

## Chapter 2

### Conceptual Framework

This chapter situates the present study in relation to existing research and presents the conceptual framework within which the analysis will develop. First, the chapter addresses the theoretical underpinnings of the notion of race; defines the concepts of *race*, *ethnicity*, and *color* for purposes of the study; summarizes the literature on how race is understood in the U.S. and in Latin America; and positions the Dominican Republic with respect to this literature. Next, the chapter reasserts the need for a linguistic perspective on racial studies and addresses the literature on critical intersections of race and language. Finally, the chapter presents lexical semantics as an overarching conceptual frame, reviews the tenets that lend themselves to the present analysis, and discusses relevant studies on prototype theory and the semantics of color to understand how existing linguistic approaches to investigating meaning, prototyping and color can be used to frame a new approach to the investigation of race and racialized color classification in the Dominican Republic.

#### ***A. Race and Racial Categories: International Lenses***

This section explores the literature on race and racial categories in the United States and Latin America. The section begins by defining key concepts and then moves to an exploration of the literature on the U.S., Latin American, and Dominican racial settings.

##### *1. Key Concepts: Defining Race, Ethnicity, and Color*

Scholars are divided on the distinction between race and color (Golash-Boza, 2010; Harris, 2009; Nakano Glenn, 2009; Sue, 2009a, 2009b; Telles, 2004) and the related

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distinction between race and ethnicity (Bonilla-Silva, 1999; Cornell & Hartmann, 1988; Loveman, 1999; Omi & Winant, 2014; Wimmer, 2008). As a linguist, and particularly as a linguist carrying out a study on the meaning of race and color categories, it is important for me to define the concepts of race, ethnicity, and color as I use them in the analysis.

Prior to the 20th century, scholars viewed race as something objective, biological, and intrinsic (Gilroy, 2000; Gunaratnam, 2003; Roth, 2012; Telles, 2014). Rooted in taxonomies elaborated during the 18th century, early studies measured race on the basis of physical characteristics such as skull size, hair texture, and eye, lip, and nose shapes (Gilroy, 2000; Hannaford, 1996; Mukhopadhyay et al., 2007; Wade, 1997). During this time, scholars considered racial categories to be visible, embodied, and hierarchically ordered (Hesse, 1997). As time progressed, academic and nonacademic actors came to treat these categories as natural, and even necessary, social divisions (e.g., Telles, 2014). These studies bore the persistent imprint of colonial racial categorization (Gunaratnam, 2003). In the early-20th century, scholars such as Boas (1912, 1940) began to problematize the biology and objectivity of race. Since that time, scholars have generally framed *race* as less of a biologically-significant concept and more of a social and political construction (Bailey, 2002; Omi & Winant, 2014). Though a proxy for some physical characteristics, race and its resulting racial categories have much more to do with the social and ideological beliefs of the societies from which they emerge (Hall, 1993).

From these contemporary studies of race, the following characteristics emerge. First, race is multi-dimensional (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991; Telles, 2014). Second, race is not stable and objective across cultural contexts (Gunaratnam, 2003; Mukhopadhyay et al., 2007). Different cultures and nations have different racial categories and different rules for

populating each category (Roth, 2012). Moreover, within a single society, differing ideas on the biological nature of race may coexist (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2007). Third, racial identities are constructed, learned, and internalized (Simmons, 2006). Finally, language influences the understanding of race, by delimiting the boundaries of ethnic memory and by shaping conceptual understanding (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991). This means that even cognate forms of the word ‘race’ may vary in meaning across languages. For example, the word ‘race’ in English and the word ‘*raza*’ in Spanish are not perfect equivalents, because the Spanish term is much broader—denoting ‘nation’ or ‘people’ (Mayes, 2014). In this sense, race is also about cognition—how individuals process biological characteristics and divide people into racial categories using racial terms (Roth, 2012). Race may thus be understood as a socially-constructed set of hierarchically ordered categories of physical appearance (Roth, 2012).

While analyses of race generally privilege lineage and physical differences, scholars invoke ethnicity to frame cultural differences (Telles, 2014). In this way, ethnicity is also viewed as a social construct and a system of classification (Bourdieu, 1986; Brubaker, 2009; Wimmer, 2013). In the U.S., ethnicity is not as fixed a boundary as race, thus allowing different ethnic groups to inhabit the same racial category (Ignatiev, 2008; Telles, 2014). Asians and indigenous Amerindian populations have also been difficult to place within this race vs. ethnicity scheme (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007; Telles, 2014; Wimmer, 2013).

Scholars have positioned skin color as a dimension of race (Sue, 2013; Telles, 2014). In this sense, skin color may be used to track physical differences across people who identify as part of the same racial category (Telles, 2014). Skin color is a continuous trait, with infinite gradations along a continuum and no clear visual boundaries (Mukhopadhyay et al.,

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2007). Moreover, the notion of racialized skin color should be understood in broad terms, in that color, as used here and as understood by study participants, may encompass more than skin tone and include phenotypic markers such as hair texture, eye color, and facial features (Roth, 2012; Sue, 2013).

For some individuals, and in some societies, there is overlap between terms used in a racial sense, terms used in a color sense, and terms used in both senses (Sue, 2013).

Generally, the two are distinguished by the nature of the description. Racial terms usually contemplate ancestry and group identity, while color terms are individual-level physical descriptors (Sue, 2013).

Having defined the key concepts of race, ethnicity and color, the following sections will briefly treat U.S.-focused and Latin America-focused scholarship on race and identity, comparing and contrasting the two and exploring the relevance of each for the present study.

### *2. On the U.S. View of Race and Racial Categories: Barack Obama is the first black president, and Tiger Woods cannot be “Caublinasian”*

In the U.S. racial setting, popular consensus has long been based upon an implicit purity of racial categories—clear distinctions among groups for physical, social, political, and legal organization—internal homogeneity, and essential and fundamental difference (e.g., Bucholtz, 2011; Omi and Winant, 2014; Smedley, 1993). In this setting, category boundaries are vigorously maintained and have widespread social repercussions (Bailey, 2002). Thus, to navigate the U.S. racial categories, the population employs various strategies. First, there are popularly accepted associations—a type of *racial shorthand*—by which descent determines racial category: e.g., African descent = *Black*, European descent = *White*, Asian

descent = *Asian*, etc. (see Bailey, 2002, p.166). Second, there are functional rules for the potential re-categorization of individuals whose parents belong to two distinct racial categories. One such rule, is the rule of hypodescent (Harris, 1964), popularly known as the “One Drop Rule” (Davis, 1991; Williamson, 1980), which has historically meant that individuals with even the smallest traceable amount of African ancestry would fall into the *black* racial category. Not all racial categories are as inclusive, however. Gross (2008) has traced the legal history of race in the United States, examining statutes and court cases relating to the determination of race, and concludes that *whiteness*, for example, has been fiercely guarded, and even fiercely litigated. Nevertheless, racial categories are not always black and white. Telles (2014) has argued that Asians, indigenous populations, and Latinos / Hispanics are more difficult to catalog racially in the U.S. system.

Furthermore, the U.S. racial system has not historically accommodated mixed racial identities. As such, individuals with more than one racial heritage have been required to choose membership in one—and *only* one—racial category. This is why, when U.S. professional golfer Tiger Woods—who is of African American, Thai, Dutch, and Native American descent—proclaimed himself to be “caublinasian” (a hybrid category combining *Caucasian, Black, Indian, and Asian*), he was met with substantial criticism, and his proposed hybrid category was rejected. This is also why Barack Obama is considered to be the first *black* president of the United States, although he also has one white parent.

With the presence of an increasingly mixed population, academia has tackled the question of mixed race identity in the United States (e.g., Brunsmma, 2006, Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2006, Childs, 2006, Horton, 2006, Rockquemore et al., 2006). With this shifting landscape, on a much greater scale than the country has ever experienced, scholars have

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suggested that U.S. views on race are undergoing a “Latin Americanization” – adding a third category for mixed racial identity to the existing dichotomous Black-White bi-racial order (Bonilla-Silva, 2002a, 2004, Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich, 2008). That is to say, whereas the U.S. racial setting has historically used strategies such as the rule of hypodescent to position “mixed” individuals within a single racial category, scholars and society in general are beginning to accept that “mixedness” is its own category (a practice prevalent in many Latin American settings). This thesis has been widely reviewed, critiqued, and debated for more than a decade (e.g., Bonilla-Silva, 2002b, 2009; Forman et al., 2002; Sue 2009a).

### *3. On Race and Racial Categories in Latin America: Fluid Boundaries and New Racial Schemas*

Scholars from a variety of disciplines have confronted and analyzed the complex historical, social, and political treatment of ethnic and racial identity in Latin America for several decades (e.g., Dixon & Burdick, 2012; Domínguez, 1994; Harris, 1964; Mörner, 1970; Rout, 2003; Wade, 2010). Moreover, Latin America has been an interesting locus for analysis, because racial categories are not as rigidly bounded as in the United States. In the Latin American setting, boundaries between race and skin color categories have been framed as soft and fluid, in contrast to the hard racial category boundaries in the United States (Sue, 2013). Specific examinations of Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela have yielded analyses of (1) the African presence and history in the Americas, (2) issues of racism and discrimination, (3) multi-racial identity, and (4) the significance of skin color (Andrews, 2004, Branche, 2008; Daniel, 2006; Dixon & Burdick, 2012; Domínguez, 1994; Friginals, 1977; Graham, 1990; Leal & Langebaek, 2010; Mörner,

1970; Telles, 2004; Whitten & Torres, 1998).

In the broader Latin American context, scholars emphasize distinct cross-national understandings of race; juxtapose understandings of race by the elite and non elite (as in the case of Mexico); and position color as central to racial dynamics (Sue, 2013; Telles, 2014). Telles (2014) argues that skin color is “a central axis of social stratification” in Latin America and that it is particularly important because it is visible, embodied, and accessible (pp. 3-4). Sue (2013) proposes that the centrality of skin color in Latin America is directly related to the way that these societies understand their collective and individual race. Specifically, Sue states that skin color is particularly salient because race and ancestry are assumed to be constant (2013). As a result, color has represented a greater distinction-making marker than race, additionally indexing social characteristics such as socioeconomic class and physical attractiveness (Sue, 2013).

Given the varying importance of race and skin color in this setting, scholars have debated whether race or skin color is best suited as the primary analytical lens for the Latin American context. For some scholars, the notion of race is exogenous to Latin America—a U.S.-based imposition (e.g., Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1999; Loveman, 1999; Sue, 2013), and color is the more fitting frame because it is locally derived (e.g., Burdick, 1998; Sheriff, 2001). Other researchers avoid both terms in the research setting (e.g., Golash-Boza, 2010, 2011; Roth, 2012). Finally, some scholars treat the suitability of each term as an empirical question, employing both terms in the research setting to understand local meaning (Sue, 2013). The present study adopts the latter stance and treats race and skin color—as categories and as frames—as an empirical question.

Roth (2012) discusses the nature of racial classification in Latin America and juxtaposes

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it to the United States. For Roth, although much literature on racial settings in Latin America treats race as a continuum of racial mixture, people may also conceptualize race in terms of nationality or in ways influenced by dominant ideologies of race in the United States. Roth identifies as a key difference between Latin America and the U.S. the centrality of ancestry vs. the centrality of phenotype. For Roth, nowhere is this clearer than in the racial classification of full siblings. In the U.S., siblings with the same parents have the same racial classification, irrespective of phenotype. Whereas, in Latin America, racialized notions of skin color may place full siblings in different categories (Roth, 2012).

Against the backdrop of the U.S. racial setting and the broader Latin American setting, the Dominican Republic, with its similarities and differences, is a fascinating and highly revealing setting in which to examine categories of race and racialized color.

### 4. The Dominican Republic in Context

Historians, sociologists, and anthropologists have shown that the Dominican Republic presents a complex racial setting, where identity has fused with nationhood, descent is not always determinative, and the discourse on racial and ethnic identity has evolved with and through the process of state formation. (e.g., Candelario, 2007; Chapman, 1997; Deive, 1999; Franco, 1984; Howard, 2001; Mayes, 2014; Mota Acosta, 1977; Moya Pons, 2010; Pérez Cabral, 2008; Sagás, 2000, 2012; San Miguel, 2005; Simmons, 2009; Tolentino, 1974; Torres-Saillant, 2010; Welles, 1966). Scholars have noted that because Dominican notions of race and identity do not correspond neatly to dominant racial paradigms in academia, the Dominican racial setting is frequently characterized as backwards, and Dominicans as ignorant and confused with respect to their race (Torres-Saillant, 2010, p. 1-2; citing

Fennema and Loewenthal, 1989, p. 209; Sagás, 1993).

The three most salient criticisms of the Dominican Republic are (1) the denial of an African past (e.g., Howard, 2001), (2) the myth of *indio* identity (e.g., Howard, 2001), and (3) the pernicious anti-Haitian sentiment (Howard, 2001; San Miguel, 2005). Central to each of these issues is the language used by Dominicans to describe themselves and others: the general dispreference of Dominicans for using the term *negro* ('black') as a marker of identity, the prevalent use of *indio* (lit. 'Indian') as a skin color descriptor, and the projection of *negritud* ('blackness') onto Haiti, respectively. Without a clear understanding of the meaning, history, and present usage of this language about race, the case for each criticism is greatly overstated.

Respecting the denial of African ancestry, Howard (2001) has asserted that Dominican nationalism is centered on a rejection of blackness and African ancestry and that Dominican racial categories are used to avoid the implication of African descent (pp. 1-2, 9). Conversely, Simmons (2009) frames the Dominican relationship with the African past in much more nuanced terms, problematizing denial and what it means to deny African heritage. For Simmons, "In other words, 'denial' implies that Dominicans do not believe that they *have* African ancestry. And this is not the case" (2009, pp. 1-2). Dominicans often acknowledge African ancestry but do not inhabit African descent as a primary identity. Rather, they downplay it as "behind the ear" (Simmons, 2009, pp. 1-2). Bailey (2002) addresses this question by framing the issue as one of difference rather than denial. In contrast to the United States, the Dominican Republic has no rule of hypodescent that equates traceable African ancestry with blackness or that divides Dominicans into rigid social categories based on the presence or absence of African descent (Bailey, 2002). While

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Dominican racial categories have parameters that cultural outsiders do not always find intuitive, all roads do not blindly lead to whiteness (Mayes, 2014). Moreover, the rules bounding these categories are situated in the country's specific historical context. Although the politics of the powerful created and constrained Dominican racial identity for much of the country's history, the landscape for racial categories, racial identity, and understandings of blackness is changing (Simmons, 2009). Torres-Saillant (2006) calls for comparative considerations of the Dominican racial setting to illuminate the extent to which the notion of exceptional negrophobia in the Dominican Republic has been exaggerated. Scholars such as Mayes (2014) and Simmons (2009) specifically respond to this call. Simmons positions Dominican hair styling practice and ideology in a comparative context with her own experience as an African American (Craig, 2002; Rooks, 1996); juxtaposes the African-American system of designating skin color variation to the Dominican system, detailing what the two systems have in common; and discusses how understandings of blackness are constructed and shift vis-à-vis positioning with respect to other groups—namely, Haitians, and African Americans.

Respecting use of the term *indio* as a skin color category, Howard (2001) characterizes Dominican use of the term *indio* (lit. 'Indian') as a "myth" and a "lived falsehood" that further evidences a "denial of African heritage" (2001, pp. 43, 47, 49). Simmons (2009) examines *indio* more closely in the cultural context of the contemporary Dominican Republic. The present study directly addresses this claim by exploring the physical and social information embedded in contemporary usage of the term *indio*.

Finally, regarding anti-Haitian sentiment, San Miguel (2005) characterizes the problem of Dominican-Haitian relations as one arising from the unique geographical context of two

nations sharing the same island. San Miguel argues that this situation led to a national discourse of opposition that placed the Dominican Republic in persistent contrast with Haiti (2005). Regarding this ideology, Sagás (2000, p.6) states, “antihaitianismo ideology created the myth of Haitians and Dominicans belonging to different races.” This is true in the broad sense of *raza*—nation or people—and in the narrow sense of specific physical characteristics. While the primary objective of the present study is not to parse out the nuances of Dominican-Haitian relations, the analysis discusses the ways in which specific Dominican racial categories are inflected with connotations of Dominican or Haitian identity.

The population of the Dominican Republic comprises persons of African, indigenous, and European descent, as well as various combinations of the three, resulting in a rich racial, cultural, and phenotypic landscape. Accordingly, a variety of color terms have emerged, indexing broad racial categories: blackness (e.g., *negro/a*, *prieto/a*, *moreno/a*), whiteness (e.g., *blanco/a*, *rubio/a*, *pelirrojo/a*), and the vast space in between (e.g., *colora(d)o/a*, *indio/a*, *jaba(d)o/a*, *mulato/a*, *trigueño/a*) (Franco, 1984; Guzmán, 1974). These terms, some uniquely Dominican in usage, index, or ideology, correspond to local, socially-constructed norms and parameters of identity, and have evolved in physical, social, and legal meaning over nearly six centuries. Thus, these words—the nuanced language of race—become a critical point of entry for an examination of Dominican racial identity.

Researchers have examined the nature of racial terms in the Dominican Republic and drawn several conclusions. Racial terms in this setting highlight diversity and mixedness (Mayes, 2014). In this system, categories are distinguished not by ancestry but rather by phenotype, such that a child of an interracial couple that looked white would be classified as

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white (Roth, 2012). This is because phenotypical differences are considered at the individual level and do not automatically imply social group membership (Oquendo, 1995). Bailey (2002) has argued that, more than by phenotype, social identity in the Dominican Republic is shaped by socioeconomic class, regional origin, and urban vs. rural background. Moreover, race and racialized color categories are not objective descriptions of skin color, but rather cultural constructions that index hair texture, aesthetic and social perceptions; gender; and situational meaning (Bailey, 2002; Candelario, 2007). The racial categories are additionally deployed in accordance with contextual factors such as money, education, and power (Bailey, 2002). In addition to the interpersonal use of these categories, individual identity is juxtaposed to national and official discourses of identity in several ways—primarily through the inclusion of racialized skin color categories on official documents such as birth certificates and national identity documents and through the narratives of race included in school textbooks. As an example, through 2011, the Dominican state official recognized six skin colors for the national identity card—*blanco*, *amarillo*, *mestizo*, *indio*, *mulato*, and *negro* (Mayes, 2014). The catalog of officially recognized terms has changed over time. *Mulato*, for example, was added in 1998 (Simmons, 2009), and *indio*, *mestizo*, and *amarillo* were removed by statute in 2011. During this same period, individual Dominicans describe themselves and others using these terms (and others) to varying extents. Despite the plurality of racialized skin color terms, this racial mixture is still framed under the banner of a unified Dominican *raza* (Mayes, 2014). When extrapolated from skin color out to broader notions of identity, scholars have argued that nationality, ethnicity, and race converge on Dominicaness (Bailey, 2002; Davis, 1994).

To put these myriad terms into perspective, Roth (2012) organizes individual terms into

conceptual schemas that indicate the different ways in which race is understood. For Roth, a racial schema constitutes “the bundle of racial categories and the set of rules for what they mean, how they are ordered, and how to apply them to oneself and others” (2012, p.12). Roth proposes that, with respect to race in the Dominican Republic, three such schemas exist: continuum racial schema, nationality racial schemas, and U.S. racial schemas. The schemas as conceived by Roth are represented in Table 1.

Table 1. Racial Schemas (Roth, 2012, p.17)

Roth (2012)’s Racial Schemas	
Continuum racial schema	Includes intermediate racial terms between Black and White, such as those in Table 3 (e.g., <i>trigueño</i> , <i>indio</i> , <i>mulato</i> )
Nationality racial schemas Basic nationality schema	Includes only nationalities and ethnic groups (e.g., Puerto Rican, Dominican, Italian, American)
Panethnic nationality schema	Includes nationalities and ethnic groups, as well as the panethnic terms Latino or Hispanic
U.S. racial schemas Binary U.S. schema	Includes only the categories White and Black, with any racial mixture classified as Black
Hispanicized U.S. schema	Includes the categories White, Black, and Latino/Hispanic

While many scholars of race in Latin America have posited that race exists within what Roth characterizes as the continuum racial schema (e.g., Hoetink, 1985), the addition of nationality schemas and U.S.-referent schemas helps to broaden the discussion of race in this setting (although Roth’s schemas do not include, for example, Asians, a group not typically defined by blackness or whiteness).

The current study builds on this previous empirical research on the Dominican racial system, adding new research questions, additional quantitative methods, multiple research sites, and an emphasis on the role of language in the formation and understanding of racial categories.

### *B. Language as an Analytic Concern in Research on Race*

Language shapes perceptions of reality (Lakoff, 2004). Not surprisingly, then, language also shapes and interacts with race and perceptions of racial realities. Although much non-linguistic research on race overlooks language as a primary analytic concern, a longstanding tradition within linguistics has demonstrated the central role of language in how individuals and cultures understand race (Bucholtz, 2011). Since the beginning of the 20th century, at the same time that researchers reimagined race as a social rather than biological reality, scholars such as Sapir (1921) and Jespersen (1922) considered the intersections of language and race. Since that time, scholars have also investigated race and language in the context of colonialism, imperialism, and global process (e.g., Alleyne, 1989; Ashcroft, 2001; wa Thiong'o, 1986); discourse and ethnic style (e.g., Clark, 2003; Cutler, 1999; Gumperz, 1978; Whorf, 1950); and nation-states and minorities (Fishman, 1972; Hewitt, 1992; Hill, 1995; Urla, 1995). Baugh (1988) specifically presents linguistics as a tool for the engagement of academia with social issues such as race, racial identity and racism. Contemporary sociocultural linguists have taken up the charge and examined the intersection of language and race with respect to a variety of populations (e.g., Alba, 2004; Alim & Reyes, 2011; Bailey, 2000, 2001, 2007; Bucholtz, 1995, 2011; Toribio, 2000, 2003; Zentella, 1997).

Bucholtz (2011) has synthesized the existing body of knowledge on language and race and concludes that this relationship is clear in at least three ways: First, in the use of racial terms; second, in racial discourse; and third, in linguistic performance of race (Bucholtz, 2011, p. 5). The present study examines the first intersection of language and race—racial terms. A key difference between the present study and most existing linguistic work on language and race is that this study specifically focuses on racial terms to explore the

various dimensions of meaning inherent in a particular system of racial categorization.

Rather than analyze racial identity or racial discourse in an overt sense, the present analysis positions racial terms within a body of social knowledge in the specific cultural context of the Dominican Republic and then extracts meaning from the terms.

For an explicit consideration of racial terms in Latin America, this study looks to the work of Stephens (1999) and Guzmán (1974). Stephens (1999)'s *Dictionary of Latin American Racial and Ethnic Terminology*, one of the most extensive catalogues of racial terms in the Americas, contains over 1,000 terms used to describe race and ethnicity in Spanish-, Portuguese-, and French-speaking America from the colonial period to the present day. Six informants with expertise in Dominican Spanish and the Dominican racial setting collaborated with Stephens in the preparation of definitions for Dominican racial terms. The dictionary contains all 11 terms examined in the present study: *rubio*, *blanco*, *pelirrojo*, *colora(d)o*, *jaba(d)o*, *trigueño*, *indio*, *mulato*, *moreno*, *negro*, and *prieto*. As authority for each definition of Dominican racial terms, the dictionary cites sources such as Franco (1970, an earlier edition of Franco (1984)), Guzmán (1974), Sagás (1993), and Fennema and Loewenthal (1987, an earlier version of Fennema & Loewenthal (1989)), among others. Thus, Stephens (1999) builds on the same body of knowledge regarding Dominican racial terms as the present study. The analysis in the present study deepens the understanding of these terms by providing historical context, visual representations, connotations and social information. The analysis thus investigates the meaning of Dominican racial terms along several additional dimensions.

Guzmán (1974) is the most widely cited semantic study on race and language in the Dominican Republic. The study emerges from the senior thesis of an undergraduate student

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at a private university in the Dominican Republic and is the first of its kind. In this study, Guzmán reports the results of 48 interviews with residents in Santiago regarding the lexical meaning of 22 different *matices raciales* ('racial shades'). This inquiry is based on six physical variables: skin color, hair color, eye color, hair quality, facial features, and other features of the body (1974). For each *matiz racial* category, skin color is frequently the most salient variable; nevertheless, distinctions between similar categories are often made on the basis of other variables such as hair color or quality and facial features. Although comprehensive in a groundbreaking way, some of the study's descriptions are quite circular (e.g., the skin color of someone described as *indio claro* is *indio claro*; the skin color of someone described as *indio lavado* is *indio lavado*). Because Guzmán (1974) was published in the city of Santiago—also the research site—its original audience had the benefit of shared cultural and linguistic knowledge. Adopting the concept of *matiz racial*, the present study builds on and extends this research in several key ways. This dissertation supplements racial category descriptions with physical representations that preserve meaning in cross-cultural and cross-linguistic analysis; expands the analysis to additional research sites; introduces new methods; and adds social considerations to the analysis of meaning.

### *C. Theoretical Framing of the Current Study*

An investigation of meaning explicitly invokes the field of semantics. The present section presents lexical semantics as an overarching conceptual frame, reviews the tenets that lend themselves to the present analysis, and discusses relevant studies on prototype theory and the semantics of (non-racial) color to understand how existing linguistic approaches to investigating meaning, prototyping and abstract color categories can be used

to frame a new approach to the investigation of race and racialized color classification in the Dominican Republic.

### 1. Lexical Semantics

At the center of this investigation of racial terms is the primary question of what the terms mean: What types of physical and social information are embedded in each category? How are categories bounded? Semantics is the branch of linguistics that is concerned with meaning (e.g., Goddard, 2011; Löbner, 2002). As juxtaposed to pragmatics, which investigates the interpretation of meaning in context, semantics is concerned with meaning that is encoded in the structure of the language (Goddard, 2011). Although the present study tackles some pragmatic questions and has pragmatic implications, the primary focus of the analysis is semantic.

Within the field of semantics, lexical semantics is the discipline that studies the meaning conveyed by words and phrases (Biggam, 2012; Cruse, 1986; Murphy, 2010). Within this discipline, the lexicon of a language is viewed as a complex structure in the minds of its users (Löbner, 2002). Scholars concerned with semantics investigate meaning as the relationship between a word and a state of affairs in the world (Goddard, 2011). In the case of the present study, meaning is situated as the relationship between a racial term and the racial category that it references. This meaning may be framed as denotative or conceptual (Murphy, 2010). One might also frame the meaning inherent in racial terms by extension to aspects of the physical world, such as Munsell color chips or a standard set of photographs. As speakers point out which items or photographs belong to each category, a *de facto* theory of meaning is uncovered (Goddard, 2011).

The present study primarily investigates two specific types of meaning as it relates to

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racial terms. The first, physical meaning, positions the terms in relation to the physical world—bodies and physical appearance. The second type of meaning, social meaning—also inherent in the structure of a word—communicates information from the social sphere—formality, relationship, affect (Löbner, 2002; Murphy, 2010). In addition to the descriptive physical and social meaning that participants judge to be inherent in each racial term, the study additionally investigates the notion of connotation—conventional associations that accompany each term (Goddard, 2011; Löbner, 2002; Murphy, 2010).

### 2. Prototype Theory

Within the field of semantics, prototype theory investigates the typicality of the members of a given category, generally. The concept of prototypes emerges from the work of Rosch (1973) and holds that best examples for many categories can be established empirically (Löbner, 2002). Rosch's experiments held that categories tend to organize around typical members, with characteristics that participants most frequently associate with the category. These salient, typical category members are understood to be prototypes (Goddard, 2011; Löbner, 2002; Murphy, 2010). Related to the notion of prototypes is the concept of prototype effects. Among these effects is frequency. For example, when participants are asked to list the members of a category, the members that most participants list are the prototypical members (Murphy, 2010). Likewise, for purposes of the present study, images that participants most frequently identify using a given racial term and characteristics that participants list when describing the racial category contribute to an understanding of where prototypes lie for this set of terms.

Because of the fluid nature of race and skin color categories in this setting, the present study contemplates fuzzy category boundaries (Labov, 1973) and the potential for

categorical overlap. The study also investigates the range of physical features that may appear within a category, even absent typicality, and thereby investigates the notion of family resemblance (Löbner, 2002).

### 3. Semantics of Color

Lexical semantics and the related concept of prototype theory offer essential analytic tools for unpacking the complexities of racial terms in the Dominican Republic. Moreover, the dissertation approaches this analysis with an understanding of the ways in which scholars have used semantics to investigate color terms and categories to this point. First, studies have considered what exactly color is—hue, saturation, tone, brightness, and other aspects (Biggam, 2012). Scholars have also investigated the nature of color and have concluded that, principally, colors exist along a spectrum with no natural boundaries (Löbner, 2002). Rather, one color shades into the next, and languages divide spaces along the continuum into categories and terms (Löbner, 2002). Biggam (2012) addresses the distinction between color categories and color terms. Categories are the categories that exist in the mind, and terms are the words and expressions used to reference these categories.

Berlin and Kay (1969) is a reference point for most contemporary research on color phenomena. MacLaury (1999) characterizes the enduring question of Berlin and Kay (1969) as one of whether, and, if so, to what extent, categorization is relative between cultures (p. 22). Research on the semantics of color has examined color phenomena in a variety of languages and settings, including Ancient Greek and Classical Latin (Lyons, 1999); French (Biggam, 2012; Schäfer, 1999; Shinar, 1999); Egyptian Arabic (Stewart, 1999); Negev Bedouin Arabic (Powels, 1999); Berber (Prasse, 1999); Judeo-Spanish (Varol, 1999); and English (Berlin & Kay, 1969). In her work on Judeo-Spanish, Varol (1999) explores several

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terms relating to the focus terms of the present study: *preto*, *blanko*, *kolorado*, *moreno*, and *ruvyvo*. Varol discusses the meaning and uses of these terms. *Preto* can connote something that is somber and sad; *blanko* is never associated with negative characteristics; *moreno* and *ruvyvo* are words used when talking about hair color; and *ruvyvo* can carry the stigma of wickedness. This exploration is very closely related to the subject matter of this dissertation.

In addition to varied linguistic and cultural contexts, scholars have explored a variety of color phenomena. Some scholars have explored the spectrum represented by specific colors such as red and blue (Morgan & Corbett, 1989) or black (Stewart, 1999). Scholars have also conducted research on the nature of color description. Biggam (2012) discusses the inherent vagueness of color terms, giving the example that the shades of red inherent in blood, the sky, and bricks are all described using the same word—red. Lyons (1999), speaking in the context of Ancient Greek argues that color terms are not always about visible color but may also have an aspect of meaning that is not visible. Lyons further suggests that scholars who investigate color phenomena must take into account cultural and historical dimensions of meaning (1999). Such cultural knowledge comes into play when examining, for example, euphemisms for blackness in Egyptian Arabic. In Egyptian culture, black is a color with connotations of misfortune and evil and may thus be a dangerous word depending on context (Stewart, 1999). The same is true for the color blue in this linguistic and cultural context. Meanwhile, the color red is associated with anger, power, and sex; and yellow represents illness or bitterness (Stewart, 1999). In Negev Bedouin Arabic, blackening of the face and whitening of the face are legal terms that pertain to honor (Borg, 1999). This type of culturally specific information is not transmitted when a term is merely translated from one language to another.

Studies on the semantics of color have also specifically referenced color terms that describe aspects of the human body, such as hair color and skin color. In Greek, the term *purrhos* describes hair that is ‘chestnut,’ ‘orange,’ ‘tawny’ or ‘reddish’ (Lyons, 1999:64). As mentioned previously, in Judeo-Spanish, the terms *moreno* and *ruvyo* can be used to describe hair color (Varol, 1999). Stewart (1999) discusses terms used to describe skin color in the context of Egyptian Arabic. In this system, color categories are divided into light and dark, and color terms are inflected by considerations of gender:

*In the most general terms, Egyptians see skin color as being divided into two main categories, light and dark. The terms abyad/bīd, literally ‘white’, and abyadāni (p.117) are used for fair-skinned males, and asmar/sumr ‘brown, tan’ or asmarāni (p. 429) ‘brownish’ for dark males. The -āni terms have no female equivalent. The term for fair females is bēda and the term for dark females is samra, and the latter term is also used figuratively for Egypt itself, ‘the Dark One,’ presumably because of the nation’s association with the agricultural soil. The term iswid/sōda/sūd ‘black’ refers to dark-skinned males, especially those with negroid features, but the term asmar/samra/sumr is also used to refer to this same category. ¶ Two adjectives which refer to in-between shades of skin color are xamri ‘tawny brown (of complexion)’ (p.265), which derives from xamr ‘wine, alcoholic beverage’ and amhi (invariable) ‘light brown, wheat colored (especially of human face and features) (p. 717), which derives from amh (<qamh) ‘wheat’. The related form amhāwi/amhawīyya also occurs. (Stewart 1999:112-113)*

Biggam (2012) highlights the importance of examining and illustrating how color terms operate in a specific cultural context, especially when this information may not be obvious to a person that is not part of the culture (p. 10). This includes outlining regional, chronological and contextual restrictions. On the utility of translating color terms from one language to another, Biggam states, “To sum up, it is evident that finding a closely equivalent word in a foreign language may prove problematic, as there is unlikely to be a simple one-to-one translation without complications,” (2012, p. 10). This stipulation contemplates Sapir’s thesis on linguistic relativity: “No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which

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different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached” (1929, p. 209). The present study avoids an extreme version of the linguistic relativity thesis but also carefully analyzes local construction of meaning, invoking Dominican racial categories and racial terms without relying on cognate terms from other languages or societies.

### *D. Chapter Summary*

This chapter has situated the Dominican racial setting within broader research on race and racial categories in the U.S. and in Latin America; examined literature that positions language as an analytic concern in research on race and the ways in which the present study extends this research; and positioned lexical semantics, prototype theory, and the semantics of color as a theoretical framework for the present study.

This review of existing scholarship has shown that race and racial categories represent complex bodies of social knowledge that may vary from country to country and from culture to culture. Although the Dominican system of racial categorization has largely been criticized on the basis of its use of racial terms, very few studies specifically undertake the analysis of racial terms in this setting. Moreover, most existing scholarship on the intersection of language and race, generally, does not focus on racial terms. This study thus fills the gap by investigating Dominican racial terms using a semantic frame. A semantic frame allows for an in-depth investigation of physical and social meaning, an examination of category prototypes and fuzzy boundaries, and highlights the way that racial terms operate in this specific cultural context.