

# Constructing a National Identity through Language: An Analysis of the Earliest Descriptions of Lunfardo in Argentina

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## Abstract

The creation of Argentina as a modern nation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century required the construction of a national cultural identity, and language was a fundamental element in this formative process. Lunfardo is the linguistic repertoire of Buenos Aires rooted in its immigration history and was one of the linguistic examples directly operated upon by that process. Though now it is a renowned and celebrated component of tango and of *porteño* speech, and thus of the entire Argentine culture, when it was first documented in Argentina it was merely depicted as a criminal jargon. This study analyzes some of the earliest descriptions of Lunfardo, and aims at identifying some of the ideological biases behind their interpretations. In this way, this paper hopes to shed more light on the role of this important linguistic phenomenon in the history of the creation of an Argentine national cultural identity.

**keywords:** Argentina, Buenos Aires, crime, immigration, Lunfardo, margins, modernity, national cultural identity

## 1. Introduction<sup>(1)</sup>

Lunfardo, as the particular linguistic repertoire of Buenos Aires (hereafter BA), has come to represent Argentine culture, especially in the Spanish-speaking world, thanks to its prominence in the everyday parlance of people in BA, as well as to its pervasive presence in innumerable lyrics of tango songs. Lunfardo is also often heard in other Argentine musical productions (e.g. Argentine rock and to a lesser extent in *cumbia villera*), as well as in a number of Argentine movies which represent Argentine culture to the world. Within Argentina, a large body of poetry has been written in Lunfardo, especially but not exclusively from the BA area, and Lunfardo has been used in the Argentine theatrical genre of *sainete*.<sup>(2)</sup> In other words, Lunfardo is an important element of Argentine cultural identity and especially of the culture of its capital, BA.

This paper aims to analyze the earliest records of Lunfardo in order to clarify some of the dynamics that were involved in the creation of an Argentine national cultural identity, a complex process that we can argue started with the attainment of independence from Spain in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Particularly, this paper focuses on the early negative depictions of Lunfardo and, in trying to elucidate them, attempts to bring to the fore some characteristics of Lunfardo relevant to this process of the creation of a national cultural identity in Argentina.

## 2. What is Lunfardo<sup>(3)</sup>

Lunfardo has been discussed and redefined ever since its first appearance in Argentine written documents, a set of two articles by Benigno Lugones in the *porteño* newspaper *La Nación* in 1879. Currently, the definition most generally accepted is the one given by one of the most renowned scholars of Lunfardo, José Gobello:

“Lunfardo is a lexical repertoire that has passed into the colloquial parlance of Buenos Aires and other Argentine and Uruguayan cities, formed from dialectal and slang words brought by immigration, some of which were spread by theater, tango and popular literature, while others remained in the homes of the immigrants, and to which must be added

aboriginal and Portuguese words that were already present in the colloquial parlance of Buenos Aires and its countryside, some argot terms brought by the French through prostitution; those of the popular Spanish and the caló brought by the Spanish *genero chico*, and those of local creation.”<sup>(4)</sup>

In other words, Lunfardo is a vocabulary used in the area of BA generated from the multiple linguistic and dialectal origins of the people who made up the population of BA during its development. This is not a dialect or jargon: it is a vocabulary that has been used in BA that substitutes standard Spanish words with words from various origins within the standard grammatical and lexical structure of Spanish.<sup>(5)</sup> Users of Lunfardo speak or write in standard Spanish, but choose to use a particular vocabulary of disparate linguistic origins distinctive of BA which does not exist in standard Spanish, and which reflects the history of immigration of BA.

More recently, Oscar Conde has stressed this opposition between Lunfardo and standard Spanish in his own definition of Lunfardo, based on the original proposed by Gobello above:

“Lunfardo is a lexical repertoire, limited in its origin to the region of the Rio de la Plata, made up of popular terms and expressions of diverse origins used as alternative or open opposition to those of standard Spanish and spread transversally through all social strata of Argentina.”<sup>(6)</sup>

These definitions of Lunfardo started coming into shape only since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, and especially after the publication in 1953 of *Lunfardía* by José Gobello<sup>(7)</sup>, and the institution in 1962 of the Academia Porteña del Lunfardo in BA. However, these definitions are very different from the first that appeared in documents in Argentina since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and it is to them we are going to turn for the rest of this paper.

### 3. Earliest depictions of Lunfardo.

#### i) Benigno Lugones (1879)

As mentioned above, the first significant mention of the term *lunfardo* dates to 1879, in two articles by Benigno Lugones for the newspaper *La Nación* entitled *Los beduinos urbanos* (The urban Bedouins) and *Los caballeros de industria* (The gentlemen of industry).<sup>(8)</sup> In them, subtitled *bocetos policiales* (police sketches), Lugones laments the fact that a minority of men of no morals stalk BA society under a constant threat of violence and abuse. These are the thieves (*ladrones*). Lugones then argues that, in order to give a degree of protection from the actions of these thieves to society at large, society needs to be informed on the special jargon that these thieves use. The two articles then describe in quite some details some of the most common *modi operandi* of thieves in BA, and Lugones introduces the specific words that these thieves use in their jargon. Lugones explains that the thieves are called *lunfardos* in their own jargon, though the jargon itself is never collectively called Lunfardo by Lugones.

In this first instance of the term *lunfardo*, therefore, it is used as the main term for the general category of thieves in BA. These *lunfardos* are described as immoral, often violent, but possessing a certain astuteness in their trade (hence the “gentlemen of industry” ironic title), and having supposedly created a vocabulary of words unintelligible to society at large is one of their strategies to success in their covert illegal activities. Their life of danger and instability does not allow them to hold a permanent address, hence the “urban Bedouins” sobriquet.

At the end of the March article, Lugones transcribes “the only *lunfardo* poem that exists” (“*la única poesía lunfarda que existe*”):

*Estando en el bolín polizando (durmiendo)*  
*Se presentó el mayorengo:*  
*“A portarlo en cana vengo,*  
*“Su mina lo ha delatado.”*

(As he was sleeping in his room/ the police officer arrived:/ “I am here to take you to jail:/ Your girl blew the whistle on you.”)

In his description of the poem Lugones uses the term *lunfardo* not as a common noun, as he does throughout the two articles, but as an adjective related to both the content of a thief’s life and the thief’s vocabulary used to write it. *Lunfardo* thus comes to signify both the category of thieves as well as activities related to criminality, one of which is the actual jargon supposedly created by the thieves in order to keep their conversations obscure to society at large.

In this first recorded example of what we can call Lunfardo literature, the words *bolín* (room), *polizar* (to sleep), *mayorengo* (police officer), *cana* (jail), *mina* (girl) are not Spanish words, but belong to the set of 58 *lunfardo* (criminal) words that Lugones is introducing in these articles. Lugones does not address the origin of these non-Spanish words, but limits himself to defining their meaning for the general reader.

## ii) La Prensa (1878)

Although Lugones’ articles are commonly seen as the first major written description and compilation of Lunfardo vocabulary, a year before (1878) a short article appeared in the newspaper *La Prensa* of BA in which a total of 26 words commonly used by the thieves of BA were introduced, with appropriate translations in Spanish.<sup>(9)</sup> These words too, like in the later Lugones articles, are not common Spanish words, and were described as a subterfuge that thieves used in order to keep their plans and communications from being understood by society at large, thus constituting a criminal jargon. This short article too aimed to alert the readers to some key words that, if heard, would imply an impending criminal attack.

In this article too the term *lunfardo* appears with the gloss *ladrón* (thief). No other use of this term is made in the article, which is why Lugones’ two articles are usually regarded as the first actual use of the term *lunfardo* to describe not only the thieves but their jargon too.

## iii) Luis María Drago (1888)

The double definition suggested by Lugones of Lunfardo both as common noun for thieves and as adjective referring to their criminal life was subsequently adopted in a large-scale study of criminality in BA by lawyer and political figure Luis María Drago. Co-founder in 1888 of the Sociedad de Antropología Jurídica (Society of Legal Anthropology), in the same year he published his extensive study of criminality entitled *Los hombres de presa* (Men of prey). In chapter 8 of this study, Drago analyzes the jargon of BA’s thieves from the perspective of anthropological criminology championed by his contemporary, the Italian positivist criminologist Cesare Lombroso.<sup>(10)</sup>

As part of his analysis of the criminal jargon of BA, Drago includes 39 Lunfardo words which he claims are usually employed by the local criminals in their communications. In his discussion of this jargon, he makes some points that we need to analyze. First, he clearly states that the term *lunfardo* has two meanings: that of the category of thieves and that of their jargon. Moreover, he makes the point that the *lunfardo* jargon’s aim is to keep the content of the communications amongst thieves incomprehensible to the larger population:

“In *lunfardo* (a word that designates at the same time the jargon and those who use it) of the thieves of Buenos Aires, we notice many expressions whose use clearly reveals the need to resort in certain cases to a special jargon unknown to the layman, while other words clearly show their professional origin.”<sup>(11)</sup>

The third important point Drago makes is that these Lunfardo words are actively created by the thieves:

“As can be seen in the cases cited, the words have been created to designate modalities or aspects of persons or things, which could only find translation in standard language by way of some interpretative detour.”<sup>(12)</sup>

Drago illustrates his argument in this chapter employing Lunfardo words, but like Lugones he also does not attempt any etymology for these words. However, he does make the statement that many of the words in Lunfardo are taken from foreign languages, through the channel of immigration.<sup>(13)</sup> In other words, Drago makes an explicit connection between immigration and Lunfardo, in his case linking immigration with criminality and thus seeing the effect of immigration in the development of Lunfardo as the criminal jargon of BA.

Such a connection between immigration and Lunfardo via criminality had also been made a few years earlier in a short newspaper article by an anonymous reporter in the newspaper *La Crónica* of BA in 1883. In this article about the history and life of a well-known complex of low-income tenements (called *conventillos*), the following definition of Lunfardo is given:

“Lunfardo is nothing more than a jumble of Italian dialects of modest extraction and is used by the country’s thieves, who have also added picturesque expressions to it;...”<sup>(14)</sup>

#### iv) Antonio Dellepiane (1894)

The fourth and last early source to describe Lunfardo that will be analyzed in this paper is a book written in 1894 by Antonio Dellepiane, lawyer and professor at the Faculty of Law of the University of BA: *El idioma del delito* (The language of crime). This is a fundamental text in the study of Lunfardo because the book consists of an introductory essay in eight chapters followed by a Lunfardo-Spanish dictionary giving definitions and example sentences for 414 Lunfardo entries. This is the first attempt to create an extensive Lunfardo-Spanish dictionary, and it explicitly uses the term Lunfardo to define this jargon.

Dellepiane’s aim is the scientific study of criminality, to which he applies sociology, psychology, and linguistics, and this book is his contributions toward a linguistic understanding of the language (and thus the mind) of the criminal. In the introductory essay, Dellepiane too shows the strong influence of Lombroso’s school of criminology, for instance as he addresses Lombroso’s theory of atavism as the basis of all criminal jargons.<sup>(15)</sup> Like Drago before him, Dellepiane links immigration to criminality, and thus claims that in many criminal jargons foreign languages are an important source of words.<sup>(16)</sup> Dellepiane too does not attempt an etymological analysis of these Lunfardo words.

#### v) Subsequent studies of Lunfardo.

The two articles by Lugones of 1879, the criminology treatise by Drago of 1888, and the dictionary by Dellepiane of 1894 served to cement the discourse on Lunfardo in these early phases of the study of this phenomenon. The three authors belonged in fact to the political and social elite of BA (and thus of Argentina) of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and thus their views were instrumental in defining the conditions of the discourse on this topic. Indeed, after Dellepiane’s dictionary a number of treatises and dictionaries about Lunfardo were published in Argentina, the vast majority of which portrayed Lunfardo in very similar fashion.<sup>(17)</sup>

One such portrayal is the statement made by Jorge Luis Borges in his *El tamaño de mi esperanza* (The extent of my hope) of 1925, in which he draws from this early “official” view of Lunfardo in the chapter titled *Invectiva contra el arrabalero* (An invective against the *arrabalero*):

“Lunfardo is an artificial jargon of thieves; the *arrabalero* is the simulation of that jargon, it is the coquetry of the *compadrón* who wants to play the outlaw and bad guy, and whose evil deeds just end in a warehouse brawl, favored by alcohol and his peers’ support. Lunfardo is a guild vocabulary like so many others, it is the technology of the *furca* and the *ganzúa*: the *arrabalero* is something even worse.”<sup>(18)</sup>

Borges here divides Lunfardo into two components: the first, and original, is the technical jargon of the guild of thieves, created artificially by them to carry out their criminal activities.<sup>(19)</sup> The second is a later simulation of that primary jargon by the inhabitants of the suburban neighborhoods (*arrabales*) at the margins of BA. These *compadrones* try to emulate the thieves by

borrowing their idiom and by getting involved in sterile acts of minor violence in some local bar/warehouse (*bochinche*). Borges regards the primary Lunfardo as a mere jargon of thieves, and the secondary Lunfardo as a copy of that idiom, and thus at an even “lower” level.

Putting aside Borges’ subjective taste in the aesthetic evaluation of these two lexicons, he identifies the marginal peripheries of BA as the space in which Lunfardo was developed, which is actually supported by the large body of subsequent research on Lunfardo, and matches the importance of immigration in the creation of this repertoire, since most immigrants settled in those marginal peripheries. However, Borges settles on a specific temporal progression of the creation of Lunfardo: first it is artificially created by thieves, and only afterward it is picked up by the larger population of the peripheries, as emulation.

Interestingly, Dellepiane himself had proposed earlier a similar mechanism for the creation and spread of Lunfardo, in the essay accompanying his dictionary. He states:

“A multitude of criminal slang terms are incorporated, everywhere, into the ordinary language. It is not difficult to explain the cause and process of this phenomenon. The first resides in the graphic and picturesque nature of these expressions, combined with the tendency to imitate them. As for the process of diffusion, it is very simple. The lower classes of the population (among us the *compadritos*, the rascals, the women in prostitution), in their contacts with the persons of the criminal world, eventually get to know some of these words and make them their own. Soon the rowdy and misbehaving youth popularizes them and sometimes takes them to the upper strata of society.”<sup>(20)</sup>

As Borges will do later, Dellepiane here chooses a specific temporal progression for how Lunfardo, supposedly a mere jargon of thieves, spread throughout society. He posits that after the criminal world had established this new slang, contacts between criminals and non-criminal (but marginal) layers of society led to the gradual incorporation of these words into their own repertoire by emulation. Here too, as in Borges, this process is linked to the marginal spaces of BA society (here judged as “low classes” by Dellepiane). Later, “misbehaving” youths who came into contact with such a “lower-class” world and borrowed their terms, in turn were responsible for spreading them further into society at large.

Lunfardo thus was consistently the noun with which to describe the general category of thieves of BA, and it also described the criminal jargon employed by them. This jargon was heavily influenced by words imported from other languages through the large immigration waves that were at the basis of the great population growth of BA from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 1930s. At the same time, immigration was also seen as tightly linked with criminality. This view of Lunfardo as the jargon of thieves (themselves called *lunfardos*) artificially created by them would be the standard view of Lunfardo until (and beyond) about the 1950s, when a number of scholars and researchers critiqued this received view of Lunfardo through linguistic and sociological studies.

Amongst these, the aforementioned *Lunfardía* by Gobello of 1953 is one the prominent works, in which Gobello summarizes his very different understanding of Lunfardo not as merely the jargon of criminals, but a widespread lexical repertoire derived mostly from the immigration background of the city of BA. Gobello carries out an extensive etymological analysis of a vast number of Lunfardo terms and shows its origins in various Italian dialects and other languages of immigrants, and also, but in a relatively small part, in the various jargons of criminality that combined in the city of BA.

#### **4. Another analysis of the early sources of Lunfardo.**

In this chapter I provide a different analysis of the sources I have introduced before, with the aim to uncover some of the ideological biases that may have informed those early studies. Arguably, the conclusions I am going to reach have been already established by previous scholarship, starting with Gobello’s work, but the attempt to quantify somehow the data we have is, to my knowledge, still needed. What I am presenting here is far from an exhaustive or scientific analysis of the data, but what I

consider an important step in that direction.

By data, here, I mean the actual Lunfardo words that the studies mentioned earlier in this paper present us. The conclusion I will reach is the same general conclusion: the repertoire of Lunfardo is made up of two major components: one directly related to criminality (what could be simply linked to the group of *lunfardos* as thieves and criminals in BA) and the other unrelated to criminality. This second component is important because it was neglected completely by the early studies on Lunfardo, possibly because those studies were listing Lunfardo words used by criminals only, while other sectors of the population of BA were not studied. This, and the aim of those studies to focus on criminality led to the creation of the category Lunfardo as solely the jargon of criminals, thus missing the second, more general use of the same or overlapping lexical repertoire.

In the analysis that follows, I have looked at each set of Lunfardo words in the four sources introduced above and have divided the lists of words into words that clearly relate to criminality (e.g. words describing specific *modi operandi* of thieves, technical terms for lock picking tools, various words to describe police officers, etc.) and those that are not necessarily or not at all related to criminality (e.g. verbs describing everyday activities, items of clothing, anatomical details, etc.). Of course, this is not a scientific analysis, and a great deal of qualitative interpretation has gone into it. Consequently, the reader may disagree with certain specific choices, but I hope that overall the results will be compelling to support the conclusion I stated above.

### i) Benigno Lugones (1879)

In his two articles, Lugones introduced 58 Lunfardo words. Of these, 29 (50%) are directly related to criminality, while 29 (50%) are not related to criminality. More specifically, of the 29 crime-related terms described by Lugones, 10 are straightforward technical terms of criminality, 7 refer to types of thefts and frauds, 7 to types of thieves, and 5 to guards and penitentiaries.

Of the 29 terms not related to criminality, 14 refer to objects and places, 6 are verbs for everyday activities, 5 depict types of people, and 4 describe qualities. I have included and underlined the standard Spanish translations for the Lunfardo terms in these lists of common words to show that the available standard Spanish words are very common and very different from the Lunfardo words.

Looking at the etymologies (available in the Lunfardo dictionaries I consulted, see note 3) both groups of related and unrelated words have about the same breakdown of origins: the majority come from various Italian jargons (i.e. specialized vocabularies for professionals in various occupations), Genovese dialect, standard Italian, and standard Spanish. A few come from Venetian, southern Italian dialects, Portuguese, onomatopoeia, etc.

These results confirm that the origins of the vast majority of the words that Lugones recorded from his criminal subjects are non-Spanish, thus are mostly related to immigration. However, half of these words that Lugones attributed to the thieves of BA are actually unrelated to crime, thus hinting that the repertoire that Lugones recorded was indeed used by the thieves but may have come from other sectors of BA immigrants. The milieu in which Lunfardo was being created, thus, may have included criminals, but was likely just the vast numbers of immigrants that kept arriving in BA especially from Europe.

### ii) La Prensa (1878)

The short article in *La Prensa* included 26 words, most of them overlapping with the set presented by Lugones. Of these 13 (50%) are directly related to criminality, while 13 (50%) are not related to criminality. As this set is basically a subset of the Lugones words, it shows that there were certain words that were probably very common amongst thieves, as well as amongst the general population of immigrants in BA. Words like pocket watch, kerchief, hat, girl are likely to have spread very easily through the general population of the city, and be used by thieves in the process as well.

### iii) Luis María Drago (1888)

In his chapter on Lunfardo Drago introduced 39 Lunfardo words. Of these, 19 words are related to crime (49%), and 20

words unrelated to crime (51%).<sup>(33)</sup> In this case too we can recognize half of the words as being common everyday words for which simple Spanish words exist and thus their continued use can likely be traced to the immigrant populations' custom of using their own familiar lexicons for such common items as keys, pocket watch chains, wallets, etc.

#### iv) Antonio Dellepiane (1894)<sup>(34)</sup>

Of the 414 entries introduced and defined in Dellepiane's dictionary, 257 (62%) are related to crime (see Table 1), but of these 47 may be considered only loosely related to crime (e.g. words used in the context of sex, of the description of simpletons, and words associated with a reprobate though not necessarily criminal life style: see categories "rough activities and words", "sex", and "fools, dumbs" in Table 1). The remaining crime-related categories may be broken down as: "technical" jargon terms related to criminal life (115 words: see categories "scams, hits", "thieves", "police agents", and "jail" in Table 1); "technical" jargon terms for objects relevant to criminal activities (65 words: see categories "keys, doors", "money, gold", "pockets, wallets", and "watches" in Table 1); and "general" terms related to criminal life (30 words: see categories "violence", and "miscellaneous criminal words" in Table 1).

The remaining 157 entries (38%) are not related to crime (see Table 2): they include a vast list of objects used in everyday life (e.g. combs, shoes, scissors, etc.); verbs describing routine actions (e.g. to eat, to sleep, to talk, etc.); types of persons one commonly meets (e.g. man, woman, foreigner, etc.) and body parts (e.g. mouth, foot, finger, etc.); qualities of people or situations (e.g. coward, important, bad, etc.); and places where one carries out normal everyday activities (e.g. various types of stores, etc.). With what was noted above about the words loosely related to criminality from the lists in Table 1, the tally could be 210 entries (51%) related to crime and 204 entries (49%) unrelated or not necessarily related to crime.

In all four examples analyzed above we can see that about half of the Lunfardo terms listed in each case relate directly to the activities or world of criminals, i.e. are words we may expect to have been brought together into a functional jargon by criminals. However, the remaining half of the Lunfardo words relate to common everyday actions and objects, and for them the rationale may be different. Given that all these are words with a strong connection to immigration, and given that the majority of immigrants were not criminals, it is plausible to imagine a scenario in which immigrants arriving to BA from various parts of the world would come to live in close quarters with each other. Neither Spanish nor any one foreign language or dialect being the single dominant linguistic milieu, each community of immigrants maintained a repertoire of its original language. As these communities were literally living together in close quarters (see below), they interacted with each other and a process of linguistic hybridization ensued. In it, immigrants' words were borrowed across immigrant communities and started forming a new linguistic repertoire: as the official language of BA was Spanish, eventually Spanish would become the grammatical and syntactical framework into which this hybridized repertoire of immigrants' words would operate.

Within the population of immigrants, a portion participated in criminal activities, and they naturally would use that hybrid repertoire of everyday words (the Lunfardo as the sociolect of the BA immigrant population) as well as adapt some words from their original languages to describe more technical aspects of their activities (the Lunfardo as jargon proper of the BA criminality). Lunfardo, therefore, should be defined not just as the jargon of criminality in BA, as it was originally done in the four examples analyzed in this paper and in the subsequent literature I have mentioned. Instead, Lunfardo should be seen as the resulting lexical repertoire of the immigrant population of BA, only a portion of which is comprised of thieves and criminals. This conclusion was already formulated by the 1950s studies mentioned above, but the type of analysis provided in this paper supports and strengthens it.

Table 1: Lunfardo words related to crime in Dellepiane (1894).

<p>Scams, hits (62):  <i>afanador, afanar, bagayo, balurdo, baratín, baratinar, blema/brema, calote, calotear, cambiaso, caminar, capa, colarse, contar, cuento, dejar, desempaquetar, de vado, engrupir, escamoteo, escrushar, escrusho, espiantar, espiente, estrilo, filar, flor, floreado/da, florear, formar, garrotear, guiñar, hoteles, indique, jamado/da, jica, mancada, mancado, mancar, manyado, masa, misos, mosqueta, pampa, pastilla, prueba, punga, reventar, roce, rostrazo, rostrear, rostro, rozado, rozar, sondear, shacamento, shacar, tirar, toco, tocomochó, trabajar, trabajo.</i></p>
<p>Keys, doors (28):  <i>altura, aro, bomba, campañeadero, caña, cascabel, chancleta, derecha, escalineta, espada, estampa, francesa, hembra, hueca, inglesa, izquierda, macho, manojo, paleta, pique, sable, san Pedro, sonda, shúa, tablero, virgen, yuga, yugadera.</i></p>
<p>Thieves (26):  <i>atorrante, biabista, caco, caloteador, campana, comprador, cumple, choro, de la vida, entregador, escrushante, espazo, filo, grupo, guitero, indicador, ladrillo, lunfa, lunfardo, malevo, mosquetero, pinguista, reo, shacador, tocomochero, toquero.</i></p>
<p>Rough activities and words (23):  <i>amurar, batifondio, batuque, descuido, ensuciar, escabiador, escabiar, escabio, escolazador, escolazar, esquillar, estrilador, estrilar, farra, fundido/da, fundir, hacer, hundir, ni un sorete, sorete, timba, timbear, timbero.</i></p>
<p>Violence (21):  <i>abiabar, al bombo, apañar, arzobispo, biaba, bufón, bufosa, caramayola, china, chocolata, colorada, fariñera, impase, marcar, mora, pegar, piña, púa, santo, serante, vaivén.</i></p>
<p>Money, gold (17):  <i>amarillo, blanca, brillo, cantador, ferros, graja, guita, guitarra, mangangas, paco, pájaro cantador, parné, poroto, pulenta, rollo, vento, zarzo.</i></p>
<p>Sex (17):  <i>bufarrón, canfinfle, conchifú, ganso, gorra, lamentarse, loca, llorar, machete, machetear, mino, orto, pirabar, quibebe, rufino, tambo, vaga.</i></p>
<p>Police agents (15):  <i>botón, chaffe, chafo, esbirro, jodido, mayorengo, mayorenguería, medio sardo, panadería, pescado, sardo, saría, sario, tira, verdugo.</i></p>
<p>Jail (12):  <i>amurado/da, apañado/da, caída, cana, cuervo, encanado, encanar, estaribel, estaro, hundido, manyamiento, quinta.</i></p>
<p>Pockets, wallets (11):  <i>cabaleta, chinche, grillete, grillo, media luna, música, pápira, porta-vento, sotala, sotana, viuda.</i></p>
<p>Watches (9):  <i>bobería, bobo, brija, cola, colgante, garroteado, marroca, parlo, traya.</i></p>
<p>Miscellaneous criminal words (9):  <i>batida, batidor, burra, burrita, burro, correo, enajar, enaje, salir.</i></p>
<p>Fools, dumbs (7):  <i>estazo, gil, merlo, otario, sánchez, turro, vichenzo.</i></p>



Table 2: Lunfardo words unrelated to crime in Dellepiane (1894) (English translations in parenthesis).

<p>Objects (60):</p> <p><i>alicante</i> (comb), <i>alumbrante</i> (candle), <i>baqueana</i> (liquor bottle), <i>bolacha</i> (cookie, cracker), <i>bullón</i> (soup), <i>cala</i> (carriage), <i>cambial</i> (bank bill), <i>caminante</i> (shoes), <i>camisulín</i> (vest), <i>cañón</i> (alcohol), <i>cayata</i> (shoes), <i>cieiro</i> (smell), <i>conqué</i> (pencil), <i>cortante</i> (scissors), <i>corte</i> (cutter), <i>chambra</i> (chair), <i>chantas</i> (socks), <i>embrocantes</i> (glasses), <i>embroque</i> (look), <i>encapillante</i> (full suit), <i>endulzante</i> (sugar), <i>escarbadiente</i> (tie pin), <i>espina</i> (tie pin), <i>fangos</i> (shoes), <i>fangushes</i> (shoes), <i>fazo</i> (cigar), <i>fulminante</i> (match), <i>fumante</i> (cigar, cigarette), <i>funshe</i> (hat), <i>gangul</i> (pin), <i>güeyes</i> (lice), <i>ingrediente</i> (tobacco), <i>lengo</i> (kerchief), <i>león</i> (trousers), <i>lienzo</i> (bed sheet), <i>lima</i> (shirt), <i>lusante</i> (street lamp), <i>mandilo</i> (napkin), <i>manrocas</i> (full dress), <i>marica</i> (oil can, tin), <i>marroque</i> (bread), <i>morfe</i> (food, meal), <i>morfil</i> (omelet), <i>pertrecho</i> (skillet, pan), <i>pilcha</i> (blanket), <i>poliso</i> (bed), <i>porta-camisa</i> (neck tie), <i>potrillo</i> (cot, bed), <i>pulisa</i> (bed), <i>quinini</i> (yerba mate), <i>quívedo</i> (soda siphon), <i>ragut</i> (hunger), <i>san Roque</i> (dog), <i>tumba</i> (stewpot), <i>verde</i> (yerba mate), <i>vianda</i> (stone, rock), <i>yacumina</i> (frock coat), <i>yin</i> (gin), <i>yira</i> (stroll, walk), <i>zafallata</i> (espadrille).</p>
<p>Actions (40):</p> <p><i>abatado/da</i> (embarrassed), <i>abatarse</i> (to embarrass oneself), <i>acordinado/da</i> (married), <i>acordinarse</i> (to get married), <i>amendrar</i> (to linger, delay), <i>atorrar</i> (to sleep), <i>atorro</i> (sleep), <i>batimento</i> (conversation, declaration), <i>batir</i> (to tell), <i>bullonar</i> (to eat), <i>cabrear</i> (to distrust), <i>campanear</i> (to look at), <i>catar</i> (to remove, take out), <i>chamuyar</i> (to talk), <i>chornar</i> (to sleep), <i>dar</i> (to give), <i>embrocado/da</i> (known, seen), <i>embrocar</i> (to look at), <i>engular</i> (to bite), <i>escrachar</i> (to write, note down), <i>espantarse</i> (to move homes), <i>estar</i> (to stay), <i>farrear</i> (to have a good time), <i>ir</i> (to go), <i>jamar</i> (to eat, watch, understand), <i>laborar</i> (to work), <i>largar</i> (to give away), <i>manyar</i> (to eat, watch/look at, understand), <i>morfar</i> (to eat), <i>no chamuyar</i> (to shut up), <i>no jamar</i> (to not understand), <i>pasadura</i> (overdoing), <i>pasarse</i> (to overstep the mark), <i>pulishar</i> (to sleep), <i>ragunear</i> (to eat, to be hungry), <i>reducir</i> (to sell), <i>refilar</i> (to pass on, to give away), <i>rolar</i> (to be friends with), <i>tomar</i> (to take), <i>yirar</i> (to walk).</p>
<p>Persons, parts of body (27):</p> <p><i>bacán</i> (man), <i>bacana</i> (woman), <i>barbusa</i> (beard), <i>bolichero</i> (store vender), <i>busarda</i> (mouth), <i>canao</i> (foot), <i>dátil</i> (finger), <i>escrachador</i> (photographer), <i>escracho</i> (face), <i>gallina</i> (female dancer), <i>gallo</i> (male dancer), <i>gamba</i> (leg), <i>guifalo</i> (foreigner), <i>lora</i> (woman), <i>marca</i> (scar), <i>mina</i> (woman), <i>misiringanga</i> (black man), <i>pisante</i> (foot), <i>pive</i> (boy), <i>quillete</i> (boy), <i>santabomba</i> (fat man), <i>servicio</i> (man), <i>testa</i> (head), <i>testamento</i> (head), <i>tio misiringanga</i> (black man), <i>vidrioso</i> (eye), <i>vive</i> (boy).</p>
<p>Qualities (17):</p> <p><i>a la gurda</i> (well, easily), <i>bora</i> (freedom), <i>cabrero</i> (distrusting), <i>comoifusa</i> (stubborn), <i>chuchero</i> (coward), <i>chucho</i> (fear), <i>de buten</i> (well, important), <i>de rebute</i> (notable, admirable), <i>fayuto</i> (false, of little value), <i>fulero</i> (bad), <i>gurda</i> (well), <i>jaiife</i> (“high life”), <i>magura</i> (good, excellent), <i>misho</i> (poor), <i>mistongo</i> (poor, of little value, false), <i>no sirve</i> (useless, coward), <i>pigrisia</i> (sloth, laziness).</p>
<p>Places, stores (12):</p> <p><i>atorradero</i> (place to sleep), <i>boliche</i> (local grocery), <i>bulín</i> (home, living quarters), <i>escrachería</i> (photo studio), <i>fangushería</i> (shoe store), <i>fumantería</i> (tobacconist's), <i>funshería</i> (hat store), <i>lache</i> (junk store), <i>marroquería</i> (bakery), <i>pío</i> (junk store), <i>sada</i> (inn), <i>santería</i> (hardware store).</p>
<p>Other (1):</p> <p><i>ancún</i> (careful!).</p>

## 5. Alternative use of Lunfardo terms in contemporary early sources.

The above early depictions of Lunfardo limited its sphere of influence to the world of criminals. However, there are a number of contemporary early sources that present a different view. These are “minor”, in the sense of being short newspaper or magazine articles, which did not enjoy the influence of works like the four described above. Some of them may be found in Soler Cañas’ *Antología del lunfardo*. For the sake of space I will focus on just one such example.

In the newspaper *La Nación* of February 11<sup>th</sup> 1887, a short fictional dialogue between two young inhabitants of the peripheral areas of BA is published (originally anonymously, but it would later be claimed by writer Juan A. Piaggio<sup>(35)</sup>). The scene (titled *callejeando* which translates to “wondering around town”, which is an apt depiction of the main activity of the archetypal modern urban inhabitant, the *compadrito* of BA, analogous to the *flâneur* of Paris) captured is a normal everyday interaction between two young men of the *arrabal*, in which they talk about some women they are attracted to but cannot afford to date, their chronic poverty, how to crash a party where some simple free food and wine will be served, together with live music and thus the chance to dance and flirt with women and look for a night of fun and happiness in their otherwise destitute lives. These two are just ordinary young men symbolizing the typical inhabitant of the *arrabal*, not at all related to criminality. In fact, throughout the piece we see them run away from a possible street fight in order not to be entangled with the police, and both of them state that they prefer to be called poor and to “eat dirt” than to be called thieves (in fact, they use the word *lunfardo* to mean thief, in one of their utterances).

In this common scene of everyday life in the *arrabal* of BA, the two characters speak in colloquial BA Spanish within which they insert a number (38)<sup>(36)</sup> of Lunfardo words. All of these words describe aspects of everyday life, unrelated to crime. Piaggio therefore already in 1887 depicted the normal life of the *arrabal* of BA as being infused with Lunfardo terms completely devoid of criminal context. Moreover, the immigrational milieu is explicitly described: the two *porteños* youths avoid confrontation with an Italian (*grébano*, in Lunfardo) living in the barrio of La Boca (renowned for its large population of immigrants from Genoa, Italy), listen to an *organito* (a street organ, ubiquitous in the streets of BA at that time, especially the suburban *arrabales*) being played by an Italian (*güifaro* and *tano* in Lunfardo) organ grinder from Naples, and eventually they go to a party organized by Genovese (*seneisis*, in Lunfardo).

## 6. Conclusions: making sense of early Lunfardo.

From the 1950s, we have come to realize that the early description of Lunfardo as jargon of criminals, had in fact been inadequate. The vast majority of words included as Lunfardo are just words of immigrant European origin, within which Italian dialects and jargons abound, especially Genovese and southern Italian dialects and jargons, but also Spanish dialects and jargons, French, etc. In other words, Lunfardo is just simply a collection of words brought over from Europe (mostly) through the various waves of (mostly) European immigration, and which continued being used after their arrival in Argentina. This paper has attempted to quantify the volume of those words, especially relating to non-criminal contexts. Even assaying the earliest sources of Lunfardo, which were geared toward criminals’ jargon specifically, we can estimate around 50% of Lunfardo words being unrelated to criminality.

All the non-criminal words included in the earliest sources point to the fact that what was initially defined as a single (linguistic and social) entity as Lunfardo, is in fact made up of at least two overlapping components. One is indeed the criminal jargons brought over from Europe by certain groups of immigrants who had been involved and/or in contact with criminality in Europe, or who found themselves without alternatives than to join such criminality once in BA. The other component, however, is the jargons and dialects reflecting the original local realities of the various populations of immigrants who crossed the Atlantic and settled in BA.

That is to say, within what was originally labelled as “Lunfardo”, two social groups overlapped in BA in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century: the first is that of the immigrants (a large component of which was originating from Genoa, Italy but also from other regions of the Italian peninsula) with their dialects and professional jargons. Upon arriving in BA, they encountered the official national language of Argentina (standard Spanish) and started a process of hybridization of their linguistic repertoires, in

parallel with a process of cultural hybridization, through which they and their offspring “became” Argentines while maintaining certain cultural links to their “Italian” or other foreign heritage (though not necessarily in a strictly national sense).

This process took place roughly in two waves, one smaller one from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the 1860s, and a second much larger one from the mid-1870s on. If we focus on the Italian immigrants, we see that they make up a large portion of the population of certain barrios of BA like La Boca, make up 60% of all immigrants in BA in the 1880s and 1890s, and constitute up to a third of the population of BA in 1887.<sup>(38)</sup> Large portions of those immigrants were illiterate,<sup>(39)</sup> and could not actually use Italian in their daily life,<sup>(41)</sup> but only their local dialects and occupational jargons (we should recall that Italy did not exist as a unified nation until 1861), so upon their arrival and settlement into Argentine society, they initiated a process of linguistic hybridization between their dialects and Spanish, as well as amongst the various dialects of the various groups of immigrants. The first well-known product of this process, linguistically, is the so-called Cocoliche, a hybrid sociolect with an Italian base (pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar).<sup>(42)</sup> Only later this type of hybrid would transition to what is originally described as Lunfardo, with a base of Spanish grammar and pronunciation, but retaining an extensive and constantly changing repertoire of vocabulary from the various immigrant communities.

This process of linguistic and cultural hybridization was further stimulated by the living arrangement of the majority of the immigrants in BA during the time: the *conventillos* tenements.<sup>(43)</sup> A key point that defines this group overall is their marginality in social status: they are not part of the mainstream discourse of the local elite, and their cultural productions too are largely ignored by such elite. They are mostly poor, living at the economical margins of the city in tenements designed specifically to cheaply accommodate large masses of marginals at a distance from the elites’ city centers. Geographically, too, they occupy the marginal areas of BA, like the barrios of La Boca, Barracas al Norte, the Barrio de las Ranas (Parque Patricios), the Bajo Belgrano in the north of the city, etc. This group of immigrants was not directly studied in the early depictions of Lunfardo, and therefore got silently incorporated under that biased umbrella term “*lunfardo*”.

The second social group included under the Lunfardo umbrella and overlapping with that of the immigrants is the one that did get studied: the group of criminals or underworld who also made use of the same immigrants’ linguistic baggage to incorporate it in a more criminal jargon-like entity. Many of them were of course immigrants, given the enormous numbers of immigrants BA received in those years. That is to say, what is labeled as “*lunfardo*” in the first studies I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, which fell within the field of criminal studies or police studies activities (i.e. the classification, surveillance, and control of criminality). In this process, the label for these criminals, who are called *lunfardos*, ends up defining a much wider linguistic phenomenon in which an ordinary immigrants’ vocabulary is indiscriminately grouped with, and labeled as, criminal jargon.

A corollary of the above considerations is that only the Lunfardo terms related to crime used by the BA thieves may have posed a problem for the masses living in BA, as these two social groups were coming from the very same linguistic and cultural milieus, and were living in close contact in the same *conventillos* in the same barrios of BA. Moreover, that was the case even for the police force: in 1872, for instance, of the 1,895 police agents in BA only 332 (18%) were Argentine, while the force counted 717 (38%) Italians, 659 Spanish (35%), 112 French (6%), and the remaining 75 shared amongst Germans, Paraguayans, Uruguayans, Brazilians, Belgians, and other nationalities.<sup>(44)</sup> In other words, even the very police the thieves were supposedly trying to fool with their Lunfardo were very likely to understand those Lunfardo words, as they themselves were immigrants from the same countries of origin. This point weakens the arguments made in the early sources studied here that Lunfardo was artificially created by criminals in order to fool the innocent population at large and the police, and that in order to do so they would draw from some esoteric vocabulary only they understood. Though a part of Lunfardo includes such technical jargon of criminals, most of the words in Lunfardo were not esoteric to the rest of the common population of BA, nor to its police.

This leads us to the final conclusion of this paper, which addresses the ideological bases of the bias against Lunfardo and its users found in the early analyses of Lunfardo. We need to recall that those were the years of the formation of national identity in Argentina: from the independence from Spain through Caseros (1852) and Pavón (1861), the years of Sarmiento, Rosas, Urquiza, Mitre, the various internal wars for the control of the newly forming nation were still taking place amongst the various Provinces and between Buenos Aires and the other Provinces until the presidency of Roca in 1880. These were the years of the formation of Argentina as a modern nation state, and an intrinsic part of such a process is always the construction of nationalism and its bedrock, a national identity.

For the Argentine elites,<sup>(45)</sup> the question was how to populate an enormous country, and to that end important policies to favor immigration were implemented. All these policies were targeted to attract an Anglo-Saxon population to Argentina, as England was seen as the model of civilization at that time. However, the flux of migration from England was directed almost exclusively to North America, and instead almost exclusively southern Europeans set into motion toward Argentina. The subsequent waves of immigration that indeed populated the newly formed nation were made up of people who had not been the intended target of the Argentine elites. Thus, in terms of national identity, the political and social elites, still looking to London (and Paris) as their model, found themselves with the “wrong” group of immigrants settling in Argentina. In addition, a large number of immigrants, given the choice of remaining in the city of BA or attempting to settle as farmers or ranchers in the pampas or other internal regions, chose the former, so the “problem” (as experienced by the city elites) was especially felt in the city of BA. This was one of the reasons for the establishment of new laws to curb the activities of immigrants in Argentina, like the *Ley N° 4.144 de Residencia de Extranjeros* (Law No. 4,144 of foreigners’ residence) of 1902 during the second Roca presidency, and the strong oppression of workers’ unions leading up to Yrigoyen’s first presidency in 1916.

Within this context, we can see how the studies undertaken to solve the problem of criminality in the rapidly expanding city of BA since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, colored by the racist ideology at the basis of the anthropological criminology of that time, and by the attempt by the Argentine elites to create a certain Anglo-Saxon-leaning national identity contributed to create a narrative holding immigrants (especially Italians and southern Europeans) as the source of criminality, and their linguistic repertoires (defined by the very same term to describe the thieves themselves: *lunfardo*) as the very “language of crime”<sup>(46)</sup>. In order to understand better the process of national identity creation in a modern nation, we need to fully comprehend the dynamics involved in that process, some of which operate at the level of the definition and control of what constitutes an acceptable linguistic repertoire and what not.<sup>(47)</sup>

## Notes

(1) The vast majority of materials related to this research topic are in Spanish, and many are available almost exclusively in Argentina. I would not have been able to research this topic without the financial support from Tamagawa University for my research trips to Buenos Aires. I would also like to acknowledge the crucial academic support this research has received while I was in BA both from the Academia Porteña del Lunfardo (especially the support of the librarian Mr. Marcos Blum and the president of the Academia Ms. Otilia Da Veiga) and the Academia Nacional de la Historia (especially the support of the librarian Ms. Mariana Lagar). I presented a version of this paper at the annual conference of the Society for Latin American Studies in April 2019.

(2) The bibliography on any of these topics is vast, and it is not the aim of this paper to summarize it. However, two sources can be mentioned as particularly relevant to the discussion of the presence and importance of Lunfardo in Argentine culture. They are Marcelo Oliveri’s *El lunfardo en la cultura porteña*, and Oscar Conde’s *Lunfardo*. See Oliveri (2013) and Conde (2011).

I also need to qualify the statements made in this introduction. Lunfardo is not only spoken or used in BA, but in other Argentine cities as well, though mostly in the general area of BA. BA, being the capital and by far the largest city, has taken almost total claim on Lunfardo, but that is a misleading position. At the same time, Lunfardo has also been spoken and used in Uruguay, especially in Montevideo, thus further complicating the issue of Lunfardo being seen as representative solely of the Argentine national cultural identity. Finally, the cultural identity of Argentina, like that of any other modern nation, is a composite of many local elements. For instance, the rich *folklore* of the music and dance of other Argentine Provinces too is a major element of the Argentine cultural identity, both within Latin America and in the rest of the world. So is also the gaucho culture, especially from the *pampas* regions of the Province of BA and neighboring Provinces. Needless to say, these examples too are not confined to Argentina either, but are

prominent in neighboring countries too, like Uruguay, Paraguay, Brazil, etc. This paper will not touch on these important points further, but they are future research topics.

- (3) Throughout this paper, Spanish and Lunfardo terms will be in italics, while any standard Spanish translations of Lunfardo terms will be underlined. All translations from Spanish into English or Lunfardo into English throughout this paper are mine, unless otherwise noted. All translations from Lunfardo to Spanish are mine, based on the analysis and comparison of a number of Lunfardo-Spanish dictionaries and glossaries, especially Gobello (1982), Espíndola (2003), Conde (2004), Gobello (2009), and Gobello and Oliveri (2013). As standard Spanish reference I have used the 2014 edition of the *Diccionario de la lengua Española* by the Real Academia Española.
- (4) "... *un repertorio léxico que ha pasado al habla coloquial de Buenos Aires y otras ciudades argentinas y uruguayas, formado con vocablos dialectales o jergales llevados por la inmigración, de los que unos fueron difundidos por el teatro, el tango, y la literatura popular, en tanto que otros permanecieron en los hogares de los inmigrantes, y a los que deben agregarse voces aborígenes y portuguesas que se encontraban ya en el habla coloquial de Buenos Aires y su campaña, algunos términos argóticos llevados por el proxenetismo francés; los del español popular y del caló llevados por el género chico español, y los de creación local.*" Gobello (1989), p.15.
- (5) The standard Spanish used in Argentina is basically both grammatically and syntactically that of Spain, though a few elements set them apart. These elements are especially at the level of phonetics, though a few grammatical patterns should also be included. For an introduction to Argentine Spanish see Honsa (1965).
- (6) "[E]l lunfardo es un repertorio léxico, limitado a la región rioplatense en su origen, constituido por términos y expresiones populares de diversa procedencia utilizados en alternancia o abierta oposición a los del español estándar y difundido transversalmente en todas las capas sociales de la Argentina." Conde (2011), p.133.
- (7) I am using the 2009 edition of this 1953 work: Gobello (2009).
- (8) Lugones (1879 a) and Lugones (1879 b).
- (9) The article's title is *El dialecto de los ladrones* (The thieves' dialect) and it appeared in *La Prensa* 1878, July 6<sup>th</sup>. I use here the transcription available in Soler Cañas (1976), pp.7–8.
- (10) He actually comes to different conclusions from the normative ideas of Lombroso on the jargons of criminality. In my current research I am addressing this topic in detail, and have presented my preliminary results on this theme at the annual conference of the Society for Latin American Studies in April 2021. I will not further discuss this topic in the current paper.
- (11) "*En el lunfardo (palabra que designa al mismo tiempo la jerga y los que se valen de ella) de los ladrones bonaerenses, se nota muchas locuciones cuyo empleo a todas luces revela la necesidad de recurrir en ciertos casos a una jergonza especial, desconocida de los profanos, pero otras palabras demuestran a las claras su origen profesional.*" Drago (1921), p.73. I am using here the 1921 edition of his 1888 book.
- (12) "*Como se ve, en los casos citados, los vocablos han sido creados para designar modalidades o aspectos de las personas o las cosas, que sólo por un rodeo encontrarían traducción en el lenguaje ordinario.*" Drago (1921) p.74.
- (13) "... *tomadas muchas de idiomas extranjeros, con el contacto de la inmigración,*" ("... many taken from foreign languages, through the channel of immigration,") Drago (1921), pp.74–75.
- (14) "*El lunfardo no es otra cosa que un amasijo de dialectos italianos de inteligencia común y utilizado por los ladrones del país, que también le han agregado expresiones pintorescas;*" as reported in Soler Cañas (1965), pp.21–22.
- (15) Dellepiane (1894), pp.11 and 20.
- (16) "*El carácter eminentemente cosmopolita y los hábitos poco sedentarios de la población criminal, obligada a cambiar de sitio continuamente por las persecuciones policiales y también por el espíritu de aventura que la domina, ha dado lugar a la introducción en los diferentes argots de una multitud de barbarismos y neologismos. Las palabras extranjeras forman en todos los países una importante fuente de léxico germanesco.*" ("The eminently cosmopolitan character of the criminal population and its not very sedentary habits, as it is forced to change places continuously by police persecutions as well as by the spirit of adventure that dominates it, has given place to the introduction in the various different argots of a multitude of barbarisms and neologisms. In all countries foreign words form an important source of the criminal lexicon.") Dellepiane (1894), p.19.
- (17) Some of the most relevant sources are Eusebio Gómez' *La mala vida* (The underworld) (1908), Francisco de Veyga's *Los Lunfardos* (1910), Luis C. Villamayor's *El lenguaje del bajo fondo* (The language of the underworld) (1915), etc. A much more extensive list of relevant bibliographic sources on this topic can be found in Villanueva (2010), pp.282–284.
- (18) "*El lunfardo es una jerga artificiosa de los ladrones; el arrabalero es la simulación de esa jerga, es la coquetería del compadrón que quiere hacerse el forajido y el malo, y cuyas malhechoras hazañas caben en un bochinche de almacén, favorecido por el alcohol y el compañerismo. El lunfardo es un vocabulario gremial como tantos otros, es la tecnología de la furca y de la ganzúa: el arrabalero es cosa más grave.*" Borges (2016), p.105.
- (19) *Furca* and *ganzúa* are Lunfardo terms referring to two techniques or robbery: *furca* involves a neck hold from behind by the

- assailant of the victim of the robbery; it comes from the Italian *forca*, meaning gallows for the hanging of criminals; *ganzúa* refers to lock picking; it comes from the Basque *gantzua* meaning the long and thin tools used for lock picking.
- (20) “Una multitud de términos del argot criminal se incorpora, en todas partes, á la lengua ordinaria. No es difícil explicarse la causa y el proceso de este fenómeno. La primera reside en lo gráfico y lo pintoresco de estas expresiones, combinado con la tendencia á la imitación. En cuanto al proceso de la difusión es sencillísimo. Las clases bajas de la población (entre nosotros el compadrito, el pilluelo, las mujeres de mal vivir), en su contacto con los personajes del mundo criminal, llegan á conocer algunas de esas palabras y las hacen suyas. Pronto la juventud de trueno las vulgariza y las lleva á veces hasta las capas superiores de la sociedad.” Dellepiane (1894), pp.23–24.
- (21) Technical terms (10): *bufosa* (gun), *bufoso* (revolver), *chacar* (to steal), *corta* (cutter), *encanado* (jailed), *golpe* (as in *dar golpe*: to steal), *guitarra* (fake money-printing machine sold by thief to the “mark”), *toco* (cut or share of the stolen goods), *trabajo* (theft), *vaiivén* (knife).
- (22) Types of thefts/frauds (7): *beaba* (type of theft involving armed assault, robbery), *escracho* (type of hustle involving fake lottery tickets), *escrucho* (type of theft involving forced entry, burglary), *espiente* (type of hustle involving fake banknotes), *mosqueta* (three-card Monte confidence game), *punga* (type of theft involving picking pockets), *refilar* (to steal by *punga*, pickpocketing).
- (23) Types of thieves (7): *beabista* (thief specialized in *beaba*, robber), *campana* (lookout accomplice), *campanasa* (two or more lookout accomplices), *escolador* (thief specialized in card games), *escruchante* (thief specialized in *escracho*), *lunfardo* (thief in general), *punguista* (thief specialized in *punga*).
- (24) Guards and penitentiaries (5): *cana* (prison), *chafó* (guard), *juiciosa* (penitentiary), *mayorengo* (police official), *quinta* (penitentiary).
- (25) Objects and places (14): *bobo* (reloj, pocketwatch) [not in Gobello (2009)], *bolín* (cuarto, room), *brema* (naipes, playing cards), *cabaleta* (top pocket of a men’s jacket), *cala* (carruaje, carriage), *chancleta* (puerta, door), *chúa* (llave, key), *ferro* (peso, peso coin), *guita* (dinero, money), *lengo* (pañuelo, kerchief), *marroca* (pocketwatch chain), *música* (wallet), *vento* (dinero, money), *zarzo* (anillo, ring).
- (26) Verbs (6): *atorrar* (dormir, to sleep), *embrocar* (to watch attentively), *espiantar* (irse, to leave), *estrilar* (rabiar, to get angry), *morfilar* (comer, to eat), *polizar* (dormir, to sleep) [not in Gobello (2009)].
- (27) Types of people (5): *angelito* (tonto, fool), *bacán* (man who supports economically a lover), *gil* (zonzo, fool), *mina* (mujer, woman), *otario* (zonzo, fool).
- (28) Qualities (4): *cuadro* (as in *otario cuadro*: muy tonto, very foolish man), *escabio* (borracho, drunk), *gurda* (as in *a la gurda*: of high quality/importance), *machio* (insignificante, pobre, of poor quality, destitute).
- (29) The 26 words are: *Arrebezar* (to get angry), *bacán*, *batir* (betray an accomplice), *bento* (*vento* in Lugones (1879)), *bobo*, *calalo* (watch the mark closely), *campana*, *dilatar* (to blow the whistle), *encanar*, *espiantar* (to rob), *espiente*, *estrilar*, *funshe* (hat), *guianda* (*gurda* in Lugones (1879)), *lengo*, *lunfardo*, *marroca*, *mayorengo*, *mina*, *musho* (*machio* in Lugones (1879)), *música*, *otario*, *refilarle la vianda* (hitting the mark before the robbery), *refilarle la vianda con caldo* (using a knife), *refilarle la vianda en seco* (using a stick), *shafó* (*chafó* in Lugones (1879)). The meanings of these entries are as in the Lugones (1879) entries above, unless otherwise noted.
- (30) *Calalo*, *campana*, *dilatar*, *encanar*, *espiantar*, *espiente*, *estrilar*, *lunfardo*, *mayorengo*, *refilarle la vianda*, *refilarle la vianda con caldo*, *refilarle la vianda en seco*, *shafó*.
- (31) *Arrebezar*, *bacán*, *bento*, *batir*, *bobo*, *funshe*, *guianda*, *lengo*, *marroca*, *mina*, *musho*, *música*, *otario*.
- (32) *Biaba* (*beaba* in Lugones (1879)), *biabista* (*beabista* in Lugones (1879)), *bufosa*, *bufoso*, *campana*, *cana*, *chafó*, *encanado*, *escruchante*, *escrucho*, *grupo* (accomplice), *lunfardo*, *mayorengo*, *punga*, *punguista*, *quinta*, *trabajo*, *traya* (type of scam), *vaiivén*. The meanings of these entries are as in the Lugones (1879) entries above, unless otherwise noted.
- (33) *Bobo*, *bolín*, *bufar* (to explode), *cala*, *caminar* (to join in someone’s activities), *chua*, *cuadro*, *espiantar*, *ferro*, *a la gurda*, *llantar* (to eat), *marroca*, *micho* (*machio* in Lugones (1879)), *mina*, *música*, *otario*, *portar* (to take), *polizar*, *toco* (portion), *vianda* (rock). The meanings of these entries are as in the Lugones (1879) entries above, unless otherwise noted.
- (34) I have provided the English translation only for those words in Table 2, i.e. those unrelated to criminal life. Providing translations for all the entries was beyond the scope of this paper, but the reader should find it useful to see the English translation of everyday words, to appreciate the scope of the Lunfardo repertoire in the everyday life of BA.
- (35) The story is transcribed in Soler Cañas (1965), pp.38–48.
- (36) *Arrolla* (to give up a fight), *atorrar* (to sleep), *batuque* (party), *bobo* (pocket watch), *bulevú* (refined), *chucho* (fear), *colamos* (to enter without proper invitation), *dar corte* (to get involved in a relationship), *embrocarla* (to watch), *escabio* (drunk), *escarpientes* (shoes), *espiente* (to run away), *falluta* (lie), *farra* (party), *firulete* (music), *fósforos* (matches), *giurda* (quality), *güifaro* (Italian person), *jailaifa* (high-life), *lengo* (kerchief), *lunfardo* (thief), *marrusa* (blow, hit), *mishote* (poor), *morfis* (food, meal), *paica* (young woman), *parada* (appearance), *pesao* (bully), *raspa* (petty thief), *refalar/refalase* (to steal), *semifusa* (truncheon), *seneisis* (Genovese person),

- tanos* (Italian person), *tarasquita* (petite, skinny), *tecliando* (to waver), *vento* (money), *viaba* (blow, hit), *zarza* (ring).
- (37) Devoto (2007), pp.10–58.
- (38) Iarossi (2017), pp.4–5.
- (39) Devoto (2007), pp.94–95.
- (40) Devoto (2007), p.42. On the complex question of how widespread was the use of Italian in the Italian peninsula of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some estimates are that, by 1863, 2.5% to 10% of the population of the peninsula was italoophone, the remaining Italians only able to communicate in their local dialects and jargons. See Colombo (2014), p.451.
- (41) Anecchiarico (2012), p.76.
- (42) Anecchiarico (2012), pp.81–90, Conde (2011), pp.173–179, Cara-Walker (1987), pp.50–54.
- (43) Páez (1970).
- (44) Donadío (1996), p.79.
- (45) A key piece of legislation in this sense was the *Ley nacional N° 817 de Fomento de la inmigración y colonización* (National Law No. 817, to encourage immigration and colonization) of 1876 (under the presidency of Avellaneda). Under Roca’s presidency too similar legislative steps were taken to stimulate immigration. See Rodríguez Aguillar (2012).
- (46) Interestingly, such a bias against Lunfardo qua jargon of criminality and debauchery was often applied by the political elites many years after the period we have been analyzing here. During the military governments of presidents Ramírez and Farrell (1943 to 1946), an official censorship was placed on all radio broadcastings using Lunfardo words, which lasted into the first presidency of Perón (until 1949) (Fraga (2006), pp.36–67.). Under these laws established with the aim to prevent the supposed moral deterioration of the Argentine people caused by exposure to such “vulgar” expressions of “low” culture, dozens of tango composers and writers had to modify their titles and lyrics (tango being one of the most recognizable productions of Argentine culture employing Lunfardo) in order to have their music still broadcast (Vardaro (2011), pp.67–108.).
- (47) See for example the renowned discussion of the relationship between the employment of linguistic projects (etymologies, dictionaries, etc.) and nationalism in Anderson (2016), pp.67–82.

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