine. These children were educated to feel a sense of pride in their adopted country while at the same time completing the transition from Italian to Spanish.

The Mutual Aid Societies assured the Italian immigrants that their interests would be protected. They armed the immigrant with the necessary tools and information to be successful in their adopted country. The mutual aid societies wanted to provide the Italian immigrants the tools to be successful in their new country. But in doing so, they gave the immigrants confidence to know that they were valued member of the prestigious Argentine society and the immigrants wanted to be a part of that prestigious society, at the expense of their Italian identity and language. The mutual aid societies had as a purpose the maintenance of the Italian identity and language. The government of Argentina played a large part in hindering the teaching of Italian by the mutual aid societies by requiring Spanish to be taught by the mutual aid societies in addition to Italian. The mutual aid societies faced the daunting task of teaching a standardized Italian language to children of immigrants who spoke different dialects.

## CHAPTER 4

### DISCUSSION

This chapter will detail how the social spaces contributed to attrition of the Italian language and the cultural assimilation of the Italians in Buenos Aires. First, the *conventillos* will be discussed, specifically how they served as an alternative market in which the immigrants were able to organize themselves in order to better their social and economic status. Second, the school community and the role the government played in fostering a sense of Argentine nationalism through the legitimate market will be discussed. Third, the mutual aid societies will again demonstrate how the alternative market was able to empower the Italian immigrants to become an essential part of the fabric of Buenos Aires society.

The linguistic experience of Italians in Buenos Aires plays itself out in the various Social Spaces that have been identified, the *conventillos*, the school community and the mutual aid societies. Social Spaces functioned as organizations that by design or necessity became social networks for the Italian immigrant. These social spaces, whether part of the legitimate linguistic network (school communities) or the alternative linguistic market (*conventillos* and mutual aid societies), were instrumental in providing the Italian immigrant with the necessary tools to transition from their native language of Italian to the target language of the prestigious Buenos Aires society, Spanish. These Social Spaces had a direct and lasting impact on the linguistic experience of the immigrant Italian population, namely, language shift in favor of the majority language, Spanish.

#### 4.1 Social Space<sub>1</sub>: *Conventillos*

The *conventillos* are the first Social Space to be recognized as integral to the attrition of the Italian language. The *conventillos*, government subsidized housing units, were places where a large concentration of Italian immigrants lived together. While it can be argued that the large number of Italians living together would result in language maintenance, the *conventillo* and its sense of community created a network where the Italian immigrant was able to improve his position in society and embrace the language of his host society. It is in the *conventillos* that the Italian immigrants learned to band together in order to demand fairness in their rent, as well as decent living conditions. The sociolinguistic experience of Italians living in the *conventillos* is central to the attrition of Italian as a language in Argentina because the social experiences the immigrants had, from contact with speakers of various languages, to the organization of the tenant strike, played a key role in their perception of the legitimacy of Spanish as a dominant language. The *sainete*, *Los inquilinos*, by Nemesio Trejo, is demonstrative of the lure of Spanish in the *conventillos*, when the characters shift from Italian to Spanish, as the *sainete* progresses from the discussion of the tenant strike to when the strike comes to fruition.

Life in the *conventillo* was not particularly easy for the immigrant. Although living conditions in the *conventillos* were deplorable, the immigrants had no real choice of where to live. The *conventillos* were all that the average worker could afford. When the landowners began to increase the rent to the point where wage increases were not equivalent to the rent increases, all renters reached a boiling point and in 1907 the

residents of a *conventillo* decided to strike against the rent increases. Nemesio Trejo, a famed *sainetero* of his time, wrote *Los inquilinos*, a *sainete* about a *conventillo* that was planning a renters' strike. While Trejo was writing the *sainete*, actual renters' strikes were occurring in Buenos Aires. *Los inquilinos* was unique in that it took a very relevant and current event, the renters' strike, and put a spotlight on it. Through the *sainete*, Trejo showed the public of Buenos Aires the conflict that was occurring in their very own communities, in their very own streets. It underscores the conflict by portraying right on the stage what was happening right on the streets.

#### 4.1.1 *Cocoliche*

Language can demonstrate the way a certain group of people interacts with other groups in their society. All groups have their particular habitus, as identified by Bourdieu (1977), their own set of beliefs, knowledge, and traditions shared by each member of that group and language plays an important role in the way a group identifies itself. The habitus, then, carries a set of expectations and perceptions on how a group can communicate with other groups and it is these perceptions that are carried into everyday communication, whether that communication is between members who share a similar habitus or a different set of habitus, relating language to one's social identity in that "linguistic resources we use to communicate, and our interpretations of those used by others, are shaped by these mutually held perceptions" (Hall, 2002, 23).

The Italians living in the *conventillos* came from many different regions in Italy and had their own habitus as they were able to communicate effectively with each other as well as with Spanish speakers. In fact, there are several occurrences of Italian that can be found in *Los inquilinos*. The opening line of the *sainete* is written in Italian and spoken by the *verdulero*, or the greengrocer, as he speaks to Filomena, a Spanish immigrant who lives in the *conventillos*. As quoted in Chapter 3, the following is the first exchange of the *sainete* and bears repeating:

*VERDULERO. Bon giorno, marchanta.*

*FILOMENA. Buen día.*

*VERDULERO. ¿Cosa voglie?*

*FILOMENA. Papas, zanahorias y apo.*

*VERDULERO. (Dándole la verdura.) Eco, cui, cincuenta centavi.*

*FILOMENA. Pero, ¿por qué tan caro, marchante?*

(Trejo in Ordáz 57)

This verbal exchange is of particular significance because it clearly demonstrates the mutual understanding between the interlocutors, the greengrocer and Filomena. The greengrocer and Filomena are able to understand each other even though they are speaking different languages, Spanish and Italian. These languages have been in contact with each other under close living conditions of the *conventillos* and, as a result, the

tenants are able to understand each other's peculiar dialect and have a full and complete conversation about social and economic issues that are impacting their everyday life. Filomena asks why the items are so expensive. In fact, she accuses him of fixing the prices in order to realize the American dream:

*FILOMENA. Ustedes son los que ponen caros los artículos, porque quieren hacer pronto la América. Y hay que sudar, mijito, para ganarse la vida. Yo no robo la plata, ni mi marido tampoco...*

(Trejo in Ordáz, 57)

The idea of *hacer la América*, to realize the American dream, is the opportunity to get ahead, to work, to feed your family, to pay your bills, to earn a living. The dream is harder to realize with all the taxes that must be paid and the looming rent increase:

*VERDULERO. Se anno acabato cielo tiempo de la sanagoria y del gapio grati, marchanta. Oggi ni lo perequilo se danno se yapa. Bisogna pagare lu alquiler caro de lu conventillo; pagare la sisa, pagare la patente de lu carro, pagare a lu compadritu de lu ispetore y pagare anque la copa a lo vigilante per restare lu caritu a la porta. ¿Avete compreduto? A me, marchanta, me ne encaja la municipalitá lo imposto; io se lo cobro a las marchantas. ¿Qué voglio que fa?*

(Trejo in Ordáz, 57-8)

In the heat of the moment, as the Greengrocer laments his situation, he begins to use some Spanish in his discourse. While the words spoken by the Greengrocer are in Italian,

the reader (or spectator) begins to see how the Italian language shifted to Italian. Note the Greengrocer's use of *lo* (used 4x) versus the *lu* that was common among Italian speakers. What is seen here is the Spanish language becoming a part of the everyday exchanges of the Italians in the *conventillos*.

Later, the greengrocer goes on to say that he has no recourse and sarcastically states that his only option is to start a revolution to protest the government excess. Also, the following exchange includes evidence of language shift, which are shown in bold:

*VERDULERO. ¡Eh! ¿Qué se po fare? ¿Una revolución? ¡Eh! Rivoluzione. ¿Una estiletata a lu gobirno? ¡Eh! Bomba tutta música. Non le quello marchanta cun quello non **guadañamo** niente il povero. Bisogna non tirare tanti miglioni in lujo, en casa grandi pel Congreso e per Palacio de Justicia, La justicia e **mu**y piccolo marchanta e troppo per tan poca justicia.*

(Trejo in Ordáz, 58)

While it may appear that this comment is made mockingly, it is a hint of what is to come, a strike that pits the renters, essentially the immigrants, against the oligarchy.

It is not incidental that the greengrocer is discussing the revolution in his native language as he speaks to a woman whose native language is Spanish. It demonstrates the mutual understanding that the Italian immigrants had with their Spanish counterparts. Though the previous excerpt suggests that Filomena and the Greengrocer are at odds with the price of the vegetables, the truth is that they are both on the same side:

VERDULERO. *E dica, marchanta, ¿no se fa cui la huelga?*

FILOMENA. *Sí para luego está todo dispuesto.*

(Trejo in Ordáz, 58)

In these two lines, the audience becomes privy to the pending strike. Linguistically speaking, it is also important because it is the first instance that the greengrocer uses *cocoliche escénico*, or literary *cocoliche*; the word *huelga* means strike in Spanish, whereas the Italian word is *sciopero*. This ensures that the audience understands fully what is to come. This is of particular significance because, as Weinreich (1968) postulated, prestige of the dominant language contributes to the attrition of a minority language. Spanish was a means to obtaining a higher social status in Buenos Aires and it is not unintentional that Trejo used the Spanish word *huelga*. It serves to unify the immigrant with the Spanish speaking audience.

As Spanish and Italian come in contact, there are also occurrences of interference through shift, that is, there are elements of the Italian language in the manifestation of the Spanish spoken in *Los inquilinos*. The similarity of the languages resulted in the interference, but there were other factors that came in to play as well., such as the huge number of Italian immigrants in Buenos Aires. As Thomason (2001) noted, the size of the two speaker groups also is a consideration in terms of interference through shift. Forty-seven percent of the immigrant population was Italian, or 2,270, 525 out of 4, 878, 925 documented immigrants. The larger the immigrant group, the more prevalent

interference through shift is. In the linguistic experience of Italians in Buenos Aires, the constant contact with speakers of various dialects of Italian and the contact with Spanish speakers resulted in interference from the Italian immigrants' dialects and the Spanish spoken in Buenos Aires.

Throughout the *sainete*, the most common linguistic change is sound substitution, especially the use of /u/ to replace the Spanish /o/. Sound substitution is one of the most common forms of imperfect learning when it comes to second language acquisition, especially when the target language is similar to the first language (Thomason, 2001). This type of imperfect learning is found mostly in the *sainete*'s first few opening scenes before the tenant strike actually begins. The phoneme /u/ is a regional phonetic realization of the Italian /o/ and is most frequent in the speech of Italians from the Southern part of Italy, including Sicily. The following examples of interference through shift are taken from Nemesio Trejo:

<i>dejando</i>	<i>dejandu</i> (58)
<i>entonces</i>	<i>entunces 2x</i> (59)
<i>conmigo</i>	<i>conmiju</i> (61)
<i>cuidadito</i>	<i>cuidaditu 2x</i> (61)
<i>tengo</i>	<i>tenju</i> (61)
<i>los</i>	<i>lus</i> (62)
<i>ahora</i>	<i>aura</i> (65)

The use of the phoneme /u/ is directly a manifestation of Spanish and Italian being in contact with each other. These instances of languages coming in contact are typical of life in the *conventillos* as immigrants were forced to communicate sometimes in languages that were unfamiliar and as a result, the languages would interfere with one another.

In addition to the phoneme substitution already demonstrated, the use of /u/ for the Spanish /o/, several other phonetic substitutions occur in *Los inquilinos*, including:

- **/e/ for /y/:**  
*y reumatismo*                      *e reumatismo* (62)
- **/i/ for /e/:**  
*peor*                                      *pior* (68)
- **Omission of /c/:**  
*doctor*                                      *dotor* (64)
- **Omission of /p/**  
*aceptan*                                      *acetan* (65)
- **Omission of /s/**  
*adiós*                                      *addio* 2x (58)

In addition to phonetic interference, *Los inquilinos* also shows other characteristics of interference through shift by means of lexical and semantic interference:

- *ché* - Italian expression *ce* (there is) spelled phonetically in Spanish (64)
- *hasta domani* - for the Spanish *hasta mañana* (until tomorrow) (58)
- *non* for Spanish *no* (58)
- *un vuelco como el equinoccio* - semantic expression taken from Italian (5)

The majority of the examples of the two languages coming in contact are found in the beginning of the *sainete*, between the pages of fifty-seven and sixty-eight. The use of interference through shift in the first scene of *Los inquilinos* provides the audience with a reference to the fact that the majority of people living in the *conventillos* were Italian immigrants. While the first part of the *sainete* references the upcoming strike, the remaining pages of the *sainete* are devoted to the plight of the immigrants in the *conventillos*, or, the necessity of the immigrants in the *conventillo* to organize into a group that eventually will strike against the government and the landowners by refusing to pay their rents until living conditions are improved and rents are made affordable once again. Not using forms of *cocoliche* in the latter part of the *sainete* could be construed as a tool to unify the members of the *conventillos* by demonstrating that they all do have a common language, the language of the prestigious elite. Once the strike was declared, Trejo chose not to include any further literary *cocoliche* characteristics of the characters in the *sainete*. The linguistic experience of Italians as portrayed in *Los inquilinos* showed that in spite of the different languages, the residents of the *conventillos* were united in their fight for equality, which was greater than any need the immigrant may have had to maintain his language. The use of the contact language in the *sainete* was a tool to remind the audience that the tenants were mainly immigrants. However, once that was established within the *sainete*, it became more important for the tenants to be recognized as productive members of the society of Buenos Aires. It became more about the solidarity of the tenants than the features that distinguish them from the legitimate market, or society.

#### 4.1.2 Bourdieu and the *conventillos*

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power and the concept of alternative markets are essential to understand the organization of the immigrants in *Los inquilinos*. As was discussed in Chapter 2, Pierre Bourdieu (1991) believed that symbolic power was present in a social space when that space organized itself and used its resources in order to impact their host society to create change. When this social space was a marginalized group of people such as was the case of the Italian immigrants, Bourdieu classified this group as being a part of an alternative market. Although the *porteño* oligarchy attempted to squash the efforts of the Italian immigrant to advance in society, the Italian immigrants and their network of members of the *conventillo* became economically, politically and socially recognized because they fought for their rights and wanted to assimilate to Argentine society in order to advance in this new environment. As the Italian immigrant group became recognized they were able to become contributory members of the society of Buenos Aires. It is this recognition that bestowed the Social Space of the *conventillo* with symbolic power in an alternative linguistic market. In economic terms, the immigrants stood up for their rights by refusing to pay the high rent. Politically speaking, the immigrants of the *conventillos* organized a strike that demanded fair treatment and equality from the government. Socially, Trejo's *Los inquilinos* brought the language and the plight of the *conventillos* to the masses as the events were unfolding in real life.

There is an abundance of instances in *Los inquilinos* in which the tenants speak of their desire for equality, especially in the latter part of the *sainete*. Wanting to be treated

equally in their host society would preclude learning the language of prestige, thus promoting language shift. While the opening scene hints at the impending strike, it is towards the end of the first scene that details begin to emerge about the strike and the specific reasons it is taking place. Don Ponciano, a retired Italian lawyer who is unable to pay the rent, declares that people who are at the lower end of the social pecking order have the right to strive for a better life; his soliloquy serves to inform the public of the specific reasons for the strike, rent and hunger:

*DON PONCIANO. ... el que está debajo tiene el derecho de darse vuelta y quedar encima del que está arriba.[...] Hay dos factores, dos vehículos, dos cuestiones; vamos, dos cosas que se discuten: el alquiler y el hambre...*

(Trejo, in Ordaz, 73)

*Don Ponciano. [...] Levantemos la voz, levantemos la cabeza, levantemos los brazos, levantemos las piernas; digo, levantemos la protesta unánime y a luchar, a luchar contra el capital y la avaricia.*

(Trejo, in Ordáz, 74)

This speech given by the respectable Don Ponciano serves to unite strikers from different walks of life, to motivate the public, and perhaps gather the courage himself to move forward with the strike. It is essential to note that Don Ponciano is urging the “*unánime*”, the unanimous protest, urging the people of the *conventillo* to come together to rise and fight against the government and the greed of the oligarchy. Using the voice of Don

Ponciano, “Trejo seems to be pointing out that even respectable people – and not just immigrant day laborers – could not pay their rents” (Castro. 1990, p. 60). The rent increases affected everyone in the *conventillos*, regardless of their social status. This notion of solidarity between people of different social statuses and speakers of different dialects and languages is important because it shows how that in this instance, language and social status did not matter. What did matter was being treated fairly and humanely. The *conventillos*, as seen in *Los inquilinos*, stripped away the social and linguistic differences of the tenants and, instead, united them in a common cause. It is in the *conventillos* that a sense of Argentine nationalism was first felt, unlike the school communities where nationalism was taught.

Filomena, who was introduced in the very first scene of the *sainete*, is featured again; and again, there is talk of a strike. In this instance, Filomena informs a resident that they are to meet in the patio of the *conventillo* where the tenants will strike together. The patio has often been recognized at the heart of the *conventillos* because it is at its center and the tenants’ rooms surround it. On a pleasant day, the tenants would gather and play, or discuss the days’ events in the patio. On this day, however, it serves as the starting point for the strike. The first scene of the *sainete* ends with all the tenants crying, “¡Viva la huelga! ¡Viva!” (Trejo, in Ordáz, 77).

The second scene opens with the first casualty of the strike: a striking tenant from another *conventillo* has been killed. The landlord, Don Timoteo, enters the *conventillo* and declares that the tenants will pay for their indiscretions. He threatens to tell the

Board of Health that the *conventillo* is uninhabitable because of an outbreak of bubonic plague and yellow fever. He vows to leave the tenants homeless and exits the scene to call the police:

*DON TIMOTEO. Voy a denunciar la casa a la Comisión de Higiene como infestada, diciendo que se han producido casos de bubónica y de fiebre amarilla, y así la mandan desalojar en el acto. Yo no pienso bajarles un centavo de alquiler. La propiedad es inviolable. Las leyes y la Constitución amparan los derechos del propietario.*

(Trejo, in Ordáz, 79)

Upon Don Timoteo's exiting the scene, the strikers are featured shouting:

*UNO. ¡Viva la huelga.*

*TODOS. ¡Vivaaa!*

*UNO. ¡Abajo los alquileres!*

*TODOS. ¡Abajooo!*

*UNO. Señores: el pueblo está con nosotros. Nosotros somos el pueblo, y si yo soy el pueblo y ustedes son el pueblo, no hay más que hablar.*

(Trejo, in Ordáz, 80)

This ending to scene two is significant because it clearly shows the unity of the strikers, "We are the people, I am the people, you are the people, there's nothing left to

say.” These are powerful words that are spoken by an unidentified character. But the specific identity is inconsequential because that voice represents all the tenant strikers, regardless of nationality, giving the audience a sense of solidarity among the tenants. The use of Spanish is also important because it shows that the tenants, many of whom were Italian immigrants, shifted from speaking Italian to Spanish because they wanted to be understood by the people. It is this very sense of unity that gives the strikers power and it is this sense of solidarity that lends itself to bestowing symbolic power to the *conventillo* as a social space.

Scene three opens with Don Timoteo, the Board of Health Inspector, who is about to declare the *conventillo* as uninhabitable, and the police sergeant whose responsibility it is to rid the *conventillo* of the tenants who are striking. None other than Don Ponciano thwarts them. Pointing to Don Timoteo and directing his words towards the Inspector and the police sergeant, Don Ponciano claims that Don Timoteo is the hazard:

*DON PONCIANO. El infestado es él.*

*DON TIMOTEO. ¿Usted, también, don Ponciano?*

*DON PONCIANO. Sí, señor, yo también; que tengo la palabra de todos los inquilinos, pobres víctimas de su avaricia desmedida, que pretende echarlos a la calle porque no aceden a sus pretensions.*

*TODOS. Sí, señor.*

*DON PONCIANO. Yo también, que protesto en nombre de la santa igualdad, contra los usureros que le roban el pan al pobre.*

*TODOS. Bien.*

*DON TIMOTEO. Que soy el dueño de la casa.*

*JULIO. Nosotros también somos dueños, porque pagamos lo que usted nos cobra con usura, y por lo tanto ya se está largando de aquí, antes de que lo dejemos como a su encargado.*

*TODOS. ¡Fuera!*

(Trejo, in Ordáz, 81)

As Don Timoteo stakes his claim on his property, don Ponciano contends that the *conventillo* belongs to the tenants and that they have rights to quiet enjoyment of the premises. Don Timoteo politely asks the police sergeant to proceed with the eviction. The Health Inspector also urges the police sergeant to proceed. However, the police sergeant surprises everyone by refusing to evict the tenants, and announces that he, too, is a victim of the system:

*SARGENTO. Yo no puedo, señor. Yo también soy otra víctima del abuso. Renuncio al puesto y me uno a los compañeros de infortunio.*

*TODOS. ¡Bien! ¡Bravo!*

(Trejo, in Ordáz, 82)

The *sainete* ends with the declaration, “¡Viva la justicia! ¡Viva!” (82) as don Timoteo exits the scene and the curtain falls. This is such a powerful scene because of the actions of the police sergeant. He renounces his position of authority and says that he himself is a victim of the abuses of power. The *conventillo*, an organized social space, gains symbolic power in an alternative market whose members now include a government official, the police sergeant.

#### 4.1.3 Concluding remarks on Social Space<sub>1</sub>

The *conventillos* were an essential aspect in the linguistic experience of the Italian immigrant. The events of *Los inquilinos* mirror the strike that was happening on the very streets of Buenos Aires. As seen through the *sainete* written by Nemesio Trejo in the turmoil of the actual tenant strike, the tenants organized a strike to protest their living conditions and the steep increase of rent. By demanding that they be treated fairly, the tenants were not only making the statement that they were an intrinsic part of the Buenos Aires society, but were also declaring that they wanted to be recognized as contributing members of society.

#### 4.2 Social Space<sub>2</sub>: Education

The population of Buenos Aires experienced a drastic increase between the years 1904 and 1914, an increase of 65.7%. The population went from 950, 891 total

population in 1904 to a total population of 1, 575, 814 within a ten-year span, an increase of 65.7%. Therefore it was imperative for the government to respond to the population boom by providing schools that could support the large number of people. Education was the only way that the government could have a positive impact on the Italian immigrants and the way to hold power within a society. By providing a mandatory, free, long-term and secular education, the government ensured that the next generation would have a sense of Argentine identity that was essentially cultivated by the government.

Education became a means for an individual to achieve a higher economic and social status, all the more so for minority communities. In the case of the Italian immigrants in Buenos Aires, education was for many, an opportunity to advance their social standing. That facilitated the attrition of the Italian language because immigrants had to learn Spanish to become a part of the fabric of the society of Buenos Aires. At the start of the twentieth century, the height of immigration, Ricardo Rojas, the national revolutionary, helped to create a school curriculum that fostered a real sense of Argentine nationalism among the Italian immigrants by teaching about the history of Argentina and teaching Spanish language. Thus, indoctrinating young citizens in what it meant, according to the Argentine government, to be Argentine. Introducing aspects of history, culture and language to young people when they are most impressionable was a tool that the government used to promote their national agenda.

The government of Argentina understood that the future of the country, its destiny, relied heavily upon the youth of the society. By 1895, 32.7% of the population

of Buenos Aires was over the age of six. As stated by Lacroix and Adams (1950), school age children are more likely to acquire aspects of a new culture, are more malleable than adults and can be influenced more easily in the ways of their host society's culture. Their socialization practices are more favorable towards coming into contact with the local, native population. Attending school with speakers of Spanish, children of Italian immigrants were motivated by their peers to learn how to speak like their peers and how to think like them. Perhaps the children initially adopted the customs and language of their peers in order to "fit it" but, it cannot be denied that these children were instrumental in the shift of Italian to Spanish. As these school-aged children attended school daily, they came in constant contact with native speakers and even though they may have spoken their parent's language at home, the school community would have been a Spanish only zone.

#### 4.2.1 Law 1420

Law 1420, known as the Law of Common Education, was put into practice in 1884 as a way for the government to promote assimilation. As discussed in Chapter 3, there were several points that were crucial to this law. The first basic decree of Law 1420 was that education be made mandatory for all children ages six to fourteen. The government viewed education as a way for the country to advance and be able to compete in a global market. When education was made mandatory for young people, the children of Italian immigrants were introduced to a different culture. Argentine history,

politics, and society were being taught at a young age when the government could directly influence the youth and this way the children of immigrants became part of a legitimate peer group that was sanctioned by the government.

The second part of the law dictated that education would be provided free of charge, recognizing that a free education was an investment in the future of Argentine society. Argentina opened its borders to foreigners in order to populate the country and for workers to help build an infrastructure in the country. When the Italian immigrants arrived in Buenos Aires, they decided to make a life in Buenos Aires and not return to their homeland. A free education guaranteed that all parents would abide by the law and send their children to school.

The next aspect of the law stated that education would occur over a gradual period of time, from six to fourteen years old. Table 10 in Chapter 3 outlines the history curriculum of the primary school and shows how the government eventually developed that gradual education. The teachings begin with simple facts about the country, such as national holidays and the symbolism of the flag. By second grade, students begin to learn more in depth; instead of learning about national holidays the students learn the significance of the national holidays. This gradual education not only makes the students develop a deeper understanding of the history of the country but also allows the Italian immigrants' children to establish an Argentine identity that recognizes the role they play in society. In other words, it helped to foster a collective identity among the immigrants and the natives, the *porteños*, through the actual teaching of the curriculum.

The fourth principle that Law 1420 addressed was that education would be free of any and all religious bias. Although the constitution of Argentina recognized Roman Catholicism as the official state religion, Argentina chose to follow the educational model of the United States, in regards to separation of church and state for educating the youth of Argentina. Free from religious views and potential conflict those views can cause, education became a unifying component in the nationalism of Argentina.

Also, by obligating all children, including those of the Italian immigrants, to attend school, the government single-handedly eradicated the Italian language since Spanish was the mandatory language used in school. These children, in turn, went home and brought the new language to their parents' *conventillos*. The children were caught in the middle of two different cultures but they felt the need to be accepted by their school peers and to be a part of the same linguistic peer community. As a result, the immigrant children were part of the legitimate linguistic market and brought that legitimacy home to their parents. The children were the vehicles for disseminating the legitimate linguistic market to the people of the *conventillos*. As the children became more comfortable and fluent in the use of Spanish, it is natural that they would bring that language home and begin speaking Spanish to their parents and their parents' friends. It would not uncommon for parents and children to have a conversation in two different languages. As these children become more proficient in their use of Spanish, Spanish would become more prevalent in their lives, especially as they begin to read and write. Never having had any formal instruction in Italian, the children would feel more comfortable

expressing themselves in Spanish, especially when discussing matters that are related to their academics.

#### 4.2.2 *El Monitor de la Educación Común*

The school community, as part of the legitimate linguistic market was pivotal in the attrition of Italian. And the most important document created in the early part of the twentieth century was *El Monitor de la Educación Común*, a working document that addressed the educational needs of a country whose population was exploding due to the immigration policies put in place by the government. It was a response, also, to the implementation of Law 1420 in that the government recognized the need to create a unified and nationalistic education system.

The first publication of *El Monitor de la Educación Común* was in September of 1891. This edition focused on researching education in other parts of the world to determine the best pedagogical approach for Argentina. Gathering that data would ensure that Argentina was using the latest and most innovative techniques in the classroom. With the National Census of 1895, the Argentine government made some changes to their approach. The census recorded a total of 834 teachers and aides, of which 361, or 43.3% were foreign born. Coincidentally, the focus of the 1901 edition of *El Monitor de la Educación Común* was on the teaching of the Spanish language in

Buenos Aires. And in 1901, the government responded by requiring Spanish language, as well as Argentine history, be taught by native speakers of Spanish.

The government recognized that in order to create unity among its people, the national history and national language of Argentina must be a focal point of education among the youth of Argentina, natives and immigrants alike. The first area addressed by *El Monitor de la Educación Común* was the teaching of Argentine history. The curriculum consisted of topics required to be taught in the formative years, from first through sixth grades (See Table 7, Chapter 3). First grade requires teaching the national anthem, national flag, national coat of arms and national holidays. Also of particular interest to the development of Argentine nationalism are the teachings required in fourth and sixth grades. Fourth grade curriculum mandated that the origins, solidarity, and common destiny of the Argentine people be taught. Sixth grade required the teachings of the founding of Argentina as well as Argentina's present and its future destiny.

The 1901 edition of *El Monitor de la Educación Común* also contained the curriculum required by the government for teaching Spanish in first through sixth grades. First, all language classes were required to be taught by native speakers (See Table 8, Chapter 3). In first grade, students were taught the basics of the national language. Consecutive grade levels required additional exercises on the maintenance of the national (Spanish) language. By sixth grade, students were working on creative writing, sentence structure and reciting and discussing selections from national writings. The emphasis placed on the Spanish as the national language consolidated its place in the legitimate

linguistic market and it became the prestigious norm that students aspired to achieve. The immigrant children were completely immersed in the acquisition of Spanish from a very young age and in a methodical way which, for every year, outlined the exact linguistic material that would be the focus of instruction. The acquisition of Spanish provided the immigrants with a level of acceptance in their host society and also it opened the doors to increased social, political and economic possibilities.

The teaching of Spanish and Argentine history by Argentine natives is an important aspect of the legitimate linguistic market as the government of Argentine holds legitimate power in the society. Requiring that a native speaker teach Spanish gave linguistic prestige to the native speakers because not just any speaker was qualified to teach Spanish, but it had to be a native Argentine speaker. Mandating that teachers hold a specific qualification to teach, in this case being a native speaker of Spanish, gives legitimacy to the law and the language of the nation. In this way, the government had a predominant role in the nationalization of the immigrants by influencing their children's language behavior at a very early age in which they can be molded as Argentine citizens.

#### 4.2.3 Concluding Remarks on Social Space<sub>2</sub>

Education directly impacted the linguistic experience of Italians in Argentina. The government mandated that Spanish be taught in the primary years and that native speakers of Argentina teach it. The government aimed to achieve one collective voice by

designing a curriculum that was heavily based on the notion of nationalism while the ruling class that held the power aided in the cultural assimilation of Italian immigrants and the attrition of their language through their education system. By providing free and compulsory education to children between the ages of six and fourteen, the government made sure that even the children of the immigrants were indoctrinated in the nationalism of the time period.

#### 4.3 Social Space<sub>3</sub>: Mutual Aid Societies

The Mutual Aid Societies were created to provide resources to make life a little easier for the Italian immigrant, by offering them information on housing, jobs, travel information, health facilities and language schools. While they were proponents of Italy and all that was Italian, the Mutual Aid societies created a sense of entitlement among the Italian immigrants. By 1910 in the City of Buenos Aires there were seventy-five mutual aid societies with approximately 52,000 members out of an Italian population of some 280,000. While the mutual aid societies favored language maintenance, they were actually vehicles for language shift because as the Italian immigrants were more confident with their surroundings thanks to the mutual aid societies, they began to be part of that society through work and school.

The mutual aid societies that were most influential were founded during the first wave of immigration to Argentina. The first mutual aid society, *Unione e Benevolenza*, was founded in 1858, and by the end of 1860, totaled more than 2,800 members. By

1910, the mutual aid societies combined had a male membership of 43,000, which amounted to three in every ten adult Italian males being active members of a mutual aid society. That is approximately 28% of 154,000 documented Italian males. Italian female immigrants counted 9,000 of the membership of the mutual aid societies, or nearly one in ten Italian female was an active member of a mutual aid society. That is 9% of the 97,000 documented female Italian immigrants who were active members of a mutual aid society. It can be surmised that the relatively lower percentage of Italian women as members of the mutual aid societies could be attributed to the traditional role of the woman as the caretaker of family and home and although many women worked out of necessity, they still would have considered it their duty to maintain the household and concern themselves with the everyday necessities of taking care of a home and family. As the self-proclaimed defenders of the traditions, customs, and language of Italy, mutual aid societies were as nationalistic for Italy as the educational curriculum was for Argentina. They strived to fulfill the needs of all the Italian immigrants, regardless of the region of Italy from which they emigrated. In addition, the mutual aid societies had the daunting task of creating a society that could address the needs of immigrants from such different regions of Italy. The following chart shows the origin of the immigrants by region:

Table 12: *Regions of Italy that Represent 10% or More of Immigrants in Argentina,*

<b>Region</b>	<b>Total Italian Immigrants by Region</b>	<b>Total Percentage of Italian Immigrants by Region</b>
<b>Piedmont</b>	370,448	16.9%
<b>Calabria</b>	289,344	13.2%
<b>Sicily</b>	243,312	11.1%
<b>Lombardy</b>	227,968	10.4%
<b>Remaining Regions</b>	1,060,928	48.4%
<b>Totals</b>	2,192,000	100.0%

The regions of Italy that had 10% or more of the emigrants to Argentina were Piedmont, Calabria, Sicily, and Lombardy. These four regions comprised 1,231,072, or 51.6%, of all the immigrants that came from Italy. Piedmont, in the northern part of Italy, had a total of 370,448, 16.9%. Calabria, from southern Italy, totaled, 289,344 immigrants, 13.2%. Sicily, also in the south, amounted to 243,312 immigrants, or 11.1%. Rounding the group is Lombardy, in the northern part of the country, with 227,968, or 10.4% of the total population of immigrants. Piedmont and Lombardy are regions in the northern part of Italy, whereas Calabria and Sicily are in the southern region of Italy. The two northern states of Piedmont and Lombardy combined 598,416 total immigrants while the southern states of Calabria and Sicily contributed 532,656 total immigrants. Although these immigrants were from the same country, they each had their own local customs, traditions, and, most importantly, their own dialects. The dialect spoken in each of these

four regions was particular to that region and not necessarily mutually intelligible for speakers of the other dialects.

Dialectal differences between the regions were a bone of contention for the mutual aid societies. Weinreich (1968) identified “attitude toward the culture of each language community” (3) as a determining factor of language attrition. Assuming that each region of Italy was a distinct speech community, it was likely that a person from Piedmont would have difficulty to understand a person from Sicily, where the phrase for “I don’t know” is vastly in the two dialects. In Piedmont, it would be expressed by *non lo so*, whereas in Sicily, that same phrase would be uttered as *mango lu sachò*. The mutual aid societies, with assistance from the Dante Alighieri Society funded by the Italian government to promote Italian language and culture in the Americas created language schools with the hope that these schools would give the Italian immigrants a common language; in particular it would help to teach Italian to the children of the immigrants (van Kessel, 2012). Furthermore, knowing the Italian language would help to unify the immigrants in Argentina and help to maintain their sense of Italian identity. The mutual aid societies had the daunting task of teaching the official Italian to people that didn’t speak standard Italian, but instead the dialect peculiar to their region. The crux of the matter was that while Italian held linguistic prestige among the mutual aid societies as the alternative linguistic market, Spanish as the legitimate linguistic market was the language that would help advance the political, social and economic standing of the individual immigrant.

Many mutual aid societies, including *Unione e Benevolenza*, were associated with schools that not only taught Italian to its students, but all other subjects as well. In 1881, *Unione e Benevolenza*, as well as the other mutual aid societies decided to hold the First Italian Pedagogical Congress in Buenos Aires to discuss ways to create a more unified curriculum and rules that would help to secure the future of the schools. However, the societies faced criticism by the Argentine government, namely the former President Domingo F. Sarmiento (1868-1874), who believed that it was not in the best interest of Argentina to perpetuate schools that taught primarily in Italian and that promoted the Italian culture (Baily, 2004). Indeed, he believed it was a hindrance to the assimilation of the Italian immigrant. In response to the concerns of Sarmiento's government, the mutual aid societies decided to expand the curriculum to include the Spanish language, as well as the study of Argentine geography and history (Baily, 2004). To maintain positive relations it was crucial for the mutual aid societies to compromise and teach aspects of Argentine history, geography and, yes, language to its pupils. Therefore, the mutual aid societies had to not only recognize but also acknowledge the legitimate linguistic power of the government.

As part of the alternative linguistic market, the mutual aid societies were very powerful institutions since successful and wealthy Italian immigrants who had overcome the obstacles that immigration presented were in charge of the mutual aid societies. These were economically, politically, and socially powerful institutions and as such they were an intrinsic part of the society that they served and promoted. Although the mutual

aid societies had the best interest of the blue-collar and skilled worker, it is important to note that the elite of the Italian community spearheaded the mutual aid societies, intending to promote a unified Italy, alongside economic success. It was believed that if the Italian government could foster a sense of nationalism among the Italian immigrants, the immigrants would return to Italy and turnkey their successes abroad on their own soil. This could potentially mean economic prosperity for the newly unified Italy (Baily, 2004). Unfortunately, Argentina benefited from the economic prosperity as most Italian immigrants made Buenos Aires their permanent home.

Weinreich (1968) and Thomason (2001) stated that how quickly an immigrant group learns the target language depends considerably on the prestige that is associated with it. On one hand, learning Italian gave the Italian immigrants a sense of belonging to a group that held their best interests. On the other hand, as part of an alternative linguistic market, Italian did not help to advance the political, social or economic status of the immigrant. Spanish had dominance in the legitimate linguistic market and in spite of the attempts of the mutual aid societies to promote the Italian language, being able to communicate in Spanish would make sure that the Italian immigrant would advance economically. Knowing Spanish directly translated to better job opportunities and better housing availability. These opportunities made the lure of the prestige that came with the legitimate linguistic market Spanish too difficult to resist and attrition, in spite of the efforts of the mutual aid societies in conjunction with the Italian government, was inevitable.

#### 4.3.1 Role of newspapers in Mutual Aid Societies

Newspapers played a vital role in the assimilation process of the immigrant. In Buenos Aires, *La Patria degli Italiani (La Patria)* first published by Basilio Cittadini in 1876 was by far the most successful and the most far-reaching (Baily, 2004). *La Patria* was:

...the most important defender of the Italian immigrants. It was a self-appointed guardian of the Italian language and the Italian culture in general. It was an important transmitter of information about and interpreter of Argentine society. The paper also served to break down the provincial loyalty of the Italians and to help develop a new sense of identity (328).

The newspaper defended Italian immigrants by striving to obtain better housing and education for the immigrants. *La Patria* wanted to encourage adaptation, and not social assimilation. It wanted Italians to be treated fairly, but ultimately, to maintain their Italian heritage. The goal of *La Patria* was to promote help Italian immigrants adapt to their society yet maintain their loyalty to Italy.

The organization of the newspaper could be separated into three essential components (Baily, 2004). The majority of the paper consisted of news about the happenings in Italy and also how to become successful in Argentina, with the front page containing stories about Italian domestic and foreign affairs as well as stories about Italians in Argentina. The second component of the paper was dedicated to several topics

pertaining to Italians in Argentina, such as their working and living conditions, as well as Italian businesses in Argentina. Finally, the bulk of the paper was devoted to paid advertising in which the mutual aid societies were able to advertise themselves. In this way, the newspapers, as conduits for the mutual aid societies addressed the everyday needs of the Italian immigrant in Argentina.

#### 4.4 Concluding Remarks

It is important to note that of all the social spaces studied (*conventillos*, school communities, and Mutual Aid Societies) the only social space that existed solely in a legitimate linguistic market was education. The legitimate market of the ruling, prestigious elite was powerful and savvy enough to know that requiring the education of all persons six to fourteen was the route to acquire the Argentine nationality. In other words, education was crucial to the advancement of the Argentine society, and the government recognized this.

Between 1887 and 1914, the Italian population of Buenos Aires increased exponentially. The best thing that these Italians could do to advance their social and economic status was organize within their social spaces. By organizing, the Italians began the process of political disposition that led to cultural assimilation and language shift. The *conventillos* were significant because the immigrants came in contact with many speakers of different languages, with Spanish being the common denominator. *Los inquilinos* is significant in demonstrating the linguistic experience of Italians in Buenos

Aires. The opening scene takes place in Spanish and Italian, and the two speakers are able to understand each other with relative ease. As the *sainete* progresses, there is evidence of *cocoliche*, the transitional language of Italians as they sifted to speaking Spanish. The latter part of the *sainete* takes place entirely in Spanish, showing the solidarity among the tenants by using the prestigious language of Spanish.

The school communities were the most instrumental in promoting language shift among the Italian immigrants. Law 1420 required children, starting at age six, to attend school and learn about the history of Argentina and to Spanish language. As mentioned previously, as these school aged children became more fluent in Spanish, it began the attrition process because they were speaking Spanish most of their day as well as when they would play with their school friends outside of school. The children of the Italian immigrants were born on Argentine soil and were citizens of Argentina. The large numbers of children born to foreigners as opposed to those born to Argentines, helped to create a new sense of nationalism, assisted by the government that required these new citizens to think a certain way about their country.

The mutual aid societies, the third social space, faced many obstacles in maintaining the Italian culture and language. The Italian government, through the Dante Alighieri Society, attempted to teach a standardized Italian to speakers of many different dialects. As if that obstacle weren't enough, the Argentine government stepped in and made these societies include Spanish in their curriculum. The Italian immigrants were unable to deny the fact that Spanish was the language that they needed to know if they

wanted to be a part of their host society – why learn a new standardized Italian when Spanish was the language of their adopted country?

For the Italians in Buenos Aires, the alternative markets of the *conventillos* and mutual aid societies were transitional spaces that permitted the Italian immigrants to create their own value that eventually became valued by the *porteños*. When the Italian immigrants yielded to the pressure of the Argentine government to shift to Spanish, they were able to hold better positions that would have required knowledge of Spanish, such as positions in banking and even in government as clerks or politicians.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 Summary

My research objective was to investigate and analyze the linguistic experience of Italian immigrants in Buenos Aires, Argentina, during the years of 1890 through 1914, using Pierre Bourdieu's theories of social space and linguistic markets and contact linguistics' concepts in order to explain the attrition of Italian and shift to Spanish.

The *conventillos* were an essential aspect of the life of the foreigners, particularly Italian immigrants. As the National census of 1895 indicates, nearly 50% of the tenants living in the *conventillos* were immigrants to Argentina and nearly one fourth of the total population of Buenos Aires was living there. Thus, the *conventillos* became places of contact among immigrants not always sharing the same language. Furthermore, sometimes the limited mutual intelligibility among Italian dialects fostered the use of Spanish, the language of the *porteños*, as a lingua franca in the *conventillos*.

The *conventillos* as a social space were home to an alternative linguistic market where *cocoliche* -the Italian-Spanish mixed language used by Italian immigrants – played a major role, as illustrated in the writing of the *sainetes* or popular plays of the time period. It was shown that there were common phonological interferences in the Spanish variety used by Italian immigrants, e.g. /u/ for /o/ (*dejandu* for *dejando*) and omission of

/s/ (*addio* for *adios*); these and other phonological transfers are found Nemesio Trejo's *Los inquilinos*.

It was shown that *Los inquilinos* is a literary representation of the psychological profile of the Italian immigrants living in the *conventillos*, especially in times economic hardship. Like in other sainetes, the tenants or other characters portrayed in *Los inquilinos* mirror real life immigrants in that because at the time real life tenants, like those in the *sainete*, were striking against the landlords of the *conventillos* who were going to raise the immigrants' rent beyond the cost of living. By organizing among themselves and making their voices heard, the immigrants in the *conventillos* constituted a social space that was used to better their economic situation while, at the same time, they demanded to be treated as an essential fabric of the Argentine nationality.

The Argentine government exercised an important function in shaping the social space that impacted the linguistic experience of Italians in Buenos Aires. For example, public schools as part of the social space were sanctioned by the government and because of that became part of the legitimate linguistic market. As discussed in chapter 4, with the inception of Law 1420 the Argentine government mandated that free education be provided for all primary school children ages six to fourteen. This allowed the government to have an early impact on children's immigrants by fomenting a new nationalism that unified the natural born citizens and the immigrants.

The government designed a curriculum that would indoctrinate the children in the history and language, and traditions of Argentina. The history curriculum incorporated

the basic history of Argentina such as holidays and the common destiny of the Argentine people, and gave thought to the future destiny of Argentina (See Table 10). Teaching all aspects of Argentine history to the children of Italian immigrants made them feel a part of a legitimate social space as well as of the legitimate linguistic market. The immigrant children were learning the official language of the nation through school through teachers and other Spanish-speaking children. The nationalistic curriculum produced young first-generation citizens that were well versed in the history, literature, and traditions of their adopted country. A mandatory education was the vehicle to nationalism and aided in the attrition and shift of the Italian language.

The third social space that was investigated for the purpose of this dissertation was the mutual aid societies of Buenos Aires. The mutual aid societies were run by the Italian elite who had established themselves in society as being politically, economically, and socially powerful within their group. They were created to protect the interests of the Italian immigrants in every aspect of their lives from housing (*conventillos*) to use of Italian friendly banks and schools that catered to their children. The Italian schools were generally funded by the Italian government and were a way to maintain ties to the motherland and this was especially important to the Italian government because of the large numbers of Italians immigrating to the New World, e.g. in Argentina alone, 1,569,271 Italians were documented as entering Argentina between 1891 and 1920. It was in the best interest of the Italian government to maintain ties with those that migrated

because it could mean a potential economic boost for the country as immigrants sent back money to the family they left behind.

The mutual aid societies, as educators, were promoters of the new standardized Italian that was gaining ground in a unified Italy. In Bourdieu's terms, the mutual aid societies are considered to be part of the alternative linguistic market. The Italian immigrants, however, spoke their own regional dialect and although often times those dialects were mutually intelligible many times the speakers of different dialects would struggle to understand each other. Therefore, the mutual aid societies had the daunting task of teaching a new standardized language in their schools. In order to counter antinationalistic trends by immigrant communities, the government of Argentina decided that teaching Italian exclusively was not conducive to creating an Argentine sense of nationalism and made the mutual aid societies' language schools integrate Spanish in the curriculum being taught in the schools.

Through the language schools, the mutual aid societies were promoters of the Italian language *and* the Spanish language. The societies were in the unique position to be both primarily part of the alternative linguistic market because they taught the standardized Italian, but they were also part of the legitimate linguistic market because they had to include Spanish as part of their curriculum. By legally requiring to include Spanish in the curriculum of the mutual aid societies, the Argentine government made the Spanish language more prestigious and useful than the Italian language in terms of advancing socially and economically.

*Conventillos* were part of the alternative linguistic market, school communities were part of the legitimate linguistic market, and mutual aid societies were primarily part of the alternative linguistic market but were also an important aspect of the legitimate linguistic market by means of their language schools. The linguistic experience of Italians in Buenos Aires was greatly impacted by these social spaces that were particularly influential in the everyday lives of the Italian immigrants.

## 5.2 Future studies

It would be interesting to adapt Pierre Bourdieu's theories of social spaces and linguistic markets to the linguistic experience of Italian immigrants in New York City and other major US cities in order to demonstrate their effect, if any, on the Italian language. Between the years of 1891 and 1920, there were 3, 987, 254 documented Italian immigrants that entered the United States. With such large numbers of Italians immigrating to the United States, it would follow that these immigrants would have a voice in their host society, and a similar linguistic experience to that of the Italians in Buenos Aires. However, the percentages are much more telling than the actual numbers; that is, Italians made up twenty-two percent of the total immigrants in Argentina during 1891-1920 whereas the Italians of the United States made up a smaller proportion. Therefore, the demographic differentials could have resulted in a vastly different linguistic experience.

In addition to the relatively small percentage of Italian immigrants in the United States, the Italian immigrants encountered several obstacles that hindered their adaptation to the culture. The first obstacle was the government of the United States who saw the southern Italians as an inferior, dirty, stupid, aggressive race, so much so that the government decided to impose certain restrictions that would limit the number of Italians, namely those from the south, entering the United States. In 1906, the Immigration Restriction League said that limiting immigration of Italians would help to purify the future of the American race (Baily, 2004).

A second obstacle was the Italian laborers were slow to organize within the labor movement in New York City. However, mutual aid societies were found as early as 1858 with the formation of *Unione e Fratellanza*, two societies were founded in the 1860's, five in the 1870's and several dozen in the 1880's. Although little is known about these societies, mass migration proved overwhelming for the societies, especially financially, and they were limited to immigrants from the same town or region of Italy. As a result, these mutual aid societies became social clubs for the recent immigrants. Baily (2004) contrasts the Buenos Aires mutual aid societies with those of New York:

By 1910 in Buenos Aires there were seventy-five mutual aid societies with approximately fifty-two thousand members out of an Italian population of some 280,000. In New York at about the same time there were as many as two thousand societies with an estimated membership of forty thousand out of an Italian population of 340,000. (Baily, 2004, p. 200)

Many of these societies were founded by the *prominenti* of Italian society who were Italian businessmen that founded the societies for their own interests. In contrast to the founding fathers of Buenos Aires mutual aid societies, these founders were uneducated and interested in their own self-worth. These *prominenti* were in partnership with the *padroni system* which was not in the best interest of the immigrant. As a result of the lack of real leadership, the Italian Government organized its own organizations. In 1901, the Society for the Protection of Italian Immigrants was formed. The Protective Society was financially funded by the Italian government and provided a viable alternative to the *padroni system*. It published a list of approved housing, set up a labor bureau, offered legal advice and financial assistance. In fact, it was so successful that by 1906 it provided for more than 13,000 people per year.

As for housing, many Italians in New York City had to live in boarding houses. According to Baily, most lived in Manhattan, especially in the area below 14th Street, clustering in the Mulberry District and its surrounding wards. Thus, it is no coincidence that the Mulberry District is currently home to New York City's Little Italy. Although many Italians planned on returning to Italy, and nearly fifty percent did, others decided to take up residence in the United States and remained in areas where the Italian population was established and thriving (124).

By looking at the roles that social spaces like those provided by the United States government, mutual aid societies, and the Italian government, a comparative study of the linguistic experience of Italians in Buenos Aires and New York City would be a possible

extension of this dissertation. Unlike Buenos Aires, in New York City the languages spoken, such as English and German, were so different that it was difficult for the Italian immigrants to yield to the power of the dominant group. They were forced to create an alternative market, which allowed the Italians to adapt to the host society, the United States, but were unyielding in their want to assimilate, holding onto their values and traditions.

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