Chapter 8

Conclusion and Implications

This dissertation has employed language as a lens through which to understand the complex system of knowledge embedded in race and racialized skin color categories in the Dominican Republic. This linguistic perspective brings unique analytical benefits to the interdisciplinary conversation on the meaning of race in the Dominican Republic. A linguistic lens facilitates the analysis of racial terms for culturally-specific physical and social meaning, does not assume equivalence between cognate forms in different languages, and presents an analysis that does not rely on traditionally unstated assumptions. Moreover, this examination of Dominican racial categories does not defer to external defaults.

This chapter summarizes the conclusions and implications of the present study and is divided into four sections. The first section comprises an overview and final discussion of the findings with respect to each of the study's five research questions. The second section discusses the implications of the study for the fields of semantics, sociocultural linguistics, and racial and ethnic studies. The third section discusses directions for further research; and the final section delivers concluding remarks.

A. Overview and Final Discussion of the Findings

The introduction to this dissertation identifies several unstated, and largely unchallenged, assumptions that underlie prevailing discourses about the Dominican Racial setting:

(1) Dominicans have African ancestry.

(2) African ancestry is equivalent to blackness and must correspond to black identity.

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(3) The term black in the U.S. is equivalent to the term *negro* in the Dominican Republic.

(4) *Indio* denotes, and may only denote, indigenous heritage.

(5) Race is an objective thing that is constant across languages and cultures.

(6) No distinction need be made between race and skin color.

The findings from the present study interact with these assumptions in interesting and, sometimes, unexpected ways.

1. Findings for Research Question 1: *What physical information is embedded in racial terms in the Dominican Republic?*

In Chapter 5, interview participants associate racial categories with specific physical characteristics including skin color, hair color and texture, facial features, and features of the body. Participants talk about physical prototypes for each category and discuss the ways in which category boundaries are "fuzzy," allowing for category overlap and positioning clusters of racial terms as non-exclusive spaces. Survey participant responses in Chapter 6 confirm the prototypes and fuzzy boundaries discussed in Chapter 5. In addition, a quantitative analysis of the survey data reveals that racial categories are being defined as much by the characteristics of a particular image as by the characteristics of a particular participant. For example, while the RGB values for skin color, hair color, and eye color correspond to trends in physical description, so do factors such as region and participant self description. The physical information embedded in these racial categories is thus very nuanced and inflected by a number of different contextual factors.

2. Findings for Research Question 2: *What social information is embedded in racial terms in the Dominican Republic?*

In Chapter 5, interview participants discuss the social information embedded in the study's focal racial terms. This information includes parameters of use (e.g., You can yell out *rubio* to catch someone's attention but not *blanco*), connotations (e.g., Absent a modifier, *prieto* conveys low education, low socioeconomic status, and negative affect), and persistent racial hierarchy (e.g., *Negro* is used to emphasize negative characteristics). An understanding of this social meaning, in addition to physical meaning, is thus necessary for the navigation of Dominican racial categories. Participants emphasize that each category does not exist in isolation, but rather as part of a racial hierarchy that privileges whiteness and disparages blackness.

Survey participants describe 16 images using the study's focal racial terms and evaluate social characteristics of the individuals in these images. The analysis of these responses in Chapter 6 reveals, overall, the evaluations for all racial terms follow the same general trends for each social characteristic. For example, for the social characteristic "Wealth," where the overall trend was for images to appear more *pobre* than *rico*, the same was true for the results within racial categories. Variance occurs, however, when the frequencies of individual ratings are examined by racial category and by social characteristic.

3. Findings for Research Question 3: *How has the meaning of racial terms changed over time in the Dominican Republic?*

The diachronic nature of this dissertation sheds light on the complex questions of this study from multiple perspectives and permits the analysis of meaning for the study's focal racial terms over time. First, the colonial legacy of race is rooted in race as traceable lineage,

race as legal status, whiteness as aspiration, and blackness as regression. Historically, gender was also a salient component in the construction of racial categories. Over time, physical appearance has come to trump lineage in determining racial categories, although lineage is still highly salient in the specific case of Haitian descent. The analysis further demonstrates that a core group of racial terms has persisted since the colonial period, while others—such as *tercerón, cuarterón,* and *saltapatrás* have waned. Over time, the meaning of some terms has evolved, as with *negro*, which no longer denotes enslaved status, and *indio*, which may now refer to skin color instead of race. This analysis also demonstrates that certain additional characteristics of contemporary Dominican racial categories are persistent legacies of the colonial system. One such characteristic is the nature of skin color categories as non-exclusive spaces in this setting, a fact demonstrated by 16th-century legal documents and by interview and survey participants in the contemporary Dominican Republic. This flexibility is not rooted in confusion as posited by external critics, but is rather rooted in a comfort with mixture and category overlap that has been present in this racial system for more than 500 years.

4. Findings for Research Question 4: *What does the meaning of racial terms reveal about the notion of* raza *in the Dominican Republic?*

After centuries of meaning making in the Dominican Republic, the word *raza* (≈'race') can be interpreted in a number of ways. When participants describe their own *raza*, the responses reveal several underlying subcategories or paradigms of race. These paradigms range from the most frequent Nationality paradigm, to the Ethno-linguistic Descriptor paradigm used in the U.S., to the multi-referent term *indio*. The ten racial paradigms that

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emerge from the data in the present study engage Roth (2012)'s racial schemas. That the notion of *raza* can be conceptualized and divided in these many different ways reveals the complexity of the notion and informs the challenge of describing Dominican racial identity. Researchers must be cognizant of which paradigm they invoke, as well as the accompanying conceptual implications.

5. Findings for Research Question 5: *How do racial terms interact with notions of typicality in the Dominican Republic?*

In Chapter 6, the analysis shows that the most frequent term that participants use to describe their race is a racialized version of Nationality—i.e., Dominican. Chapter 7 revisits the notion of nationality as a racial identity and demonstrates that the images that participants most frequently describe as Dominican are also described as *moreno, indio*, and *blanco* (in the broad Dominican sense of the term). The images that participants least frequently identify as Dominican are *blancos* and *rubios* that fall outside of what participants consider to be the Dominican racial spectrum, and the categories of *negro* and *prieto* are considered to be Dominican by just under 50 percent of participants. Moreover, when participants are specifically asked to identify the image of a 'typical Dominican,' participants gravitate toward images that they describe as *moreno* and *indio*. The results in both experiments are inflected by region, and the results of the *Dominicano Típico* experiment are also inflected by gender. These results demonstrate the utility of engaging existing racial paradigms in the Dominican Republic to understand race in a new way, suggesting that effectiveness need not be sacrificed to frame a conversation about race that engages the Nationality paradigm. This section additionally suggests new methodologies for examining the question of Dominican racial identity.

B. *Implications of the Study*

This study is the first of its kind, a linguistic approach to racial studies that complements the big picture racial setting analysis of historians, sociologists, and anthropologists, and presents innovative methodology for examining complex questions. The dissertation thus adds a voice to the conversation on racial identity in the Dominican Republic. Moreover, the dissertation is truly interdisciplinary; and its methodology presents the opportunity for both qualitative and quantitative analysis of results, a novel approach to the examination of racial categories.

1. Implications for Semantics

An investigation of meaning explicitly invokes the field of semantics. The present study demonstrates the utility of semantics as a frame for analyzing complex questions and highlights the importance of the thoughtful examination of meaning. Moreover, the study additionally demonstrates how existing linguistic approaches to investigating prototyping and color can be used to build innovative approaches to the investigation of race and racialized color classification.

2. Implications for Sociocultural Linguistics

The present study joins the expanding body of sociocultural linguistic scholarship on the critical intersection of language and race. In doing so, the study adds support to the case for examining language as a central analytic concern in research on race. A key difference between the present study and most existing linguistic work on language and race is that this study specifically focuses on racial categories to explore the various dimensions of meaning inherent in a particular system of racial categorization. Rather than analyze racial identity or

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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. The study also proposes a mixed methods approach that may prove useful for other researchers. Additionally, the study updates the empirical research on racial identity in the Dominican Republic.

3. Implications for Racial Studies

In the field of racial studies, the results of this study have methodological and substantive implications. First, by positioning language as a primary analytic concern, the study brings a new perspective and new methodology to racial studies inquiries. Moreover, the dissertation offers an additional voice on racial identity in the Dominican Republic that is grounded in rigorous analysis and social and historical context. As the study builds on prior research in the field, it specifically includes the consideration of racialization of region, presents images of prototypical members of Dominican racial categories, and proposes association rules analysis as an analytical tool.

The results of this dissertation should challenge researchers investigating themes related to race in various cultural and linguistic settings to identify and address unstated racial assumptions and to challenge these assumptions methodologically to test whether they are empirically supported. Second, as discussed in Chapter 6, how individuals see themselves influences how they see and describe others. This empirical finding has significant implications for researchers conducting cross-cultural analyses. First, it means that researchers must be cognizant of, and able to check, their own racial perspective. Second, it means that how participants describe themselves is a critical component of any analysis that involves the description of others. Finally, the study offers a framework for examining race

in settings in which individuals talk about race in non-traditional ways. This is illustrated in the analysis from Chapter 7: Delimiting Dominicanidad. Whereas, in Chapter 6, the highest percentage of participants describe their race by racializing their nationality—*dominicano/a*—Chapter 7 demonstrates that it is still possible to meaningfully analyze the physical parameters of this non-traditional racial category.

C. Directions for Further Research

Directions for further study include additional research in the Dominican Republic, research in the Dominican diaspora, and research in other racial settings.

1. Further Research in the Dominican Republic

Further research in the Dominican Republic may expand the present study in several ways. First, additional research may expand participant sampling and increase the number of overall participants to examine whether additional considerations might emerge from a larger participant sample. Specifically, given the finding that the frequency and meaning of racial categories may be inflected according to region of the country, the expanded sampling could investigate the physical and social meaning of racial categories in additional regions of the Dominican Republic: southern cities such as Barahona and San Cristóbal, additional border cities such as Pedernales and Jimaní, eastern cities such as Higuey and La Romana, and more rural settings. Second, further research in the Dominican Republic could build on the present study by further analyzing racial categories in social context. For example, the present study has isolated faces for analysis, and further studies might include full-body photos, video data, audio data, and other contextual cues to examine how additional variables influence racial categorization. Third, the present study has examined the

perspectives of Dominican adults with respect to racial terms. Further research might, with the appropriate ethical review and parental permission, examine the perspectives of Dominican adolescents and children as it relates to racial categories. This facet of the analysis invokes broader considerations of how and when individuals are socialized into a shared understanding of race and racialized color categories. Finally, further research might investigate how immigrants living in the Dominican Republic interpret, inhabit, and deploy Dominican racial terms. In the data collection phase of the present study, I collected some surveys and informal interviews regarding Dominican racial terms with Haitian, Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Spanish students and immigrants living in the Dominican Republic. Because this perspective was not the focus of the present study, I did not collect a substantial amount of data on this question. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to see how this question would bear out empirically.

2. Further Research in the Dominican Diaspora

Further research in the Dominican Republic may also expand the present study in several ways. There are large populations of Dominican immigrants, second generation Dominicans, and children of one Dominican parent and one parent from another background in countries such as the United States and Spain. For example, the Bronx, a borough in New York City, has the largest population of Dominicans and individuals of Dominican descent outside of Santo Domingo. In this environment, where multiple racial systems and multiple racial ideologies are in contact, further research might explore the extent to which Dominicans in this setting continue to subscribe to the Dominican system of racial classification. Additionally, this research might explore how individuals understand the relationship between English racial categories and the Spanish racial categories of the Dominican racial

system. Where individuals have a parent from another racial, ethnic, or cultural background, it would be interesting to examine how this additional racial system factors into an individual's understanding of racial categories. A similar analysis might be carried out in Spanish cities with sizeable Dominican immigrant populations, such as Madrid or Barcelona. An even more nuanced analysis might be carried out in Dominican communities in non-Spanish-speaking European settings, such as France, Italy, and Holland.

3. Further Research in the Other Racial Settings

Further research in other racial settings may also expand the present study in several ways. First, in the Spanish-speaking context, ethnography, photo description tasks, and interviews might illuminate local understanding of racial categories in Mexico, Colombia, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, among other settings. These analyses would be specifically designed to account for regional inflections, as in the present analysis. In additional to facilitating the analysis of racial terms in each country, this analysis would enable a hemispheric comparison of terms such as *negro* or *moreno* that maintains the cultural-specific information of each research site. Beyond other Spanish-speaking settings, the methodology from the present analysis could be expanded to examine racial categories in Portuguese-speaking settings such as Brazil, or the African countries of Cape Verde, Angola, and Mozambique. A particularly interesting companion to the present analysis would be research on the physical and social meaning embedded in Kreyol racial categories in Haiti, as well as the racialization of Haitianness. These expanded analyses bring global racial systems into conversation, with a methodology that prevents false equivocations and preserves the locally-derived meanings.

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D. *Concluding Remarks*

This dissertation opens with the statement by a Dominican government official that "Dominicans are in complete denial of who they are." This sentiment and its accompanying assumptions permeate most social and academic commentary on the Dominican racial setting. By contrast, however, participants in this study discuss their own racial identity and how this engages notions of blackness and notions of mixedness; juxtapose the Dominican racial system and its particularities to the racial systems of other countries; explain the positive and negative connotations associated with racial terms; address intersections of race, region, gender, and class; identify the physical and social boundaries of racial categories; and present an image of Dominican typicality that is primarily identified as *moreno*. These results do not support a conclusion that Dominicans are confused or in denial. Rather, they suggest that new methodologies and approaches can problematize longstanding consensus and illuminate new perspectives. Moreover, to respect Dominican racial categories as a complex system of social knowledge is not to assert that issues of racism and discrimination do not exist in this setting. Rather, by removing specious claims about the Dominican racial system, the analysis allows for a more thoughtful consideration of racial questions in this setting.

Many academic studies on race in the Dominican Republic have invoked racial categories without exploring them, taken for granted the universality and translatability of racial terms across linguistic and cultural contexts, and, in doing so, have glossed over a wealth of physical, social, historical, political, and legal meaning contained within these terms. This original research reframes research on the analysis of Dominican racial categories and contributes to the fields of semantics, sociolinguistics, and racial studies.