

The Resemantisation of Proper Nouns.

La Resemantización de los Nombres Propios.

DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.v30.n89. e0291

Patricia Lizeth Juárez Silva

University of Guadalajara.

(MEXICO)

CE: patricia.juarez1002@gmail.com

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-8043-327X>

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Received: 02/06/2025 Reviewed: 07/10/2025 Approved: 24/11/2025

How to cite this article (APA):

In paragraph:
(Juárez, 2026, p. _).

In reference list:
Juárez, P.L. (2026). *The Resemantisation of Proper Names*. *Sincronía Journal*. 30(89). 175-192
DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.v30.n89.e0291

Abstract

The purpose of this work is to identify the meaning of proper names in family discourse, mainly from the semantic onomastic perspective of Yolanda López Franco and Luis Fernando Lara. To this end, the concepts of *familect* and *sociolect*, coined by Albert Álvarez González and Benítez-Berraco and Felíu-Arquiola, respectively, are fundamental. It is proposed that the speaker changes the meaning of the name in a process of resemanitisation as a result of social practices in the private sphere, with the aim of teasing or mocking others.

Keywords: Teasing. Proper names. Resemantisation. Onomastic semantics.

Resumen

Este trabajo tiene como propósito identificar el significado de los nombres propios en el discurso familiar, desde una perspectiva semántica onomástica de Yolanda López Franco y Luis Fernando Lara, principalmente. Para ello, son elementales los conceptos *familecto* y *sociolecto*, otorgados por Albert Álvarez González y Benítez-Berraco y Felíu-Arquiola, respectivamente. Se plantea que el hablante cambia el significado del nombre en un proceso de resemanitización como producto de las prácticas sociales en el ámbito privado, con motivo de la llamada “carrilla” o burla hacia otros.

Palabras clave: Carrilla. Nombres propios. Resemantización. Semántica onomástica.

Introduction

This paper aims to analyse phrases used in family discourse that include proper nouns, with the purpose of identifying their meaning and the reasons why this semantic variation, referred to here as *resemantisation*, occurs. It is argued that, at a diaphasic level, the speaker changes the meaning of the proper noun as a result of social practices in the private sphere, for the purpose of mockery or 'banter'¹ among its members. To this end, the theory of linguistic semantics and onomastics is followed to define the meanings associated with proper names in certain situations. In terms of methodology, variationist sociolinguistics is used as the basis for the method employed to collect the information.

First, contact was made with informants belonging to two different families: on the one hand, three people from the ejido La Partida, Torreón, Coahuila de Zaragoza, who will be referred to as group A; on the other hand, three people from La Barranca de Achio, on the ranches of La Conchilla, Jalisco, who will be referred to as group B. Scheduled individual interviews (Hernández and Almeida, 2016, p. 135) were conducted by telephone to gather phraseological information where proper names were used. The triggering questions were: 1) What phrases do you use? 2) How did they come about? and 3) Would you use them at a wake, at a school meeting for your children, or on the street? (See Table 1).

TABLE 1.

AGE OF INFORMANTS.

GROUP A	51	48	47
GROUP B	61	48	47

NOTE: Data obtained in November 2023, originally compiled for this article.

Source: Own elaboration.

¹ The Dictionary of Mexican Spanish defines it as: "a tease or joke that friends play on someone to annoy them" ("Carrilla", def N.1, *Dictionary of Mexican Spanish*). In this particular case, it would be added to the members of the family.

Before they answered the questions, the scope of the research and the relationship between these types of phrases and families from different groups in different regions of Mexico were explained to them. Similarly, their consent was requested to be recorded and to safeguard the data, such as that collected in question 3. Based on the results obtained, the phrases and the meaning given to the proper names within them were analysed in order to understand their respective functions. A survey was also conducted among family members of each group, their direct descendants, in order to measure the scope of these phrases.

The meaning of proper names

Prior to discussing the semantic change in proper names, the idea of their flat meaning, so to speak, must be defined.

Yolanda López Franco (2014) in "On the semantics of proper names. Between debate and theoretical synthesis," defends the thesis that proper names retain meaning insofar as they are linguistic signs. To this end, she draws on several theorists, finding Willy Van Lagendonk's pragmatic-semantic and morphosyntactic onomastics to be the most substantial (pp. 69-81).

López asserts that the *norm* is an important concept for the speaker's *onomastic competence* because this competence resides in their consciousness, present at the level of language and speech. *Onomastic competence* includes: 1) sociolinguistic factors such as the social image of the name (whether a name is fashionable, whether it is part of a religious tradition: naming after a saint in the Judeo-Christian tradition, for example); ethno-sociocultural imaginaries in the use of figurative and predicative meaning; and some pragmatic factors (such as polyonymy, where many names are given to one bearer) (pp. 69-81).

López states that, at the language level, first names have three meanings: categorical assumption (associating the name Mary with the biological sex female: woman), grammatical (feminine/singular) and etymological transparent (Citlalli, which means 'star') or opaque (Renata, which etymologically means 'rebirth'). At the level of speech, it has an associative meaning, which allows the bearer to be described depending on the social relationships developed between the interlocutors; an emotional meaning (in the choice of name, one of the criteria is its meaning, for example), as well as motivation; and a procedural denominative meaning, whereby the speaker

understands that it is a first name and must associate it with a referent. It is in speech that the meaning of proper names is actualised in context, within a sociolect and idiolect (pp. 69-81).

Like López, Luis Fernando Lara (2023), in "Reflexiones semánticas sobre los nombres propios" (Semantic reflections on proper names), argues that proper names, as signs, have meaning. He draws on linguistic semantics to assert that proper names serve to single out an individual from a group (*the others*). In this case, a person can be singled out using demonstrative pronouns (*that, this, that one*) or the name itself, which has a *deictic character*. Unlike demonstrative pronouns, proper names do not change with conversation, so in addition to pointing out, they single out and identify (pp. 1-17).

Lara continues to develop his idea by saying that, within the identification of a person, the choice of names is conceived in which different social practices have a place, such as the Judeo-Christian custom of naming the person after a saint or giving them the name in honour of a relative (the sociolinguistic factors mentioned by López). The criterion for their choice is their *significant value*. Therefore, a person's name lends itself to symbolic value, a symbolism that seeks to add historical or metaphysical significance due to its associative and emotional value (for example, naming a person after a historical or famous figure from culture and the media). In this way, according to Lara, it goes from being a sign to *an identifying symbol* (pp. 1-17).

For her part, Alba Luz Sánchez Escudero, in "Resemantisation as a place of enunciation: a possibility for constructing collective biographies," says that "a name is only its extension and not its intentionality; in other words, the meaning of a name is its bearer, and not the descriptions that can be made of it" (Sánchez, 2018, p. 3). This approach disputes *associative* meaning, as it denies the possibility of adding qualities to proper names and limits them to referring only to the bearer. This is refuted here, since in speech, social and relational values are attributed to meaning insofar as they perform a function within their context.

From this, it follows that, at the level of language, a proper name is a name, since it fulfils a referential function (identifying and singularising, according to Lara), that is, its meaning is the bearer. In contrast, in speech, all the ideas associated with it (its bearer) are attributed to it, depending on the context and the interlocutors. It is given, so to speak, the associative meaning mentioned by López.

The process of resemanitisation

Approach to the issue

In his work, Sánchez Escudero approaches resemanticisation from the perspective of narrative, and therefore language. He does not focus on linguistic issues, but he does address aspects of semantics. He states that "associative relationships" in discourse "are subject to the 'nature' of relationships and the individual, which allows for the creation of as many associations as possible based on the subject's knowledge, experience, context, individual and social configuration of meaning, and memory" (Sánchez, 2018, p. 9). This implies a strong pragmatic sense in that meanings in speech are closely linked to social relations between speakers. In this regard, he states that:

The elaboration of the resemanticised version has to do with the way in which social groups or citizens who constitute a social group, who operate in the same context and in the same everyday life, have their own meaning for words or referents or things and sustain it through acts and practice. (Sánchez, 2018, pp. 8-9)

That said, there are words and phrases that represent linguistic codes that can only be deciphered by a group unified by geographical, social and/or cultural issues. Therefore, two concepts are raised here: *sociolect* and *familect*. With regard to sociolect, Milagros Fernández (1997), in "On the notions of sociolect, *synstraty*, sociolinguistic variation, *diastraty* and related issues", says that it is "the methodologically justified (statistically evidenced) demonstration of the speech community: the group, the community is socially interesting because linguistic uses correlate with social factors" (p. 164). According to this conception, it refers more to a method of collecting data than to a theoretical concept applicable to a group of people, and is therefore used for quantitative questions.

In contrast, Albert Álvarez González (2006), in *La variación lingüística y el léxico*, mentions the following definitions: according to Bernard Pottier, an author cited by the researcher, sociolect is the "social dialect or social variety of a language" (p. 59); and according to George Mounin, it is "a variety of language specific to a social group, also called a social dialect" (p. 33). In this sense, dialect would constitute linguistic variation and, specifically, sociolect would be the form that addresses social spheres (which would result in the sociolinguistic factors and ethno-sociocultural imaginaries that López refers to, applied to names).

At this point, we can talk about a familect, understood as "a linguistic variety shared by a group of speakers who are members of the same family" (Benítez-Berraco and Felú-Arquiola, 2023, p. 6), generated from children's speech, misunderstandings or slips of the tongue and/or neologisms.

In this regard, Benítez-Berraco and Felú-Arquiola (2023), in "From typological variation to intralinguistic variation (and vice versa): the case of familectos", point out that the structures of familectos could be due to two functions: an identifying function, whose purpose is to reinforce family ties, and a playful function that is related to the first (p. 9). They also criticise the fact that the study of familectos is more appreciated in discourse analysis and ignored by variationist sociolinguistics (Benítez-Berraco and Felú-Arquiola).

In the process of resemantisation, proper names change their meaning and come to denote not a person, but issues associated with that person, understood only in a private sphere: the family. It is established that the proper names presented in the tables of contents² make up the intimate lexicon, sociolect or familect of the informants (a distinction will be made as to when each concept applies depending on the group). An important factor in this research is age, for reasons discussed below.

Data from interviews and surveys

Table 2. Meanings of proper names according to their function in group A.

Word	Phrase(s)	Referential function	Pragmatic function
Beruco	You've already <i>berucated</i> yourself.	Known in the region where he was from, he felt he was the best at everything.	To feel special, important or proud.
Chandi	Ah, <i>Chandi</i> Don't be <i>Chandi</i> You are very <i>Chandi</i>	Known in the region for exaggerating stories.	Exaggerated, liar.
Chulenque	You're already like <i>Chulenque</i> Don't be a <i>Chulenque</i>	Well-known in the region, an introverted young man who never married.	A single person who will never marry.

² See Tables 2 and 3.

Chuy	Yes, <i>Chuy</i>	A well-known figure who boasted about his future projects and dreams.	To avoid a fact that is known to be a lie. To give the slip.
Juan	You've already <i>blown it</i>	A family member who gets very angry.	To get angry.
Peña	Ah, <i>Peña</i>	A family acquaintance who insisted on doing a job and ended up doing it badly.	Doing something badly that you say you are good at.
Pompín	You've already <i>pompined</i> yourself	An acquaintance from the region who was vain, dreamy, thought he was the most handsome, 'the last refreshment in the desert'.	Feeling beautiful, perfect, incomparable.
Tabito	You're leaving, but like <i>Tabito</i>	Known in the region for walking very fast.	Walking fast.
Vico	Ah <i>Vico</i>	Well known in the region for being a liar.	Liar.

Note: Data obtained in November 2023, originally compiled for this article.

Source: Own work.

Table 3. Meanings of proper names according to their function in group B.

Word	Phrase(s)	Referential function	Pragmatic function
Cheli	Echar <i>Cheli</i>	A term from the region that referred to someone who changed the subject and confused the person they were talking to.	To suddenly change the subject.
Chonito	He's <i>Chonito</i> You're <i>Chonito</i> To throw <i>Chonito</i>	A member of the family who was a good person and people took advantage of him.	Being too kind.
Don David Doña Chuy	Echar <i>Don David</i> , <i>Doña Chuy</i>	A member of the family who always arrives early.	Arriving early to a place.
Flavia	You are <i>Flavia</i>	Member of the family. An acquaintance called her Flavia after a character in a novel who was scrupulous, delicate and non-conformist; so they gave her that nickname.	Someone who is delicate and fussy.
Florencio	Pure <i>Uncle Florencio</i>	A member of the family who talked about plans or goals, but in the end dismissed them by saying "pure bullshit".	Plans that will not be made, will not be fulfilled.
Gaby	<i>Gaby's mops</i> Echas <i>Gaby</i>	A well-known figure in the region who mopped quickly and in one go, from side to side.	Mopping quickly, from one side of the room to the other.

Germán	Echas <i>Germán</i>	A member of the family who was spoiled as a child and felt ashamed.	Snitched on, ratted out.
Juana	I am <i>Juana</i> You are <i>Juana</i> To kick out <i>Juana</i>	Known in the region for living in a house where murderers, thieves, and people wanted by the government were hidden, which is why her house was wallpapered.	To keep the house dark.
Juat	<i>Juat</i>	A member of the family who spoke with a lisp.	When someone is sulking.
Julio	Hey, what's up, <i>Julio</i> ?	A well-known figure in the region who questioned irrelevant and decontextualised things, such as how many grains of rice would fit in a tractor.	Absurd
Lourdes	Hey, what about <i>Lourdes</i> ?	A woman from the region who believed her daughter was well-behaved, when in fact she was quite the opposite.	Naive, to believe something that is not true.
Lupito	Go away, <i>Lupito</i> / Come on, <i>Lupito</i>	A well-known figure in the region who drank heavily, insisted on staying and was slow to leave.	To be annoying, stubborn.

Marisela	Echar <i>Marisela</i>	A woman known in the region for cheating on her husband, who once warned a family member not to say anything when he saw her with another man.	Wanting to hide something.
Nenura	Hey, <i>Nenura</i>	A family member who was nicknamed "Nenura" because he pronounced the letter "n" when he spoke.	Way of speaking.
Papi	You're <i>Daddy</i>	Well known in the region.	Referring to the way he walked and his body. Crooked.
César	<i>César</i>	A boy who walked with his knees turned inwards and called his father "Daddy", a term associated with wealthy families. "The child dressed like a rich person."	A person who looks rich.
Vaude	You're doing well, <i>Vaude</i> .	A member of the family who is called Vaude because of his resemblance to a lady with dry, yellowish lips when he is drunk.	To be drunk or hungover.
Vicky	Throw <i>Vicky</i>	A member of the family who claimed to be going somewhere but ended up	Backing out.

	not going for various reasons.	Forgetting something and going back for it.
	He would forget something when he left and then return.	Not accepting things out of pride.
	She didn't like to take things that people offered her and would accept them depending on who they came from: if it was someone poorer, she would take them, but if it was someone wealthier, it was like an insult to her for being poorer.	

Notes: Data obtained in November 2023, originally compiled for this article.

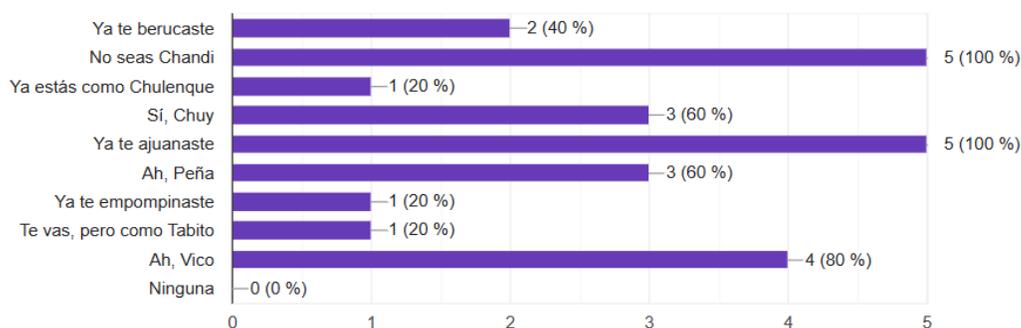
Source: Own work.

Figure 1.

Recognition of phrases by speakers in group A.

Question 1: *Have you heard these phrases?*

5 respuestas



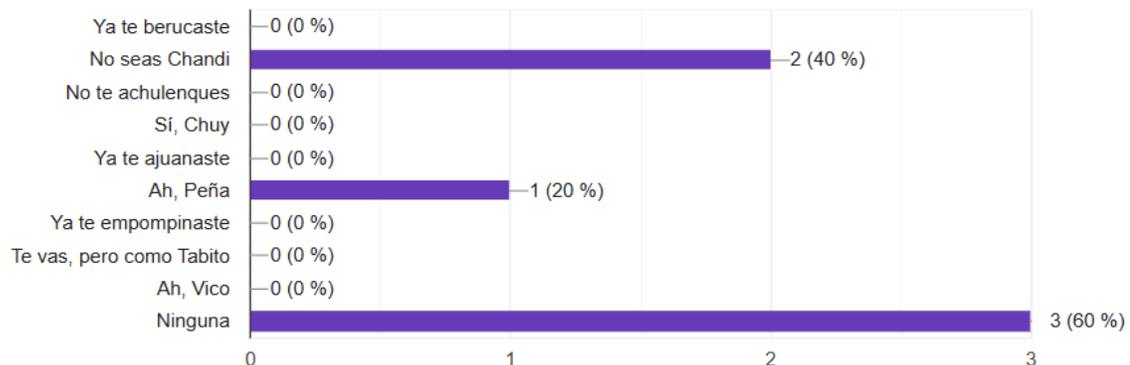
Note: The survey was conducted using Google Forms. The figure is a screenshot of the results, originally created for this article.

Source: Own work.

Figure 2.

Frequency of use by speakers in group A.
Question 2: *Which phrases do you use?*

5 respuestas



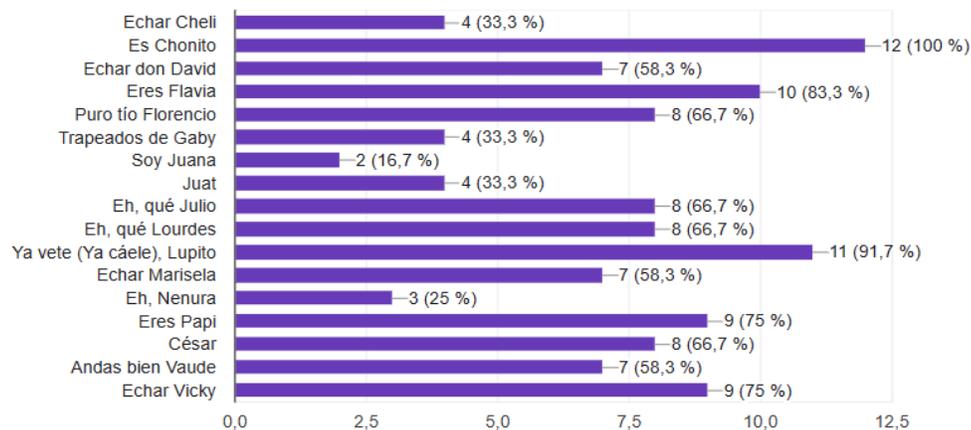
Note: The survey was conducted using *Google Forms*. The figure is a screenshot of the results, originally created for this article.

Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 3.

Recognition of the phrases by speakers in group B.
Question 1: *Have you heard these phrases?*

12 respuestas



Note: The survey was conducted using *Google Forms*. The figure is a screenshot of the results, originally created for this article.

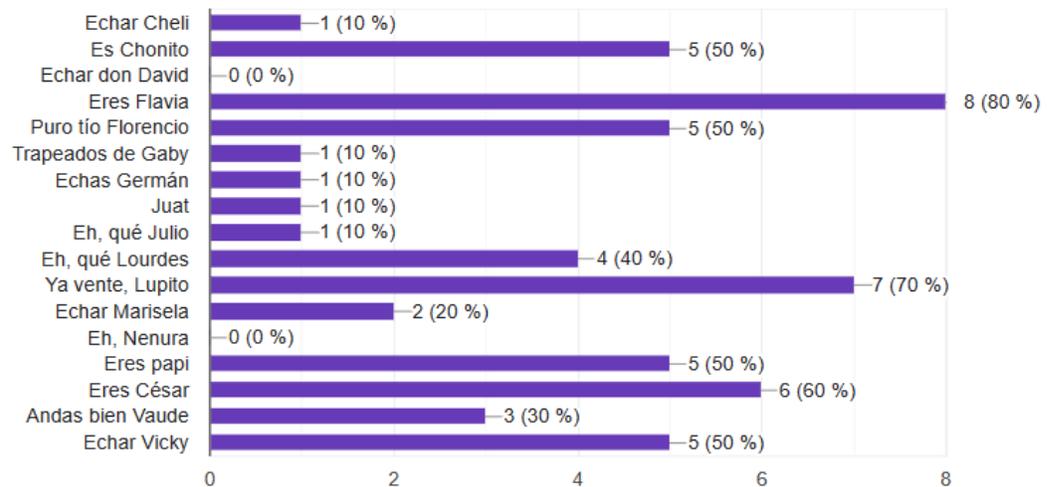
Source: Own work.

Figure 4

Frequency of use by speakers in group B.

Question 2: Which phrases do you use?

10 respuestas



Note: The survey was conducted using Google Forms. The figure is a screenshot of the results, originally created for this article.

Source: Own elaboration.

Data analysis

Firstly, the proper names within the phrases "³ " refer to people who are known in the region or members of the immediate family. In their *referential function*, they allude to the bearer and issues associated with them (situations, behaviours, qualities, actions). They then take on a *pragmatic function* when they form part of a phrase commonly used by the family, and in this way, the associative meaning becomes isolated from its bearer.

In group A, some of the names or nicknames are verbalised, as in the cases of *Beruco-berucar*, *Chulunque-achulencar*, *Juan-ajuanar* and *Pompín-empompinar*. Except for these, most remain

³ Benítez-Berraco and Felú-Arquiola (2023) propose that familectos could be revealed through esoteric structures of the language, where, for example, at the semantic level, they express that esoteric languages have "less semantic compositionality (including a higher frequency of idioms and idiomatic expressions, with less semantic transparency)" (p. 5). This lack of transparency is revealed in proper names within sentences, whose decoding depends on the intimacy of the community (the degree of belonging to a group).

unchanged. In their pragmatic function, they are used to refer to the behaviours or qualities, actions or situations of their bearers. Behaviours include: *Beruco*, *Chandi*, *Chuy*, *Juan*, *Pompín* and *Vico*; actions include *Tabito* to say that he walked and walks fast; and situations include *Peña* (linked to an anecdote about the individual) and *Chulenque* (whose marital status was single). According to the interviews, when asked about their use (the context of their use), they said that it was closely linked to the family and their place of origin.

It is important to note that the informants in group A resided in La Laguna, Coahuila. In the late 1990s, the couple moved to Moyahua and later to Juchipila, municipalities belonging to Zacatecas, where they currently reside. In this sense, when they left their place of origin, expressions such as "no seas *Chandi*" were not understandable in their new sociocultural and demographic context, as they referred to people from the La Laguna region. One of the informants said that "these are phrases that I have only heard on the ranch" ("the ranch" refers to the La Partida ejido), and another informant said that these are not things they would say at work, for example. Therefore, this resemantisation occurs in an "exclusive" group that is heavily dependent on its geographical location. Thus, this variation belongs to a *sociolect*.

The names or nicknames from group B remain unchanged. Instead of verbalising, the adjectival structure is established with the verbs *ser/estar* and *estar* (the best example is the case of *Chonito* in Table 3 in the appendix). The names or nicknames that refer to behaviours or qualities are: *Chonito*, *Flavia*, *Florencio*, *Germán*, *Julio*, *Lourdes*, *Marisela*, *Nenura* (related to her way of speaking), *Papi* (related to his body posture) and *Vicky* (the name that has more than one *pragmatic function*); actions include *Cheli*, *Don David*, *Gaby*, *Marisela*; and states or situations such as *Juana* (related to her home), *Juat* (related to being ill) and *Vaude*. There is one exception that fully describes someone's appearance, which is *César*.

The informants in group B live on farms and in towns relatively close to La Barranca; they also meet frequently and maintain contact with their families. When asked about the context in which they use these phrases, they mentioned that they are "only among family," as many of the expressions refer to people outside the family and are used to criticise them in a mocking way (previously mentioned as *carrilla*). Thus, it is determined that proper names are part of the lexicon of a *familect*, as they are limited to a certain group: a family.

Among the social factors, the informants relate the context of their use to trust and the type of relationship with their interlocutor. In this regard, López, in his article, recovers the concept of the "name threshold" contributed by Fabre, which consists of the idea that "there is a continuum between proper names and common nouns, whereby it is possible to move from one category to another without changing their nature" (López, 2014, p. 73). He also mentions, quoting Herbert, that processes of *desemantisation* occur in language, whereby a common noun becomes a proper noun. This means that when they are used in speech, the inherent senses are reactivated and become afferent, which is why a common noun such as school becomes a proper noun when we say "you are going to arrive at The School", as it designates an individual (or place in this example) known to the interlocutors in a certain context (Hébert, 2004; cited in López, 2014, p.74).

By virtue of this, I can affirm that the opposite occurs in the resemantisation of these names. Proper nouns go from being referential to being nouns: they become somewhat detached from their bearer, although those who knew or know them do not separate them completely from their bearer, but rather they become virtualised. Because of this, they cross the *threshold of the name* to no longer refer to the bearer but to a particular action, behaviour or situation (whose origin does indeed come from its bearer).

However, within the phrases there is a strong negative semantic charge, not in a pejorative sense, but rather for the purpose of mockery, as there are no situations where flattery is sought. The main purpose within the enunciation of these phrases is their playful meaning. In the case of "echar don David" in Table 3, a positive quality can be observed, but the intention is critical, laden with humour to refer to situations where one arrives "too" early at a place.

Results of the analysis

Based on the context, the interlocutors, and the meaning given to proper names within the phrases, it can be concluded that this phenomenon of resemantisation is a product of social practices and the linguistic creativity that has a place in the family, where coexistence, trust, and a sense of community prevail.

In the case of group A, this sociolect becomes a familect when they separate from their community to, in a way, form a new one. This is why, when their family expands with their children and their children's partners, the phrases remain in use. One of the informants in this group said that

she uses these phrases with her daughter-in-law because there is coexistence and trust. Due to their motivation, the phrases are linked to what was referred to as *teasing* and humorous criticism (the *playful function* proposed by Benítez-Berraco and Felú-Arquiolas) towards a person, but especially the latter. For this reason, the sense of belonging is important.

In the case of group B, it is clear that this is a familect and, as a second finding, that it is a lexical inheritance. According to Lara (2016), in *Lexical Heritage of Mexican Spanish*, the lexicon reflects the experiences of the world. This baggage does not come from a social convention (except in scientific vocabulary), but from a coinage by its speakers through use. When used, meanings are preserved, changed, or lost (pp. 7-8). With the recurrent use of these phrases, the meaning of the names is preserved and inherited, even though younger speakers do not have direct information about the bearer.

In the survey conducted⁴ among 12 members of the family in group B⁵, 12 out of 17 phrases received more than 50% affirmative responses as to whether they had heard them; 7 out of 17 phrases were used 50% or more of the time⁶. Compared to the ages of the informants, who range from 40 to 60 years old, they represent the direct descendants, their children. With this, the meaning of proper names in their *referential function* is lost to reside solely in their *pragmatic function*. It is verified that names become part of the lexicon at another level, where family tradition resides. On the other hand, in group A, we cannot speak of lexical inheritance, since most of their descendants do not use these phrases (there are only two exceptions, who use one or two), but they continue to be used according to the terms of the familect (those from La Laguna who continue to use them in private), understood to a large extent by all its members⁷, since 5 out of 9 phrases score over 60% in the first question and at least some have heard the other 4.

Finally, it should be added that there are phrases whose meaning is linked to a name, the person who said them. For example, from group A, the following stood out: "As *Gracia* said, I became suspicious" (the woman replaced *satisfied* with *suspicious*, a comparison based on sound that is

⁴ They consisted of three questions: 1) Have you heard these phrases? 2) Which ones do you use? and 3) How old are you?

⁵ Two generations: one aged 11 to 22 and the other aged 26 to 32.

⁶ See Figures 3 and 4 in the section Interview and survey data.

⁷ See Figures 1 and 2 in the section Interview and survey data.

Five members, aged 16 to 25, comprising four children of a married couple and the partner of one of them.

considered funny); "A poco uy, said *Guillo*" to take a challenging stance and express that one is not afraid of something; and "ta cabrón, said *María*" to refer to difficult situations. Thus, the person's name is used to allude to the phrase itself and its pragmatic meaning. From group B came "¿Qué quieres, *Pedro*?" (What do you want, Pedro?), used when someone gets hit and hides their pain. The semantic meaning of the phrases is related to the name and they become part of everyday use within the family or region, functioning as "famous" phrases that could potentially spread through the mass media and consolidate variants of speech. Also noteworthy in group A is the verb *echar*, which is conjugated with the name and is common in most phrases, raising questions about the reasons for this phenomenon. These issues remain pending for further research.

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