YO SOY DE P FKN R: MAINSTREAM REGGAETON ARTISTS' USE OF CODA [L] AS A RACIOLINGUISTIC MARKER

Derrek Powell

University of Texas at Austin

ABSTRACT. Based in a sociophonetic analysis of lyrics performed by eight male Reggaeton artists of Puerto Rican origin, this study combines raciolinguistic and variationist frameworks to examine the frequency of occurrence and underlying linguistic, musicological, and poetic factors conditioning the distribution of the lateral variant of syllable- and word-final alveolar tap /ɾ/. Given that this trait is regarded as a distinctive characteristic of Puerto Rican Spanish capable of indexing in-group membership alongside positive assessments of Puerto Rican national identity, the study explores the implementation of this feature in popular performances of Puerto Ricanness in the context of global Latin Urban Music (Delgado Díaz *et al.* 2021, Medina Rivera 1997, Valentín Márquez 2015).The results show that lateralization is more frequently used by contemporary *reggaetoneros* like Bad Bunny and Ozuna, whose professional careers began in an era in which Reggaeton enjoyed global accessibility, contrasted to the pioneering artists of the genre such as Daddy Yankee and Nicky Jam, who use the variant significantly less frequently. Additionally, the results suggest that, while the most recent tracks performed by newer artists exhibit the highest rates of occurrence, the inverse is true for artists whose careers began in the early 2000s before the global consumption of Reggaeton, who are documented as *decreasing* use of [l] in what is interpreted as an attempt to distinguish their works from younger performers. This work contributes to the growing literature regarding the linguistic construction of performative identities permeating the popular music industry, offering insight into the racialization of [l] as a distinct Puerto Rican feature relative to expressions of ethnonational pride.

Keywords: Puerto Rican Spanish, Variationist Sociolinguistics, Lateralization, Raciolinguistics, Performativity, Reggaeton

RESUMEN. Basándose en un análisis sociofonético de letras cantadas por ocho reguetoneros puertorriqueños, este estudio combina metodologías raciolingüísticas y variacionistas para examinar la distribución y los factores lingüísticos, musicológicos y poéticos que condicionan a la distribución de la variante lateral del vibrante alveolar singular /ɾ/. Dado que este rasgo se considera una característica distintiva del español puertorriqueño que puede indexar membresía a la comunidad puertorriqueña junto a tasaciones positivas de la identidad nacional de Puerto Rico, este estudio explora su implementación en presentaciones populares de la puertorriqueñidad en el contexto musical del Urbano Latino global (Delgado Díaz et al 2021, Medina Rivera 1997, Valentín Márquez 2015). Los resultados demuestran que la lateralización se usa más frecuentemente por reguetoneros contemporáneos como Bad Bunny y Ozuna quienes empezaron sus carreras en una época en la que el Reggaetón goza accesibilidad global contrastado a artistas pioneros como Daddy Yankee y Nicky Jam, quienes implementan menos frecuentemente la variante. Además, aunque las canciones más recientes presentadas por reguetoneros nuevos exhiben el mayor uso de [l], resulta lo opuesto cuando se observa las tendencias de los músicos quienes empezaron sus carreras antes del consumo global del Reggaetón, quienes actualmente *disminuyen* el uso de la variante. Se interpreta este resultado tentativamente por parte de los artistas veteranos como un

intento de distinguirse de artistas contemporáneos. Sobre todo, este trabajo contribuye a la literatura relativo a la construcción lingüística de las identidades performativas permeando la industria de la música popular y ofrece una percepción adicional con respeto a expresiones del orgullo etnonacional y la racialización de la [l] como rasgo distinguible del español puertorriqueño.

Palabras clave: español puertorriqueño, sociolingüística variacionista, lateralización, raciolingüística, performatividad, reggaetón

1. Introduction

On February 29th, 2020, the Puerto Rican Reggaeton superstar Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio, known professionally as Bad Bunny, released his second solo-studio album titled *YHLQMDLG* (an acronym representing "*yo hago lo que me dé la gana*" (translation: I do what I want). The album features 20 total tracks, consisting of solo performances and collaborations with some of the biggest names of Reggaeton, including Daddy Yankee and Anuel AA, and has enjoyed significant commercial success; Martínez Ocasio won his first Latin Grammy award in 2021 for Best Latin Urban album (grammy.com). Of particular interest is track 18, titled "P FKN R", featuring Kendo Kaponi and Arcángel. Bad Bunny and his collaborators lyrically assert an artistic superiority by deploying a presentation of streetwise origins and credibility locally contextualized within Puerto Rico. Throughout the song's verses one cannot help but notice the emphatic use of multi-vibrant alveolar trills when producing "Puerto Rico" (i.e. "*esto es Puerto Rico* [ˈpwelto ˈriko] *lugar de respeto y se escribe con* 'r'" translation: this is Puerto Rico, a place of respect, and it's written with 'r'"). The stark contrast between rhotic and liquid consonants paired with the lyrical content asserting Puerto Rican superiority exemplifies an overt commentary on the stigmatization of lambdacism for coda /ɾ/ (Valentín Márquez 2015:328) and subsequent mockery of this variant by speakers of non-Puerto Rican origins via an exaggeration of the productivity of [l], which does not occur in intervocalic contexts (i.e., "*¿tú eres de **Puelto Lico**?*," see Medina-Rivera 1999). In essence, the song denounces negative evaluations of Puerto Rican Spanish (PRS) and by extension, Puerto Rico as a geopolitical and cultural entity.

Of interest to the researcher is the connection between presentations of Puerto Rican identity and the use of [l] as related to stigma in the context of the global Latin Urban music enterprise. Linguists and speakers of PRS alike recognize the stigma ascribed to [l], often characterizing the variant as incorrect. Despite this stigma, [l] is regarded as one of many distinctive dialectal features of Caribbean (Puerto Rican) Spanish utilized in performances of ethnonational identity. Given that asserting a localized (authentic) racioethnic identity is an essential practice in Hip-Hop based music performances (Androutsopoulos & Scholz, 2003; Cutler, 2003; Pennycook, 2007), the present study examines the frequency of occurrence and underlying conditioning factors governing the distribution of [l] for coda /ɾ/ in a corpus of PRS music performed by mainstream Latin Urban artists. By pairing raciolinguistic conceptual frameworks with variationist methodologies, this work tracks the distribution of [l] along a chronology of Reggaeton's international accessibility. The results are suggestive that the apparent increase in [l] realizations in mainstream Reggaeton may constitute a case of covert prestige coming to be assigned to stigmatized (Puerto Rican) dialectal features within the international Latin Urban musical collective. Moreover, the findings provide insight to the linguistic construction and performance of mainstream

Puerto Rican Reggaeton and the marking of artists and their works as authentically *boricua*[1] in global musical contexts.

2. The Reggaeton Context

2.1 Defining Reggaeton

Latin Urban, or *urbano* music, is a term that describes the various genres constituting the Pan-Latin urban music collective, including Reggaeton, Rap in Spanish, Latin Trap, etc. In popular and colloquial discourse, artists and consumers alike use the term *Reggaetón* to refer to *urbano* music as a collective rather than reserving the term exclusively for the Puerto Rican Hip-Hop-dancehall underground fusion. This is most likely because Puerto Rican Reggaeton is the genre that paved the way for the global accessibility and success of Latin Urban music in the present (see below). Although *urbano* artists like Daddy Yankee, Bad Bunny, and J Balvin typically perform works that could be classified as distinct subgenres depending on primary musical influences (i.e., *popetón*, *trapetón*, see Caramanica 2022), these sources are seldom integrated in isolation and thus make classifying *urbano* works as representations of distinct subsets of the genre a daunting task. Therefore, this study does not attempt to distinguish or control for subgenre boundaries and influences within Latin Urban music, focusing instead on mediated performances of Puerto Ricanness within the *urbano* collective.

It should be noted that I distinguish between *urbano* music as a Pan-Latin musical collective and localized Reggaeton, reserving the latter term to refer explicitly to Puerto Rican productions. In what follows, my aim is not to provide an in-depth historic account of the trajectory of Reggaeton, but rather to draw attention to a period when Reggaeton was regarded as detached from Puerto Rican culture. Additionally, I intend to highlight Reggaeton as a space for racioethnic identity negotiations relative to the categories (Black), (Puerto Rican), and (Latinx).

2.2 Racializing Reggaeton

The dominant origin narrative situates Reggaeton in the crossroads between Afro-Panamanian *reggae en español*, Jamaican dancehall (most notably the incorporation of the *dembow* rhythm, see Marshall 2009), and U.S.-based Hip-Hop first produced by urban Puerto Rican DJs (i.e., DJ Nelson) in the underground scene of the working-class *caseríos* (housing projects) of San Juan without the support of major record labels (Rivera-Rideau 2015). While dancehall and reggae may be the dominant musical influences of Reggaeton (Romero Joseph 2009; Rivera-Rideau 2015), it is the direct connection to "foreign" (U.S.) rap and the racist entrenchments of vulgarity projected onto Hip-Hop culture that motivated the initial detachment of Reggaeton from Puerto Rican culture (Pennycook 2007: 85; Rivera 2009).

Rap first made its way to Puerto Rico from New York via the relationships established between African Americans and racially subjugated *Nuyoricans* based in experiences of

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[1] From the Taíno name of the island *Boriken,* meaning a person with Puerto Rican heritage (see Sánchez Korrol 1999).

racial inequality and socioeconomic domination.[2] Hip-Hop practices, ranging from improvisation, performativity, and identity negotiation,[3] influenced by racial sensibilities emergent from connections to the Black experience in New York (Flores 2009; Marshall 2009), were thus adopted to address the unique issues faced by impoverished Afro-Puerto Rican and Dominican youth, providing musicians with a platform to bring issues of social and racial inequalities to the foreground. The absence of these themes in other forms of popular music (Flores 2009: 164) proved enticing to the youth, promoting the widespread popularity of Reggaeton throughout the *caseríos*; however, the elite saw the critical discourse of early Reggaeton lyrics as potentially destabilizing to the definition of a raceless Puerto Rican identity, as many focused on the socioracial inequalities experienced by Afro-Puerto Ricans (Rivera-Rideau 2015).

As scholars have pointed out, despite pervasive notions of racial equality, phenotypically darker Puerto Ricans disproportionately occupy the base of the socioeconomic pyramid as "Puerto Ricans have long denied, ignored, or rejected people and culture considered 'too black'" (Pacini-Hernández 2009: 137), thus facilitating the synchronization of class and racial categories (Rivera 2009). While the *caserío* provided Puerto Ricans with a local space to negotiate racial identities and critique dominant ideologies of racial democracy via musical expression, it also became the locus of racial domination disguised as government intervention and surveillance in the interest of crime reduction.

In 1993, the Puerto Rican government launched the state-sponsored anti-crime initiative *Mano Dura Contra el Crimen* (henceforth MD), identifying the *caseríos* as ground-zero for criminal activity. This campaign, building on existing racialized images of the *caseríos*, sought to decrease criminality by eliminating working-class shantytowns via Police raids, replacing the residents' "primitive values" with modern, appropriate alternates. Although the media outlets accredited Police raids for apparent decreases in criminal activity (Montalvo-Barbot 1997: 541), many saw MD as little more than a political front designed to assert power and racial subjugation over predominately Black communities, successfully promoting perceptions of these areas as dangerous, chaotic zones, whose residents were poorly educated, manner-less, and with misplaced values (Rivera-Rideau 2015). Ultimately, the implications of MD resulted in the synthesis of race and criminality; working-class spaces were positioned as *criminal* and *vulgar* in stark comparison to the surrounding middle- and upper-class areas that were thus racialized as safe, high-cultured, and white (Dinzey-Flores 2007).[4]

As the underground music scene was centralized in the *caseríos*, Reggaeton was also criminalized and racialized, resulting in political agendas in the interest of controlling the distribution of the genre on the grounds that the violent, hyper-masculine images and suggestive lyrics of this *música negra* would corrupt the youth and turn them towards a life

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[2] The affinities between African Americans and Puerto Ricans can be observed in the emergence of hybrid cultural practices, with musical collaborations being a common form for observing hybridization (i.e., *Latin Soul*, see Flores 2000).

[3] Pennycook (2007: chapter 4) offers an adept discussion of the relationship between Hip-Hop performances and performativity.

[4] Regarding discussions of the use of codewords designed to signal values associated with blackness and whiteness while avoiding overt racial commentary, see Bonilla-Silva's (2003) discussion on color-blind racism.

of crime (Rivera 2009: 115).[5] This combative relationship between the social elites and the Reggaeton artists (henceforth *reggaetoneros*) of the *caseríos* did not persist past the early 2000s; by 2003, Reggaeton had been publicly accepted into the mainstream music market, and record sales skyrocketed to make up one third of the ten most popular albums in Puerto Rico (Negrón-Muntaner & Rivera 2007: 37). Following the local commercial success of Reggaeton, critics who had previously openly opposed the genre began to endorse and accept Reggaeton in what some have called a political attempt to appeal to youth voters (Rivera-Rideau 2015). Put differently, Reggaeton began to transition from a marginal artistic form of expression associated with foreign images of blackness to a cultural product proudly recognized and embraced as representatively and collectively Puerto Rican.

When addressing the transitional distribution and accessibility of Reggaeton in both local and international contexts in the early 2000s, two artists are typically regarded in the literature as the central driving forces who brought Reggaeton into the mainstream: Tego Calderón and Daddy Yankee. Tego Calderón, a *reggaetonero* from working-class Santurce, is regarded as the artist who brought Reggaeton into the Puerto Rican mainstream. Despite similarities to other artists of his time, Calderón is popularly considered the quintessential *afro-reggaetonero* because of his performative incorporation of folkloric images of blackness, including elements of *Bomba* and a self-identification with *Loíza*,[6] a community east of San Juan colloquially recognized as the Black cultural hub of Puerto Rico. By incorporating elements of blackness claimed by the Puerto Rican collective into his presentation, rather than those common to U.S. Hip-Hop, Calderón's *negritud* was not automatically read as threatening to the dominant constructions of national Puerto Rican identity despite his lyrical content critiquing the contradictory nature of raceless ideologies in Puerto Rican society.[7] His sold-out 2003 performance at the Coliseo Roberto Clemente, which was attended by celebrities and civilians of all socioeconomic statuses, is considered symbolic of a new-found acceptance of Reggaeton in Puerto Rican society (Negrón-Muntaner & Rivera 2007).

Just as Tego Calderón is credited as the artist who brought Reggaeton into the mainstream on the island, Daddy Yankee is the artist regarded as having expanded this audience to North America and the international popular music scene, exposing Reggaeton to new processes of racialization. By 2005, the *dembow* characteristic of Reggaeton (Marshall 2009) had arrived in mainland U.S. media outlets via Yankee's song "Gasolina", quickly climbing the Billboard charts and gaining routine play on English-language radio and television in a time when "Latin" music was regarded as the hottest new musical commodity, commonly referred to as the *Latin Boom* (Albert & O'Neill 2015).[8] Marshall (2009: 19) states that although "Gasolina" is an exemplary product representing the long history of hybridization of sounds, people, and localized racial sensibilities that resulted in Reggaeton as an art form, this history was largely disregarded in U.S. media coverage,

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[5] For an in-depth account of the various government attempts to censor and limit Reggaeton consumption, see Rivera-Rideau (2015: chapter 2).

[6] Calderón's 2003 album *El Abayarde* exhibits tracks which deal explicitly with the juxtaposition of the Afro-Puerto Rican experience and notions of racial democracy and a collective mixed heritage.

[7] See Rivera-Rideau (2015: chapter 3) for an in-depth discussion of Tego Calderón's role in the transitory racialization of Reggaeton from a *música negra* to a *música boricua*.

[8] Artists such as Ricky Martin, Enrique Iglesias, and Shakira, who had already experienced success in their local industries, were releasing English-language albums and asserting their place in the U.S. and global pop music charts.

which treated the work as a novel discovery. Far more common was the presentation of "Gasolina" as solely a Puerto Rican innovation, often marketed reductively as a *Latin* construct, allowing for the packaging and marketing of Reggaeton as a musical revolution that would transform "Latin" music by blurring the distinctions between racialized Reggaeton as a performance of blackness, Puerto Ricanness, and *Latinidad* in the global music scene.[9]

The U.S.'s marketing of Reggaeton as a "Latin" genre promoted a change in the international framing of this performance art. No longer a *música negra* nor regarded as uniquely a Puerto Rican product or a hybrid expression of *caribeñidad*, Reggaeton transformed into a *hurban* (Hispanic Urban, see Pacini Hernández 2010) entity accessible to artists from all Latin American ethnonational backgrounds residing in the U.S. (Marshall 2009). This shift towards a *Música Latina* in the mainstream effectively opened the doors for Reggaeton (now regarded as a Pan-Latin genre) to become a site for expressions of *Latinidad*, as was the case with other popular Afro-Caribbean musical productions like the Cuban Son and Dominican Bachata (Rondón 2008; Sellers 2014). In the present, Reggaeton (or Latin Urban, to use the industry term as discussed above), is produced and performed by artists of various Hispanic,[10] Latin American,[11] and non-Latinx backgrounds,[12] with artists of Puerto Rican and Colombian ethnonational origins dominating the demographics. The question of localization (Pennycook 2007) is thus brought to the foreground: in a world where Reggaeton has become a space to index and negotiate performances of *Latinidad* rather than distinctly (Afro-)Puerto Ricanness, how are Puerto Rican *reggaetoneros* distinguishing their works from their competitors?

This work aims to engage in the conversation regarding localized raciolinguistic depictions of the mainstream *reggaetonero*, and forms part of a series of works in preparation that seek to identify the sociolinguistic distribution of PRS features as produced by Puerto Rican, Caribbean, and non-Caribbean/Spanish-speaking artists performing contemporary renditions of Reggaeton. Because Reggaeton is considered by many to be a distant cousin to the Hip-Hop nation (Romero Joseph 2009), compositions can be studied by applying frameworks that analyze Hip-Hop lyrics to inform on questions regarding the sociolinguistic and cultural settings of the artists. In this study, the intention is to show that rather than detached from Puerto Rican culture, Reggaeton now occupies a central space in Puerto Rican popular culture and serves as a space for artists to express ethnic pride through use of distinctive feature(s) of PRS. While speakers are most likely constructing their ethnonational identity via the co-occurrence of various lexical, syntactic, and phonological features of speech (i.e., coda /s/ deletion, velarization of onset alveolar trill), the present study choses to focus specifically on the implementation of [l] for coda /ɾ/ given the variant's widespread association with Puerto Rico.

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[9] See Rivera-Rideau (2015: chapter 5) for a detailed discussion of the relationship of "Gasolina" and the racialization of Reggaeton as a Latinx musical product.

[10] Spanish artists such as Lola Índigo and Rosalía have enjoyed commercial success in recent years, with the latter's album *El Mal Querer* winning the "Best Latin Urban/Alternative Album" award at the 62nd Latin Grammy ceremonies in 2020.

[11] Brazilian artist Anitta has had significant success performing Reggaeton in Spanish and producing Spanish-Portuguese bilingual collaborations with memorable artists such as J Balvin and Ozuna.

[12] There have been collaborations in the early 2010s between Puerto Rican and Romanian artists (i.e., Alexandra Stan). Additionally, in recent years there have been Korean Pop tracks that feature Puerto Rican *reggaetoneros* like Guaynaa sung both mono- and multilingually in Korean, English, and Spanish.

3. Studies on Hip-Hop Language

Hip-Hop linguistic performances typically align artists with the vernacular of their speech communities (Androutsopoulos & Scholz 2003); rappers, *reggaetoneros*, and the like are documented as orienting towards colloquial patterns of everyday speech to establish themselves as members of the community and to mark the experiences that make up their lyrical content as local and authentic (a practice known as "keepin' it real", see Cutler 2003; Pennycook 2007: 14). In international Hip-Hop contexts, implementing local linguistic practices is a strategy for artists to localize the content of their works and express marginal identity affiliations (Stæhr & Madsen 2015) while simultaneously adopting and hybridizing the performative norms of global Hip-Hop with the traditional/popular music of the community. This process of *glocalization* allows performers to thus connect with Hip-Hop theologies (see Schulz 2012) and adapt them to their local experiences (Pennycook 2007).[13]

In the context of Reggaeton, Rivera (2009: 114) emphasizes that underground artists took pride in being faithful to their everyday speech patterns in contrast to the language performed in mainstream popular music, which was closely monitored and edited to effectively neutralize artists' linguistic diversity in the interest of presenting a register that more closely reflects the "standard" dialect of Latin American Spanish (Marshall 2009). In other words, distinctive (and in many cases stigmatized) Caribbean features such as deletion of coda /s/ and variable /ɾ/ production were essentially erased, yet Reggaeton appears to have resisted these processes (see Powell, under review). In the present, *urbano* artists tend to perform in registers that utilize more vernacular features than other genres of music, theoretically in the interest of staying true to one's roots and/or aligning their performative personas with the urban experience, emphasizing distinctive, marked features of the speech of their respective communities to both assert group membership and localize their works within the *urbano* collective.

Given that song lyrics are not naturalistic spontaneous occurrences of language as artists reflect upon and edit their song content for extended periods of time prior to publication (Benthalia & Davies 2002: 192), linguistic variation as performed in popular music may be interpreted as a strategy employed by artists to send messages about who their performative persona is by aligning themselves with a local community (Coupland 2002, 2007; Duncan 2017; Picone 2002). For example, Powell (under review) found that coda /s/ deletion rates in popular Spanish-Caribbean music are conditioned by performative genre; frequency of sibilant deletion significantly increases in works promoted as *urbano* tracks (μ=77% SD=16.17 *n*=285) in comparison to those marketed as *tropical* (μ=10% SD=7.77 *n*=181). This pattern is interpreted as evidence of artists aligning themselves with more colloquial speech patterns like those spoken in the *caseríos* to give their performances a *callejero* (streetwise) quality. Given that Caribbean Spanish varieties typically reduce /s/ at near categorical rates (see Brown 2009; Brown & Brown 2012; Lipski 1995; Terrell 1977, 1979), to find such stark contrasts in production across genres highlights the indexical nature of sociophonetic variables in musicological contexts (D'Onofrio 2018; Eckert 2008). By studying the motivations for these premeditated choices and the function

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[13] Glocalization is understood as the processes by which artists simultaneously align their works with their local communities and the global collective that produces similar genres of music (i.e., *the Hip-Hop nation*, see Pennycook 2007: chapters 2 and 3).

of linguistic variation in public musical performances, linguists can gain insight into performers' sociolinguistic and cultural settings (Loureiro-Rodríguez 2017: 252; Loureiro-Rodríguez, Moyna & Robles 2018). This study thus aims to contribute to the scholarship concerned with the artistic means through which popular music artists linguistically encode their performative identities, in particular those identities which may relate to ethnonational categories.

4. Raciolinguistics and Puerto Rican /ɾ/

Performances of race and ethnicity are not uncommon in Hip-Hop (see Alim et al 2009; Alim, Lee & Carris 2010; Roth-Gordon 2009). Raciolinguistics (Flores & Rosa 2015), as theoretically grounded in processes of *racial formation*,[14] refers to the analytical framework utilized to address the intersection of race, ethnicity, and language. Understanding that racial identities are constantly (re)created within interactional contexts (see Bailey 2000; Bucholtz 1995), raciolinguistics seeks to answer questions about racialized features of the linguistic repertoire and their indexical relationship to different groups, as well as the ways in which subjects utilize these features in the construction and presentation of their own racioethnic identities (see Alim *et al.* 2016, García & Wei 2013). Through a raciolinguistic framework, scholars can investigate the ways in which subjects learn to "sound like a race" (Rosa 2019), or rather, to speak in a way which aligns themselves with those with whom they share a collective racioethnic identity.

Theoretically, all subjects socialized into racially structured societies are, to some degree, linguistically performing and defining their racioethnic identities daily (Fought 2006). Like all linguistic variables, raciolinguistic features are systematically structured and contextually specific. Speakers, as agentive subjects, can heighten or diminish features of their speech to adapt according to the context of an utterance, accomplish varying conversational goals (2006: 20; see Barrett 1999: 318), and align themselves with groups with whom they share a common identity (Eckert 2005, 2018). Successfully performing a racialized identity thus requires a functioning understanding of the community linguistic norms upon which evaluations of group membership are based (Fought 2006: 7). In interactions where boundaries of group membership are contested as a central part of the interactional context, ethnically marked features are typically heightened (Fought 2006: 13). The intercultural context of Latin Urban music represents such a setting.

One of the distinctive features of Caribbean varieties of Spanish used in performances of racioethnic identities is the variable articulation of the syllable- and word- final alveolar tap /ɾ/. Sociolinguists have identified multiple coda variants distributed at different rates of occurrence across national (and regional) boundaries, including standard alveolar tap *parte* [ˈpaɾte], lateralization [ˈpalte], aspiration [ˈpahte], gemination to the following consonant [ˈpatte], and elision realized as vocalic elongation [ˈpaːte] (Hualde 2005, Navarro Tomás 1948). While also present in varieties of Dominican and Cuban Spanish, [l] is often associated with speakers of PRS (Lipski 1994, 2011). Foundational scholarship conceptualized PRS coda liquid production as a binary process of neutralization between [l] and [ɾ] with acknowledgment of an intermediate or hybrid variant [ɹ] (Navarro Tomás 1948: 76). Advancements in acoustic analytical software reveal multiple approximate liquid and rhotic consonants, among these: an alveolar lateral flap, a retroflex approximate

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[14] *Racial formation* is described as the sociohistorical processes through which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed (see Omi & Winant 1994: 55).

[ɻ], and a bunched variant described as retroflex with lateral qualities (see Beaton 2015, Dauphinais Civitello 2018, Simonet *et al*. 2008). In comparison to [l], retroflex variants are not socially stigmatized and are present in several other Latin American dialects (Canfield 1981:3, Lipski 1994:222).

Scholarship attending to the attitudes surrounding lateralization assert that women present more negative feelings towards [l] than men (Emmanuelli, 2000; Valentín Márquez, 2007). Delgado Díaz *et. al* (2021: 148) found that participants associated lateral production with masculinity and *cacos,* an urbanized social group of young men who overtly identify with Reggaeton cultural practices and spaces. Regarding production and the social distribution of [l], sociolinguistic studies conducted on the island and in the diaspora offer conflicting results. López Morales (1983) found that, in San Juan, [l] was most frequently used by middle-aged male residents occurring in 34.6% of the total instances of /ɾ/. This result is reflected in both Prosper-Sánchez' (1995) study of speakers from the northwest who produce [l] at a rate of 43%, and Medina-Rivera's (1997) study of the eastern-central region of the island, whose speakers reportedly realize 30.8% of the /ɾ/ tokens as [l]. Regarding PRS spoken on the east-coast of the mainland U.S., Ma & Herasimchuck (1972) and Lamboy (2004) both report similar patterns of distribution with [l] occurring at a rate of 46% in New Jersey and 25% in New York City respectively. Contrastively, there is documentation of highland communities where the lateral variant is highly infrequent (realized in only 9.8% of all possible cases), and favored by female residents (see Holmquist 2003, 2004). In other cases, gender is not rendered a significant variable (Beaton 2015, Medina Rivera 1999, Ramos Pellicia 2007).

In interviews conducted by Valentín-Márquez (2015: 337-344) regarding self-identification and ethnonational identity, informants frequently referenced the persistent use of stigmatized variants of coda pronunciations as a core practice in constructing Puerto Ricanness, including reduction of /s/ *los gatos* [lo ˈgato], velarization of trills *carro* [ˈkaxo], and the use lambdacism for /ɾ/. Most of the participants considered [l] to index positive values of ethnonational identification while also recognizing the stigmas associated with this variant.[15] It is worth mentioning that the frequency of [l] realization is evidently impacted by conversational setting and audience. For example, Medina-Rivera (1999: 537) found that subjects were more likely to produce [l] in informal, in-group settings at a rate of 62.8%, in contrast to professional/public speaking environments in which use of [l] reduced to a mere 6.6%. This pattern is also evident when considering the relationship the interlocutor has to the speaker: subjects are attested as reducing [l] from 44.4% to 24.4% when interacting with an unknown conversational partner (Medina-Rivera 1999: 534). These patterns speak not only the awareness speakers have regarding the stigmatization of [l], but also to the indexical correlation [l] shares with Puerto Rican identity. Valentín-Márquez (2015: 343), utilizing Labovian terminology and referencing Medina-Rivera's

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[15] The stigmatization of Caribbean features is thought to be remnant of the Andalusian-Castilian contrast during the distribution of sociopolitical and economic powers throughout the Spanish conquest of the Americas. In essence, areas of greater importance to the empire saw higher influxes of speakers from central Spain whose Spanish was considered prestigious whereas areas like the Caribbean were conquered by speakers of the southern dialects whose features were stigmatized (see Canfield 1981; Penny 2000). The hierarchy continues to the present, and dialects and features of Spanish that more closely reflect the tendencies of speakers in central Spain remain prioritized.

(1997) classification, thus posits [l] as a raciolinguistic *marker* of Puerto Ricanness, rather than a sociolinguistic *indicator* of specific social categories.[16]

Across international popular music genres, there exists the normative tendency to use raciolinguistic markers to localize artists and their works within the global context (see Pennycook 2007). Moreover, the use of nonstandard features is essential to the construction of Hip-Hop personas (see Cutler 2003). As discussed in section 2.2, this practice appears to have carried over to Reggaeton given that it is artists' attested resistance to dialectal erasure via use of nonstandard, ethnically marked features like [l] that distinguishes the linguistic performance of Reggaeton from other Caribbean-based genres of popular Spanish-language music. However, one must recognize that this assertion describes the practices of *underground* artists. Reggaeton as a global genre of popular music has since undergone over the course of the last decade radical changes in terms of musicological style, esthetics, participant (performer) demographics, and audience attitudes (see Caramanica, 2022). The linguistic implications of this shift warrant inquiry as this apparent popularity may be aiding to undo the stigmatization of PRS features.

If Latin Urban music is conceptualized as a global collective, where participants must assert both a (Latinx) and a local identity, it stands to reason for artists of Puerto Rican origin to assert their racioethnic identities as (Puerto Rican) via frequent use of [l]. Consequently, artists by asserting local identities through use of [l] draw attention to the Caribbean (Puerto Rican) origins of the genre; use of [l] among other features may be employed to linguistically encode authentic, localized Puerto Ricanness into performances of Reggaeton (Bucholtz 2003) to distinguish works from renditions performed by artists of non-Caribbean origin (i.e., J Balvin, Karol G, Rosalía, etc.).

The linguistic construction of popular music performative identities is a strategy for artists to appeal to varying audiences and align themselves with specific genres (Duncan 2017). However, when the linguistic practices of a particular genre are racially marked, out-group subjects/performers can become *transracial* by adopting racialized features into their own performances (Alim 2016: 37-44; Roth-Gordon 2013) which brings critiques of racioethnic privilege and cultural appropriation under scrutiny. For example, Eberhardt & Freeman (2015) draw attention to the ways in which the white Australian rapper Iggy Azalea adopts features of African American language (AAL) in the presentation of her performative persona as a rapper. In the same sense, non-Puerto Rican *urbano* artists can align themselves more closely with Reggaeton's Caribbean origins by adopting core features of PRS, a tendency that has sparked academic inquiry and fan criticism (Martínez Kane & Papadoboulos 2021). While the implications of artistic racial malleability are fascinating and highly relevant to Reggaeton/Latin Urban scholarship, they extend beyond the scope of the current work. However, this phenomenon should not be ignored in intercultural popular music contexts like the *urbano* music scene, where attitudes regarding dialect prestige may be racialized.

This study aims to contribute to the conversation regarding the linguistic construction and performance of racioethnic identities within the Latin Urban collective by comparatively examining the use of [l] across a chronology of the expansion of mainstream Reggaeton into the global spotlight. Using variationist methodologies, the following sections will report on the distributed frequency of [l] realizations for coda /ɾ/ as produced

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[16] Markers differ from indicators in that the latter are conditioned only by social stratification, whereas the former are subject to both social and stylistic constraints (Labov 1972: 314).

by eight Puerto Rican *reggaetoneros* as well as the underlying linguistic, musicological, and poetic factors that plausibly condition this variation. The data set informing the results comes from works produced by both pioneering Reggaeton artists and those who are currently leading the charts to facilitate comparison across time and "styles" of Reggaeton (see below). By comparing the rates of [l] occurrence across these generations of artists, the results will also be able speak to any apparent shifts in usage that have occurred as the conditions for gaining fame as a *reggaetonero* have changed. Because younger *reggaetoneros* are having to establish themselves in a world where Reggaeton is considered a *Latin* genre of music, and there is significant competition from non-Puerto Rican artists, it is plausible that they may favor use of [l] to localize their works more than established artists whose racioethnic backgrounds are already regarded as common knowledge. Overall, the findings of this study provide further insight into the indexicality, stigmatization, and prestige of [l] in the global Latin Urban context.

5. Methodology

5.1 Data Collection

The data set for this study is taken from songs produced between 2000-2021 performed by eight mainstream male *reggaetoneros* of Puerto Rican origin:[17] *Anuel AA*, *Bad Bunny*, *Daddy Yankee*, *Don Omar*, *Nicky Jam*, *Ozuna*, *Rauw Alejandro*, and *Yandel*. Only the speech of male performers is analyzed to control for possible gender influences in production as detailed above (Labov 1990).[18] Two generations of artists were identified prior to participant selection: artists whose professional careers began in the 1990s (*Daddy Yankee*, *Don Omar*, *Nicky Jam*, *Yandel*, henceforth "first-generation"), and artists whose professional careers began in the early-mid 2010s (*Anuel AA*, *Bad Bunny*, *Ozuna*, *Rauw Alejandro*, henceforth "second-generation"). The artists selected to represent the first generation are those whose fame can be traced back to their first-hand experiences with Reggaeton in the underground preceding and following the *Mano Dura* initiatives. Additionally, these *leyendas* (legends) are considered largely responsible for the subsequent popularization and demarginalization of Reggaeton in both the local and international music scenes (see Rivera et al. 2009, Rivera-Rideau 2015) and are often referenced by contemporary artists as sources of inspiration (see Bad Bunny 2021). In contrast, the second-generation is composed of some of the most popular contemporary artists. The decision to include artists representative of two styles of Reggaeton allows for the possibility of comparatively examining the implementation of [l] applied in both *reggaetón de antes* (Reggaeton from before) and more contemporary styles of the genre.

In addition to tracking the use of [l] between two generations of artists, the songs selected for this study were structured along a timeline constructed to represent a chronology of Reggaeton's development and global expansion. This timeline also represents a theoretical increase in the potential need for asserting a Puerto Rican ethnonational identity, given the overt presence of equally popular artists of Latinx, non-

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[17] Despite being credited as the artist who brought Reggaeton into the Puerto Rican mainstream, tracks performed by Tego Calderón are not considered in this study as he has not released contemporary solo tracks since 2015.

[18] see Powell and Toribio (forthcoming) for a discussion on the performative nature of [l] as utilized by Ivy Queen, the quintessential *reggaetonera* and "Queen of Reggaeton".

Caribbean origins. Thus, three eras of production were identified to represent key moments in Reggaeton history prior to song selection. The first era, conceptualized here as the *Gasolina* era (2000-2012) represents the first years of Reggaeton in the mainstream on the island of Puerto Rico and in the international music scene. The second era, conceptualized here as the *La Familia* era (2013-2017), represents the influx of highly successful and internationally recognized artists of Colombian-origin such as Medellin natives J Balvin, Maluma, and Karol G, who have each gained rivaling international popularity contrasted to Puerto Rican artists. The third era, identified for the purposes of this study as the *Despacito* era (2018-2021), represents Reggaeton in its most popular, international, and accessible form following the historic and groundbreaking success of the Luis Fonsi and Daddy Yankee track "Despacito". I consequently randomly selected five tracks with release dates falling into each respective time frame from each artist's discography accessed via the artists' profiles on the music streaming platform Apple Music. In total the data set represented 5 hours and 36 minutes of music (*n*=100 songs) and was composed of fifteen songs for each first-generation artist (*n*=60) and ten songs for each second-generation artist (*n*=40) as the latter were not active performers during the early 2000s and thus have no songs representative of *reggaetón de antes*.

5.2 Coding for Quantitative Analysis

Following the identification of the data set, the lyrics for each selected track were extracted from online sources such as *letras.com* and *genius.com* and compiled into a single file organized by artist for token extraction. These lyrics were then checked for accuracy by listening to each track a total of three times. Songs were listened to two additional times to identify variable contexts. The researcher proceeded to listen to each track three final times to impressionistically code tokens as examples of [l], rhotics [r] [ɾ] and [ɹ], or a collective *reduced* category representing deletions and aspirations.[19] The total number of tokens in the data set is 1138. Following this step, the researcher selected a small sample representing 30% of the data set (30 songs, 330 tokens) for an interrater reliability comparison as non-native speakers of PRS may miss perceptual cues and classify tokens as laterals when [l] has not been produced (see Emmanuelli 2000). The lyrics for each track constituting this sample were first copied and cleared of any notes to avoid priming the reviewer. These files were subsequently reviewed by a native speaker of Puerto Rican Spanish from San Juan trained in variationist methods. The second coder followed the same steps as the researcher, listening to each track three times to code tokens as lateral, rhotic, or reduced. Following completion, each token was given a score of 1 if the marks across the two coders' data sets were identical, and a score of 0 if they differed. Out of 330 tokens, 319 were identically matched, producing a reliability score of 97%. The distribution of the variants as coded by the author is presented below in Table 1:

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[19]In the original research design the researcher attempted to isolate the vocals from the backing instrumentation of each track using version 3.0.0. of the audio editing software Audacity (Mazzoni & Dannenberg 2000) to subsequently open the edited audio files in Praat (Boersma & Weenink 2021) for a visual-acoustic confirmation of variant use based on formant structure following the procedures laid out in Powell (under review). However, despite the vocal isolation step producing a clearer spectrogram, the audio files exhibited a significant noise presence that inhibited a reliable visual identification of the presence of [l] across several tokens. Thus, following the advice of one of the reviewers, the decision was made to opt for an impressionistic coding paired with interrater reliability measures.

Table 1: Overall distribution of /ɾ/ variants by artist.

Generation	Artist	[ɾ]	[l]	[h ø]	Total
Gen. 1	Daddy Yankee	69	39	17	125
	Don Omar	89	44	20	153
	Nicky Jam	90	83	21	153
	Yandel	129	38	8	175
Gen. 2	Anuel AA	34	95	16	145
	Bad Bunny	47	47	3	97
	Ozuna	12	63	13	88
	Rauw Alejandro	66	84	8	158

The tokens were coded for a mixed-effects logistic regression conducted in the statistical software Rbrul (see Johnson 2009). Rbrul operates by calculating the probabilistic weight of effect of each independent variable on the application of the dependent variable and assigning significant predictors a factor weight. Those variables assigned a factor weight value greater than 0.500 favor the application of the dependent variable, while those values less than 0.500 disfavor application. Contrary to other statistical tools used in variationist methodologies (i.e., GoldVarb, see Sankoff & Tagliamonte 2018), Rbrul allows the researcher to code for continuous variables (i.e., age, speech rate) and random effects (i.e., speaker) in addition to the inclusion of fixed variables (Johnson 2009, Tagliamonte 2012). In addition to the dependent variable and the inclusion of *singer* as a random effect, the following independent variable factors acknowledged in the literature as plausibly conditioning variable production were included in the model.

- **Tempo** – Pennycook (2007: 88) acknowledges that studies concerning the linguistic nature of musical performances cannot ignore the musicological relationship between instrumentation and lyrical meter. Regarding Hip-Hop, Bailey (2017) describes this relationship as a process of layering: while the back track provides the base rhythm, the lyrics performed by the rapper add to the characteristic polyrhythmic beats (called *flow*) that make rap so attractive to listeners. Poetic meter structuring the lyrical content is thus shaped by the rhythm of the back track. Thus, the tempo of the back track can be thought of as providing the parameters within which the artist can explore the tempo of their vocals, though this measure does not directly inform on the vocal tempo in any given work. This relationship is operationalized by coding for the beats per minute (BPM) of each track. This measure (taken from *songbpm.com*) is included in the model as a continuous effect to explore the emergence of any patterns regarding tempo and [l] realization.

- **Following Phone** – Medina-Rivera (1996) and Valentín-Márquez (2015) show that lateralization is favored in preconsonantal contexts when the consonant is a stop and before pauses. Contrastively, [l] is disfavored before nasals, fricatives, and vowels. Pre-lateral (***sentir lo que siento*** [senˈti lo ke ˈsjento]) and pre-trill (***lucir ridículo*** [luˈsi riˈðikuˌlo]) tokens were excluded from the data collection step. Each token was coded according to the following phone categorized into three levels: Pre-stop (*pa' **comerte** bien* [pa koˈmelte βien]), a collective pre-consonantal/prevocalic level as these environments are documented as disfavoring [l] production (*el **amor** en*

*la **forma** correcta* [el aˈmoɾ en la ˈfoɾma koˈrekta]), and pre-pausal tokens. Pauses here are defined as the rests between the lines of a verse: All word-final tokens occurring in verse-final position were coded as pre-pausal.

- **Position in word** – Tokens were coded based on the position of the variable context in relation to the word as a whole. This distinguished word-internal (*no **importa** la bandera* [no imˈpolˌta la ˌβanˈdeɾa]) and word-final tokens (*como lo hicimos **ayer*** [komo lo iˈsimos aˈjel]). Studies have shown that word-final cases are more likely to feature [l] than word-internal /ɾ/ (Medina Rivera 1996; Ramos Pellicia 2020).

- **Morphological Content** – Word-final alveolar tap marks non-finite verb forms.The verb *perder* [pelˈd̪el], for example, features both lexical and affixal /ɾ/—the word-internal tap is part of the verb stem and carries no morphological meaning, but the word-final tap (alongside the thematic vowel /e/) signals the infinitive. Tokens were binarily coded regarding the morphological status of /ɾ/ as previous scholarship shows that infinitive suffix favors [l].

- **Syllabic Stress** – Tokens were binarily coded as either stressed or unstressed according to lexical-syllabic stress patterns; tokens like *color* [koˈlol] where primary stress falls on the syllable containing /ɾ/ are coded as stressed, whereas tokens where a variant of /ɾ/ is produced on syllables without primary stress *virtual* [biɾˈtwal] were coded as unstressed. In cases with multiple /ɾ/ such as *perversa* [ˌpelˈβelsa], each occurrence of /ɾ/ was coded as a separate token.

- **Rhyme Scheme (priming)** – Priming effects can condition variation in that speakers are more likely to produce a particular variant in combination and proximity with a similar structure; this is to say the likelihood of /ɾ/ being realized as a lateral should increase if [l] has recently been produced. However, this research has been restricted to naturalistic conversational data and may not impact edited utterances like song lyrics in the same fashion. Priming is operationalized thus as a tool to control for the probably poetic influence of rhyme scheme and alliteration (see Bradley 2017) as artists can use the lateral variant to rhyme words ending in /ɾ/ and /l/ in the construction of their lyrics.[20] Tokens were coded as primed if they occurred within two lines of a word containing syllable-final liquids to account for instances of both naturalistic and rhymical priming.

- **Generation** – Tokens were binarily coded according to the generation of the artist performing the lyrics (see section 5.1). Tokens produced by Daddy Yankee, Don Omar, Nicky Jam and Yandel were coded as *first-generation* in contrast to *second-generation* tokens produced by Anuel AA, Bad Bunny, Ozuna, and Rauw Alejandro. The age of the artists is not considered in this model because generation as coded here accounts for age. The first-generation artists are all in their early 40s with an average

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[20] Tego Calderón's 2003 track "Loíza" highlights how lateralization can facilitate rhyme schemes as he rhymes *pensar* [pen.sál] and disculpar [d̪i.cul.pál] with *racial* [ra.siál] and *mal* [mal].

age of 43yo (SD=2.4), while the second-generation artists are all in their late 20s/early 30s with an average age of 29yo (SD=0.8).

- **Timeline** – Each token was coded according to the year of production of the song in which they were performed divided into three levels (see section 5.1 above): songs from the *Gasolina* (2000-2012), the *La Familia* (2013-2017) and *Despacito* (2018-2021) eras of Reggaeton. This factor was included into the model to examine how each generation's patterns of [l] have changed alongside time as the demographics of Reggaeton become increasingly more global.

- **Topic** – Research has shown that discourse topic can influence variation (see Becker 2009; Reagan 2020; Zhang 2005). Regarding Reggaeton specifically, the results of Powell & Toribio (under review) suggest that [l] as performed by Ivy Queen has an artistic, performative quality, as they find that the frequency at which *La Diva* uses [l] is contextually specific relating to lyrical content. This suggests that [l] may have an artistic quality for the performers considered in the present work as well. To account for this possibility, each token was coded for the general theme of the verse contextualized within each song according to five levels identified while reviewing the lyrical accuracy of the works: 1) love and relationships; 2) sexual relations; 3) party culture and *perreo*, 4) artist's success and superiority; 5) other, including verses that speak to artist's streetwise credibility and those that describe the qualities embodied by *una mujer dura* (translation: a badass woman).

- **Word Type** – This work does not assert that artists index their racioethnic identities solely through use of a marked phonetic variable. To account for the probability that subjects index their racioethnic identities with a combination of dialectal features, this model includes this factor to distinguish standard words used in global Spanish from dialect specific words (i.e., *pichear, guillar*). This level includes integrated loan words from English (*janguear*), cases of semantic differences (*roncar* meaning "to talk shit about someone" and not "to snore"), and items whose referential meaning depicts a culturally specific practice (*party de marquesina*).

The data set was subsequently subjected to a series of mixed-effects regression analyses to identify which of the abovementioned independent variable factors influences the production of [l] for coda /ɾ/. As the independent variables represent a combination of (extra)linguistic constraints, including musicological structure and poetic devices, there are a few possible outcomes with each its own implications. Firstly, it is possible that Rbrul identifies only language-internal constraints (morphology, stress, following phone, etc.) as significant predictors, which would imply that the use of [l] is constant across time/artist generation and largely reflective of naturalistic use. Contrastively, Rbrul could identify only the literary factors (topic and rhyme scheme) as significant predictors implying that the choice to produce [l] is strictly artistic and thus warrants a closer examination using qualitative methods (see Powell & Toribio under review). Moreover, there exists the possibility that only the chronological factors show significance, which would suggest that the use of [l] has significantly changed alongside time and the patterns of the two

generations should thus be examined separately. The results of these series of analyses are presented in the following section.

6. Results

6.1 Distribution of the variants

The most present variant in the data set is a rhotic consonant [ɾ], which is produced in 47% (*n=538*) of the variable /ɾ/ contexts. The combined *reduced* category representing both aspirations and deletions is the most infrequently used variant, occurring in only 9% of the total cases (n=105) and decreasing over time in both the music of the first- and second-generation artists. For example, in the *Gasolina* era (2000-2012), first-generation artists produced 16% (*n=23*) of the total /ɾ/ instances as [ø], and that number decreases to 7% (*n=15*) by the *Despacito* (2018-2021) era. Overall, the lateral variant is the second most frequently produced variant in the data set, making up 43% (*n=495*) of the total token entries. This value falls within the range of attested production rates identified in previous studies (see section 4). While the descriptive statistics of the data set are in line with naturalistic patterns of [l] realization, a deeper examination of the variant's use reveals distinct patterns for each generation. As evident in Figure 1 below, [l] is used more frequently by second-generation artists. Second-generation works representing the *La Familia* era (2013-2017) show a rate of occurrence of 49% (*n=127*) in comparison to first-generation productions, which make use of [l] in only 34% (*n=95*) of the cases. Far more interesting is how these patterns diverge from one another alongside time. While the second-generation use of [l] has increased into the present literature (70%, *n=163*), the first-generation artists appear to diverge from their colleagues by *reducing* the quantity of their [l] realizations (20% *n=41*).

Figure 1: Distribution of variants by artist generation and year of production.
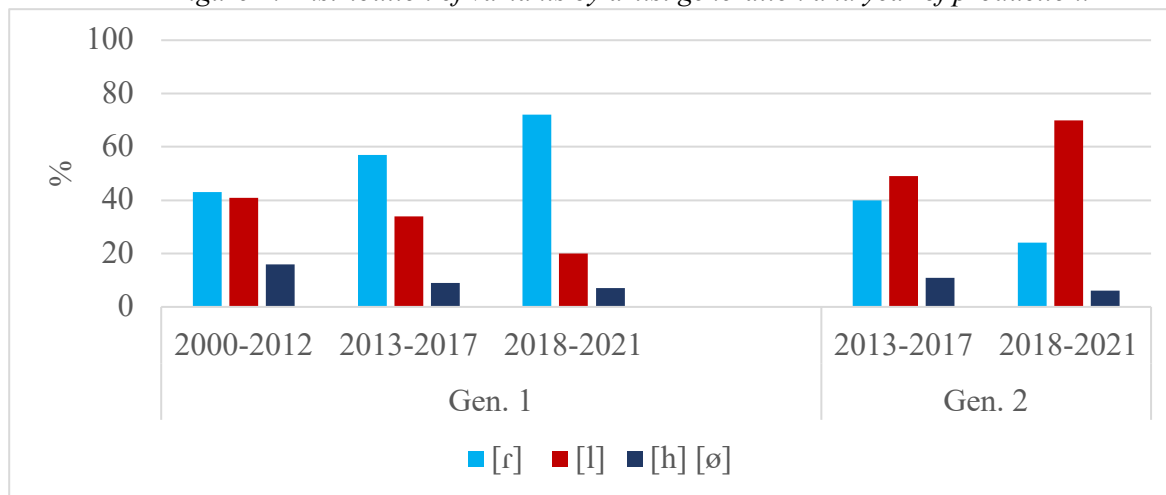
Examining the distribution of the variants across time as produced by each individual artist shows that the artists do not perform uniformly within any given generation or time frame despite overarching generational tendencies (Figure 2). For example, Nicky Jam's use of [l] increases between 2000-2012 (40% *n=19*) and 2013-2017 (51% *n=44*), becoming the artist's most frequently used variant during the latter and occurring at a

higher rate than those documented for second-generation artists Bad Bunny (42% *n*=27) and Rauw Alejandro (38% *n*=32) within the same time frame. Despite these slight idiosyncratic deviations, the variant distribution for each artist in the most present era (2018-2021) shows that *reggaetoneros* known for pioneering the genre are showing a preference for [ɾ], while younger artists are producing [l] at a significantly higher rate (chi square: $x^2(1, n=438) = 109.38$, p<.05). The results of the mixed-effects regression models offer more insight regarding this apparent divergence.

Figure 2: Distribution of first-generation artists' variant use by year of production.
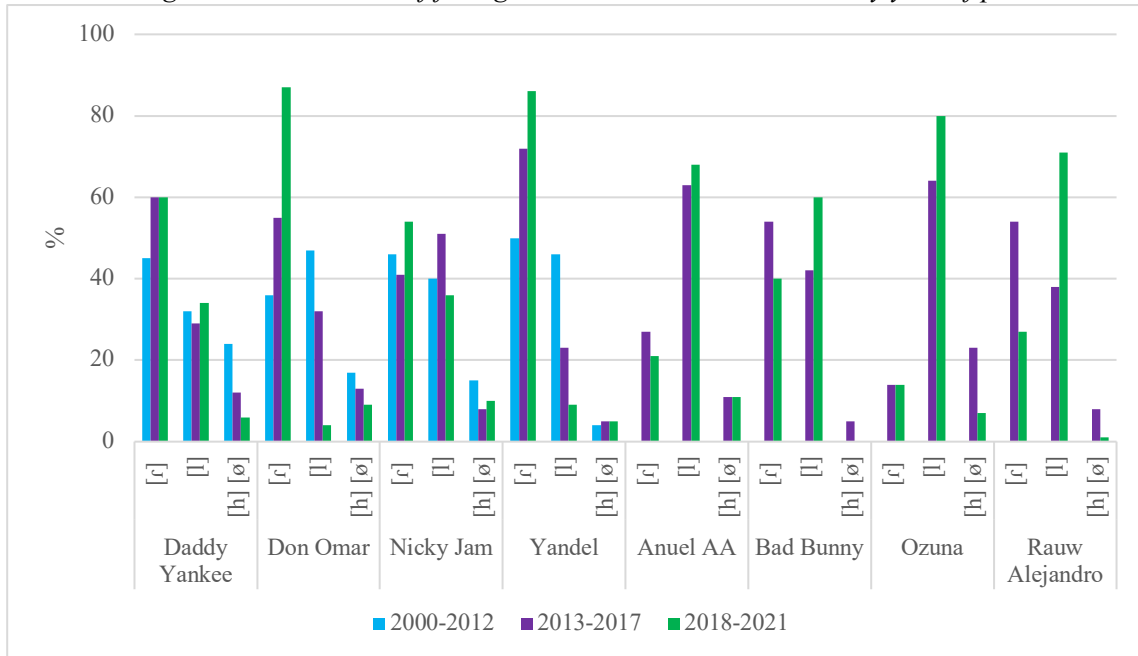
The first series of regression analyses (Table 2) combined [l] and [h] into a *nonstandard* category to identify which combination of factors were significant predictors regarding the overall production of nonstandard variants of /ɾ/ prior to specifically examining the use of [l]. The majority of the language-internal factors, including the position of /ɾ/ in the word (medial/final), the syllabic stress, the morphemic content, and the dialectal-specificity of the tokens were not deemed significant, and were thus discarded from further analysis. The lack of significance assigned to these predictors speaks to the productivity of [l]. Furthermore, the model as applied to the entire data set (*n*=1138) did identify five of the fixed independent variables as significant predictors and showed a positive correlation for both the tempo of the track (log-odd = 0.525) and *singer* as a random effect (SD=0.549).

The significant predictors represent a combination of language-internal, poetic, and chronological factors. Artist generation was deemed the most significant predictor, finding [l] production more probable if the artist is from the younger generation (factor weight .65). Timeline is also rendered significant, though the direction of effect is opposite to what is suggested by the descriptive statistics of the data: works produced by first-generation artists during the *Gasolina* era favor use of [l] (factor weight .61), whereas the most contemporary works appear to disfavor application (factor weight .44). This result is most likely due to the distribution of the data in the combined set, as the second-generation artists have no data from 2000-2012 for the model to compare to the *reggaetón de antes* data. Regardless,

the results thus far suggest that use of [l] differs from generation to generation and that this use has somehow changed with time.

The poetic and thematic structure of the work in question also appears to be a significant predictor for whether an artist will produce a nonstandard variant for coda /ɾ/. The rhyme scheme (priming) is ranked the second-most significant predictor, with tokens favoring lateralization if they occur within two lines of a token produced with a syllable-final liquid (factor weight .61). Additionally, use of nonstandard forms appears favorable in songs/verses which describe the superiority of the singer, both as a lyricist, capitalist, and overall character of integrity (factor weight .61), and unfavorable in lines that deal with themes of love (factor weight .41). Future scholarship should build on this observation and use qualitative methodologies to examine the significance of theme as it correlates specifically to linguistic variation (see Powell & Toribio forthcoming). Furthermore, the following phone was deemed a significant predictor and the direction of effect closely follows that identified in the literature. However, this factor occupies the lowest ranking within the constraint hierarchy, suggesting that the impact of phonemic environment is less regarding [l] production than that of artist-generation.

Table 2: Results from mixed effects regression for [l] and [h] against [ɾ]

	log-odd		SD	
BPM	0.525	Singer	0.549	
	Factor Weight	**% [l] [ø]**	**Total (*n*)**	**% Data**
Generation				
Gen. 2	.65	67	491	43
Gen. 1	.35	42	647	57
Range	30			
Rhyme Scheme				
Primed	.61	72	303	27
Not primed	.39	46	835	73
Range	22			
Song Theme				
Superiority	.61	70	136	12
Other	.54	62	133	12
Party	.51	56	100	9
Sex	.43	51	382	33
Love	.41	44	387	34
Range	20			
Timeline				
2000-2012	.61	57	167	15
2013-2017	.45	51	533	47
2018-2021	.44	53	438	38
Range	17			
Following Phone				
Stops	.59	58	573	50
Pauses	.48	49	258	23
Other	.43	46	307	27
Range	16			

Total *n* = 1138 Intercept = -1.747
Deviance = 1359.75 R2 Total = 0.259

The second series of mixed-effect regression analyses (Table 3) aimed to compare specifically the binary production of [l] and [ɾ]. Overall, the exclusion of the reduced token group (*n*=105) did not significantly change the results of the regression. Song BPM and singer as a random effect still have positive coefficients suggesting a minor effect conditioning the variation. Additionally, primed tokens, pre-stop tokens, and tokens occurring in lines asserting the artists' superiority all favor [l] realization. Artist generation is still deemed the most significant predictor with a factor weight of .67 favoring lateralization for second-generation artists and .33 favoring tap retention for the first-generation artists. Once again, timeline is also regarded significant, but this time it is the least significant of the predictors. However, the pattern remains that the *Gasolina* era apparently favors use of [l] while the contemporary works of the *Despacito* era of Reggaeton do not. I will address this in more detail below.

Table 3: Results of mixed-effects regression comparing [l] and [ɾ]

	log-odd		SD	
BPM	0.413	Singer	0.505	
	Factor Weight	**% [l]**	**Total (*n*)**	**% Data**
Generation				
Gen. 2	.67	67	451	44
Gen. 1	.33	42	582	56
Range	29			
Topic				
Superiority	.64	67	125	12
Other	.55	58	119	11
Party	.50	48	84	8
Sex	.44	47	358	35
Love	.38	38	347	34
Range	26			
Rhyme Scheme				
Primed	.63	69	279	27
Not primed	.37	40	754	73
Range	26			
Following Phone				
Stops	.63	56	542	52
Pauses	.45	40	221	21
Other	.41	39	270	26
Range	22			
Timeline				
2000-2012	.60	49	141	14
2013-2017	.46	48	410	40
2018-2021	.44	46	482	46
Range	16			

Total *n* = 1033 Intercept = -1.6
Deviance = 1190.81 R2 Total = 0.304

Up to this point the mixed effects regressions have been conducted with the inclusion of the tokens collected from songs produced between 2000-2012. While the inclusion of this level will inform us regarding evident changes in [l] production in the music of the first-generation artists, the lack of reciprocal data points for the second-generation may be skewing the model as applied to the entire data set. Thus, a third set of regresional analyses was conducted on only the data collected from the *La Familia* (2013-2017) and *Despacito* (2018-2021) eras of production (Table 4), to see if the factors identified as significant thus far remained predictors for [l] production. Withstanding minor changes, the results sustain that artist generation is the most significant predictor regarding variable application in the expected direction of effect. Additionally, the results once again select timeline as a significant predictor, this time in the direction of effect suggested by the distribution of the variants. The range of this factor is very low, suggesting that the significance of timeline is minor. This result is most likely reflective of the oppositional tendencies across artist generation, suggesting that the next step of the statistical modeling should be to separate

the data by generation and compare the hierarchy of constraints to see how [l] operates differently within these respective groups of musicians.

Table 4: Results of mixed-effects regression applied to 2013-2021 data

	log-odd		SD	
BPM	0.00359	Singer	0.575	
	Factor Weight	**% [l]**	**Total (*n*)**	**% Data**
Generation				
Gen. 2	.68	64	451	51
Gen. 1	.32	31	441	49
Range	36			
Following Phone				
Stops	.65	56	459	51
Pauses	.44	39	197	22
Other	.41	236	236	26
Range	24			
Rhyme Scheme				
Primed	.63	69	253	28
Not primed	.39	39	639	72
Range	24			
Topic				
Superiority	.60	65	103	12
Party	.59	59	49	5
Other	.53	57	93	10
Sex	.41	47	319	36
Love	.37	39	328	37
Range	23			
Timeline				
2018-2021	.51	50	410	46
2013-2017	.49	46	482	54
Range	2			

Total *n* = 892 Intercept = -0.249
Deviance = 997.751 R2 Total = 0.272

6.2 Comparisons across artist generation

The results of the statistical modeling so far are suggestive that the use of [l] for coda /ɾ/ operates differently across generations of artists, and that these patterns have somehow changed over time. Two additional regression analyses were thus conducted on the data set separated by generation to examine the similarities and differences between each artists' use of [l]. Within each respective generation, *singer* was not included as a random effect, but BPM remained as a continuous variable and has a positive coefficient in both models, though the value for the second-generation artists is lower (0.00466) than that of the first-generation (0.426).

Regarding the first-generation's use of [l] (Table 5), the most significant predictors are literary in nature, suggesting that the lateral variant may serve an artistic function. Based on these results, it appears that [l] is used more frequently in lines which reference the

artists' professional/personal superiority (factor weight .69) and disfavored when performing lyrics which deal with elements of love (factor weight .36). These patterns reflect Powell & Toribio's (forthcoming) findings from Ivy Queen's lyrics, suggesting that use of the lateral variant for first-generation artists has acquired an artistic function relative to performances of dominance and authority. Subsequently, tokens are more likely to realize as [l] if they are primed, suggesting that first-generation artists use [l] strategically to facilitate rhyme across liquids. Given that [l] is also disfavored in pre-pausal position (factor weight .41), one can theorize that many of these instances do not constitute end rhyme.

Table 5: Results of mixed-effects regression for first-generation artists' variant use

	log-odd			
BPM	0.426			
	Factor Weight	**% [l]**	**Total (*n*)**	**% Data**
Topic				
Superiority	.69	64	55	9
Other	.56	47	62	11
Party	.47	38	58	10
Sex	.42	32	183	31
Love	.36	26	224	39
Range	33			
Rhyme Scheme				
Primed	.66	60	116	20
Not primed	.38	29	466	80
Range	28			
Timeline				
2000-2012	.62	49	141	24
2013-2017	.52	38	251	43
2018-2021	.37	22	190	33
Range	25			
Following Phone				
Stops	.62	44	316	54
Other	.46	26	134	23
Pauses	.41	24	132	23
Range	21			

Total *n* = 582 Intercept = -2.428
Deviance = 645.97 R2 Total = 0.236

The patterns conditioning the use of [l] in the songs performed by the second-generation are opposite to those of the first generation (Table 6). Firstly, the most significant predictor is deemed to be the phonemic context, with both pre-stop (factor weight .61) and pre-pausal (factor weight .52) tokens favoring lateralization. Comparing the factor weights to those of the first-generation makes evident that while each generation exhibits similar patterns regarding those environments which historically favor and disfavor lateralization, [l] realization is consistently more frequent in the music of the second-generation artists (72% *n*=226 and 51% *n*=136 respectively) than that of their predecessors (44% *n*=316 and 26%

n=134 respectively). Additionally, the significance for topic as a predictor in the second-generation data is relatively low, and the factor weights for each level are more closely approaching the threshold of favoring [l] in comparison to the first-generation data. This suggests that the younger generation's use of [l] may be less lyrically constrained than older works.

It is worth noting that, overall, the ranges of the second-generation data reflect smaller differences in probability across levels than those of the first-generation, since the highest range value for the second-generation artists is lower than the majority of the ranges for the significant predictors in the first-generation sample. This is suggestive that the second-generation [l] is not only a more frequent variant, but a more productive variant whose use is not performatively restricted to the same extent that it is when performed by older artists. However, this is not to say that [l] does not carry indexical value. Recall that the raw distribution of [l] in the second-generation *Despacito* era data is 70%. This rate approaches the values attested in Medina-Rivera's (1999) study for when participants were speaking in informal group settings. The significance of this observation will be discussed in the following section.

Table 6: Results of mixed-effects regression for second-generation artists' variant use

	log-odd			
BPM	0.00466			
	Factor Weight	**% [l]**	**Total (*n*)**	**% Data**
Following Phone				
Stops	.61	72	226	50
Pauses	.52	65	89	20
Other	.38	51	136	30
Range	23			
Timeline				
2018-2021	.60	74	220	49
2013-2017	.40	55	231	51
Range	20			
Rhyme Scheme				
Primed	.59	76	163	36
Not primed	.41	58	288	64
Range	18			
Topic				
Other	.59	70	57	13
Superiority	.55	70	70	16
Party	.49	69	26	6
Sex	.45	63	175	39
Love	.42	59	123	27
Range	17			

Total *n* = 451 Intercept = 0.194
Deviance = 532.261 R2 Total = 0.163

7. Discussion

The aims of the present study were to examine the distribution of the lateral variant for coda /ɾ/ across a timeline of Puerto Rican Reggaeton's expansion into the global music market. Positing [l] as a raciolinguistic marker of Puerto Rican identity, this work hypothesized that Puerto Rican *reggaetoneros* would show a preference for [l] realization as Reggaeton passed through various racialization processes alongside time. Theoretically, while Reggaeton was a locally circulated expression of hybrid Caribbean identity, the need for artists to linguistically mark their works as (Puerto Rican) would be relatively low as the genre *itself* could index this affiliation. However, as Reggaeton was reframed as a *Latin* construct in the international music scene and artists of various ethnonational backgrounds began to circulate and perform their own takes on the music, there emerged a need for Puerto Rican artists to assert their own ethnonational identity. As is common with Hip-hop based genres, this identity authentication could be accomplished linguistically via use of marked features of the linguistic system, which, despite widespread stigma as is the case of [l], are highly correlated with speakers of PRS and often considered key to the construction and presentation of Puerto Rican identity. The results of the mixed-effects models discussed in the previous section partially support this assertion: while it does seem to be the case that younger *reggaetoneros* are currently shifting their speech patterns towards a more frequent use of [l], the inverse is occurring in the speech of the veteran artists who are diverging away from [l] in favor of the tap and trill variants.

Examining the constraints of [l] realization across generations highlights that, in addition to disparate rates of production, the function of [l] may be shifting across generations. In both the first- and second-generation data samples, [l] appears to be conditioned by both rhyme-scheme and the lyrical content, and while [l] is the favored variant in songs which position the artist as a superior entity, artists appear to disfavor the variant when singing about themes of love and relationships. This pattern holds up between the two generations, yet topic was rendered the most significant predictor for the first-generation variable production and contrastively the least significant for the contemporary artists. Additionally, the difference in production rate between the two aforementioned topics is significantly different for the first-generation artists (chi-square: $x^2(1, n=308) = 27.19$ p<.0001) yet the difference in [l] occurrence between the same two topics fails to achieve significance in the works of the second-generation (chi-square: $x^2(1, n=215) = 2.86$ p=.091), suggesting that [l] is becoming more frequent in songs with lyrical content relating to love in the more contemporary styles of the genre. Put differently, the lyrical boundaries appear to be in the process of weakening.

The question as to *why* [l] appears to be favored in some topics and less so in others may have its answer in the observation that [l] use is perceived as a masculine feature: are *reggaetoneros* constructing a more "masculine" presentation by combining [l] with lyrics which assert their authority and dominance? Given the hyper-masculine nature of Reggaeton (see Goldman 2017; Nieves Moreno 2008), this seems like a plausible explanation, but it must be taken as merely a tentative musing pending detailed qualitative lyrical analyses as the topics included in the present methodology were reductive for the sake of the statistical model and thus can only identify superficial patterns of distribution. Furthermore, returning to Powell & Toribio's (forthcoming) discussion of [l] use in Ivy Queen songs, examining multiple topics within broader thematic paradigms reveals specific patterns of variant use; while love songs as a category exhibited less coda /ɾ/

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realized as [l] than other topics, expanding the category to compare songs about being in love and songs relating the pains of a breakup revealed that most of these instances of [l] were tied to the latter and not the former. Future studies should seek to qualitatively examine the ways in which [l] is lyrically distributed in the works of both veteran and contemporary *reggaetoneros* as the results will provide insight into the general contextual functions of [l] and the specific patterns for each group.

That [l] is favored within the "superiority" level of the topic factor across both generations may also speak to questions regarding how artists assert notions of ethnic pride. Here it is important to remember that ethnographic interviews show that speakers of PRS consider [l] a core feature in constructing Puerto Ricanness and indexing positive evaluations of ethnonational origin. Also, recall that the inclusion of the superiority level was implemented to account for lyrics that highlight attributes of the artists deemed to promote their dominance and comparative superiority over another participant, be it their abilities (sexual and artistic), their wealth, their success, or aspects of their character (i.e., "*Soy más real que el anterior*" [ˌanteˈɾiol] translation: I'm more real than the last guy, see Anuel AA, 2016). Artists through these kinds of lyrics assert a character whose traits are worth emulating. Performing lyrics of this nature accompanied by lateral tokens may be seen as a form of resistance to the variant's ascribed stigma, as the artists may be thought of as (in)directly re-writing the narrative(s) regarding the categories of people who speak with [l].

Let's return to the 2020 collaboration "P FKN R" presented in the introduction. Recall that the lyrics of this song depict the artists as superior participants, who command respect in the form of directly calling out disrespect (i.e., "*Si no saben de dónde soy, no me ronquen no*" translation: if you don't know where I'm from, don't talk shit about me). The ability and authority to silence those who would disrespect the artists (i.e., "*Mejor que la boca cierres antes que los míos te entierren*" translation: better close your mouth before my boys bury you) is depicted as derived from the lived experiences of and community ties to the *caseríos*. In this case dominance and authority are directly linked to ethnonational identification. As stated in the introduction, the work also directly critiques the discourses regarding the mock use of [l] by emphatic use of alveolar trills, which may be thought of as imitating the sound of a rapid-fire assault weapon. In combination with the trills, the artists maintain the lateral coda (i.e., "*Esto es Puerto Rico* [ˈpwelto ˈriko] *lugar* [luˈgal] *de respeto* [reˈpeto] *y se escribe con 'r'*"). The use of the trills does not erase the fact that [l] is a feature of authentic PRS; rather, the pairing of the two phones draws attention to the contexts in which [l] does and *does not* occur. The interplay of these artistic elements works to performatively and linguistically establish an overt ethnic pride alongside the discursive level.

While one may posit over the possible interpretations of [l] use as related to lyrical content, these musings do not answer the question as to *why* younger *reggaetoneros* favor [l] and why the veteran artists are diverging away from this pattern. Throughout this work it has been suggested that the need to mark artists' performative personas as (Puerto Rican) in response to the Latinization of Reggaeton on a global scale could explain an increase in [l] realization rates (i.e., Colombian artists Karol G won the 2021 Latin Grammy for "Best Reggaeton performance" for her song *Bichota* in which she appropriates a Puerto Rican accent, see Hussey & Bloom 2021). While this conceptualization may explain why there is an apparent increase in [l] use for the younger generation, the explanation for the older

generation's pattern remains hidden. Another possible interpretation lies in the global expansion and subsequent evolution of the genre from its underground roots. Caramanica (2022) discusses how the influx of musical and stylistic influences has radically changed the performance and creation of Reggaeton, such to the extent that the genre could be split up into various subgenres including *popetón* (Reggaeton Pop), *bachatón* (Bachata infused Reggaeton), *trapetón* (Reggaeton influenced by Trap music), among others. The popification and Latinization of Reggaeton has influenced the genre so drastically that fans and artists alike can be heard patrolling the soundscape boundaries regarding what sounds, lyrics, and esthetics actually represent *Reggaetón*. For example, several articles have come out claiming that veteran artists like Don Omar (see *musicmundial.com)* and Ivy Queen (see *ondacero.com*) have been cited as claiming to not enjoy some of the newer Reggaeton tracks, though these preferences may reflect artists' take on the individual styles of newer artists as there is comparable literature suggesting veteran artists are fans of contemporary productions (see StageRightSecrets 2020). While the musical preferences of these artists are their own and do not speak to the authenticity of any novel production, it is worth mentioning that those who helped create this genre see contemporary (Puerto Rican) renditions as something akin to, but distinct from, the *reggaetón de antes* that began in the *caseríos*.

Here I suggest that the apparent drop in first-generation *reggaetoneros'* use of [l] in the most recent years in contrast to the second-generation artists' use drastically increasing is not a coincidence. Figure 3 below plots the frequency of the lateral variant for each artist from 2013 to 2021. The figure reveals that the rate of [l] production was on average around 42% (SD=15.3) between 2013-2017, with some overlap between artists. At this point, the newer *reggaetoneros* had not yet achieved the commercial success they enjoy in the present; they had not transitioned to be the "new faces" of the genre. However, following 2018, these artists begin to sweep the charts and dominate the media. While the veteran *reggaetoneros* are commonly regarded as Reggaeton royalty, they are not the spotlighted trendsetters within the genre in the same sense as superstars Bad Bunny and Rauw Alejandro are right now. If second-generation artists are increasing the use of [l] to show ethnic pride and mark their works as authentic Reggaeton, it is possible that the first-generation artists who are not partaking in the same contemporary trends as their successors would diverge away from the almost emphatic use of [l] to distinguish themselves and their work from contemporary, global styles of Reggaeton. Subjects diverging away from ethnically marked patterns across generations to create distinct subcommunities within macro-level groups is not unheard of. For example, Lynch's (2008:778-779) study on Miami Cuban Spanish found that third-generation Cuban Americans born and raised in Miami are retaining coda /s/ at higher rates than their grandparents (25% and 12% respectively). The author also found that young male speakers were more likely to retain /s/ than their female counterparts, which is unexpected given that /s/ retention is typically associated with the speech of women (see Mack 2011). Lynch suggests that this apparent inverse of /s/ reduction tendencies is reflective of younger speakers with community ties attempting to linguistically distance themselves from the influx of recent arrivals who speak with high rates of sibilant reduction.

Figure 3: Distribution of [l] from 2013-2021 by artist.
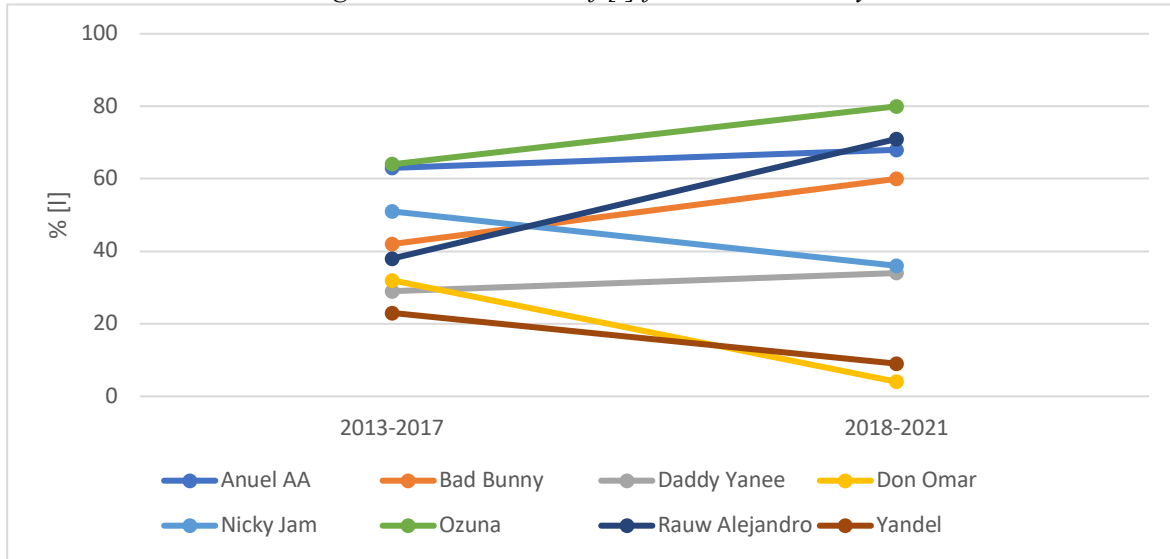
The purpose of the current study was not to provide a definitive answer as to why any one *reggaetonero* or generation of artists would produce [l] in place of other coda /ɾ/ variants. Rather, this work was designed to examine the patterns of [l] distribution to identify any tendencies that may correlate with extralinguistic factors relative to the projection of Puerto Rican identity. The main question informing the implemented methodology was raciolinguistic in nature: does [l] as performed by Puerto Rican *reggaetoneros* signify Puerto Rican identity in the global Latin Urban collective? The results presented here are suggestive in favor of this question, despite having identified two distinct patterns of [l] use between generations. The findings show that the most contemporary artists who are arguable the driving forces of Puerto Rican Reggaeton in the global Latin Urban scene are using [l] the most frequently in their most novel works. The results also suggest that the pioneering artists are diverging towards a preference for the standard variant. It is possible that [l] can still index Puerto Rican identity in this space, regardless that the effect is not uniform. This is because the works, the style, and the flow of the first-generation artists is already well known in the global Latin Music industry: it is common knowledge that Daddy Yankee is from Puerto Rico. Thus, Daddy Yankee does not need to linguistically *mark* himself as Puerto Rican, as his artistry accomplishes this. It will be fascinating to see how these patterns change over the course of the next decade as Reggaeton and Latin Urban music continue to mold and change one another.

8.   Conclusion

Overall, this study has contributed to the collective literature concerned with the linguistic practices of Hip-Hop artists and the processes through which artists can participate in global musical practices while linguistically anchoring themselves to their local sociolinguistic contexts. The work presented here traces the history of the racialization of Reggaeton into the present day and contextualizes the genre as a space for racioethnic identity negotiation via use of raciolinguistic features. Attention is given to the

indexical quality and malleability of sociophonetic variables as used in popular music performances, advocating for their scholarly merit warranting future academic pursuits.

Results show that contemporary performances of Reggaeton are showcasing an increased use of the lateral variant for coda /ɾ/, and that this pattern appears to be a generation specific tendency. Regardless, the results are supportive of the notion that Puerto Rican *reggaetoneros* use [l] in the performance of their racioethnic identities. Furthermore, these findings contribute to the literature regarding the patterns of distribution of [l] for coda /ɾ/ as studied in Puerto Rican linguistic practices outside the use of naturalistic conversational data (see Medina-Rivera 2014). Throughout this work there was mention that the findings presented here may constitute a case of covert prestige assigned to Puerto Rican dialectal features. While the results at current cannot answer this question in entirety, they are essential to beginning this conversation. I ascertain that the next step in is to address the use of [l] in performances of Reggaeton by non-Puerto Rican and non-native speakers of Spanish.

Derrek Powell
University of Texas at Austin
Department of Spanish and Portuguese
Benedict Hall #2.116
150 W. 21st Street
Austin, TX 78712-1155
derrek.powell@utexas.edu

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