

"Friends aren't friends, homes": A Working Vocabulary for Referring to Rolldogs and *Chuchos*

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In this article I analyze various apparently synonymous words for 'friend' (e.g. 'homes,' 'bro,' 'homeboy,' 'ése,' and 'rolldog') as they are used by one former gang-member, Mario, to persuade two current gang-members to stop "gangbanging." While giving advice to the two current gangsters, Mario uses a variety of words in order to refer to "so-called friends" and to index the fact that he is, though no longer a gangster, part of the same community as his addressees. This analysis also shows how the meanings of these disparate reference terms are made and re-made through talk as conversationalists use these words to put forward their contrasting points of view.

INTRODUCTION

"Friends aren't friends," is the lesson an ex-gangster, Mario, has learned from the loss of his best friend due to gang violence. For Mario, a teenager who grew up in Los Angeles, there are many ways in which 'friends aren't friends' anymore. Most immediately, his former best friend literally isn't a friend any more because he has passed away; a victim of gunfire. Following the loss of this friend, Mario left their shared world of the barrio and the friendships of gangland for a new kind of life. Today Mario lives in the San Fernando Valley with his girlfriend, attends Valley Vocational School, and works four nights a week at an ice-cream shop in Westwood. He keeps his distance from the Echo Park *barrio* where he lost his friend.

Nevertheless, Mario has forgotten neither the pain of his loss nor the hardships of life as a gangster and, although he also admits it is hard sometimes to refuse the invitations of some of his old friends to come back to the barrio, Mario frequently laments the mistakes he believes he has made in the past. This paper is about one conversation Mario had with some current gangsters. Their exchange took place during a lull in a class they were attending at 'City School,' a now defunct charter school where former high-school dropouts were given another chance to finish their high-school education.¹ In this conversation, Mario is trying to convince two young men not to make the same "mistakes"

that he did and to leave their life as gangsters before their lives are literally taken away from them.

Mario's persuasive task is not easy: While Mario has become convinced that the negative consequences of gang life and gangster friendship are too great, his addressees, Jorge and Luis, are best friends, both deeply involved in their gang. What Mario sees as the terrible consequences of gang life, these boys see as part of their definition of friendship. While for Mario, "friends aren't friends," for Jorge and Luis, friends are everything, and the potentially dire consequences of being friends in a gang are actually what makes a friendship worthwhile. But while Mario holds views in direct opposition to the views of his addressees, Jorge and Luis, and although he is barely acquainted with them, all three share a set of similar experiences. As three Latinos familiar with gang life, Mario, Jorge, and Luis share a great deal of language particular to this group, and Mario liberally uses this shared linguistic repertoire in his attempt to present his addressees with a new version of their world. Nevertheless, all three boys are using the same words to refer to very different realities. Through conversation, this shared repertoire becomes a 'working vocabulary,' used to talk about conflicting views of friendship.

Mario, Jorge and Luis define and re-define friendship by selecting from a shared set of words which at first seem to be nearly synonymous. In addition to the word 'friend,' these three young men, and Mario in particular, use the words 'homes,' 'ése,' 'homeboy,' 'family,' 'familia,' 'vato,' 'roll dog,' 'dog,' and 'chucho' throughout their discussion. Obviously, all of these words don't have the same meaning; there is a reason for such diversity of expression. After a discussion of theories of reference as they have been developed in philosophy and anthropology, this paper will explore the changing meanings of particular reference terms as they are used within this conversation.

REFERENCE

This paper builds on the notion that reference is fundamental to human interaction, and that interaction in turn contributes to the meaning of reference terms. However, philosophers of language initially discussed reference as it occurs apart from any context. Their goal was an analytic one, to create a mathematics of language which could scientifically describe and account for the world. To this end, Bertrand Russell (1985[1950]) posited a one-to-one relationship between referents and words used to refer, but other philosophers of language noticed that while there is indeed meaning at the word level, it is not necessarily arbitrary or intrinsic to the referring expression. Frege (1892) argued that concepts are derived from wholes not parts, and for Frege, the whole consisted of the sentence which created the possibility for intersubjective meaning through "sense compositionality" or grammar. Going beyond the

sentence, Kripke (1977), Searle (1970), Strawson (1955), Putnam (1989), Wittgenstein (1953 [1945, 1946-1949]) and others have pointed out that a referring expression relies on social knowledge in order to do its referring work. Even at the word level, apart from "sense compositionality", meanings are socially grounded. As Kripke tentatively suggested, habitual use of a word may result in the accrual of semantic qualities. The accrual of layers of semanticity on a single word is expanded by Silverstein's notion of "orders of indexicality," which contribute to linguistic ideologies behind the usage of certain words (1992). As Donnellan (1966) suggested, linguistic expressions not only refer, they also attribute certain qualities to an object. These 'attributions' may be understood in Silverstein's terms as the indexical layers associated with particular word uses.

As the development of a theory of reference suggests, even a purely analytic agenda must account for the (socially and linguistically) entextualized nature of any act of reference. Building in part on Heidegger's conceptualization of "being-in-the-world" and "everydayness" (1962[1927]), many of today's social scientists consider scientific or philosophical 'discoveries' to be inseparable from human interaction (Cahoone, 1996). Naturally, this attention to interaction also influences our account of reference or, more currently, "referential practice" (Hanks, 1990). Even a speaker's choice of a particular language to use for one's referring layers social and potentially political meanings onto the referent. These layers accrue not only to the referent, but to the addressee and interlocutor as well. As Gloria Anzaldúa has said with great emotion in her discussion of varieties of Spanish and English, "if you really want to hurt me, talk badly about my language" (1990, p.207). The corollary may also be true: That is, to express affinity with an addressee, use their language—or what you think their language might be (Anzaldúa also describes the embarrassment which follows her attempts to speak Spanish to her monolingual Latina colleagues here in California).

What Anzaldúa has expressed about the ideological nature of language choice, Schegloff, Sacks, and Jefferson have described within conversation as "recipient design" (Schegloff, 1972; Jefferson, 1974; Sacks, 1974; Sacks et al. 1974) or "the multiplicity of ways in which participants take into account the particulars of who they are talking to, and the events they are engaged in, in the organization of their action" (Duranti & Goodwin, 1992, p. 192). Depending on who we are addressing, we will select not only language, but also particular words and ways of speaking accordingly (cf. Schegloff, 1972). In discourse, as will be shown in this analysis, these choices made with regard to the addressees, give rise to entirely new referring expressions, seeming 'synonyms,' which nevertheless play distinct and contingent roles within the talk.

REFERENCE IN DISCOURSE

When the literature on the philosophy of language is supplemented with the insights of anthropological research, conversation analysis, or literary theory it becomes clear that to talk about reference apart from discourse and interaction is to miss key determining factors in reference: Sociolinguistic criteria, sense-compositionality, and the inherently sequential nature of talk intersect in conversation and referring becomes a shared activity which evolves in moment-to-moment interaction between speakers. Individuals' social experiences, their political agendas and some form of "recipient design" all potentially contribute to the selection of appropriate reference terms. Furthermore, as Strawson (1955) said in his critique of Russell, words refer differently in different contexts. The word '*ése*' for example, may refer to one's friend in one social and grammatical context, but in another context it may be an insult.²

As we will see, the referential uses of the words 'friend,' 'homeboy,' '*chucho*,' 'roll-dog,' and 'family' are constructed interactionally in Mario's confrontational talk with Jorge and Luis. Vocative uses of words like '*ése*,' 'homes,' and 'bro' also affect the activity of reference. As these three young men argue about the meaning of friendship, the referential value which accrues to particular words in discourse works to construct two different versions of reality. In this conversation, identical words can have very different meanings depending on who is uttering them and at what point in the conversation. As Mario struggles to use a shared language to promote change, he relies both on the indexical associations his words carry, and his own ability to use those words for new purposes. Yet as Jorge and Luis contest his arguments, they insist that his words hold different referential values for them.

In this conversation, Mario puts forth a very different view of friendship than that held by his addressees, Jorge and Luis. Jorge and Luis see sacrifice as a defining element of friendship, and show their willingness to sacrifice for their friends by being active gang-members, 'backing each other up,' (fighting against rival gangs in the name of the home gang) and 'getting locked up' for each other (going to jail for their friends' crimes). Mario, however, claims to have been through this kind of friendship and experienced its tragic finale: His friend was shot and killed by rival gang-members. As a consequence of their experiences, Jorge and Luis see their sacrifices as a valuable part of friendship, while Mario sees the sacrifices made towards a friend in a gang as an act of self-deception which inevitably ends in tragedy. Thus, in his discussion with Jorge and Luis, Mario tries to redefine what a true friend is—while Jorge and Luis insist on their own understanding of friendship. This series of re-definitions hinges on claims and denials about the referential value of the 'synonyms' for 'friend.'

Towards the beginning of the conversation, Mario states the paradox which guides the discussion and the conflicting attempts to define what a true friend really is:³

1) Mario: Friends aren't friends, homes.

The present indicative verb here ("aren't") and the absence of articles on the pluralized nouns ("friends") are common characteristics of universalizing statements in English (e.g., "Germans are good musicians" (Celce-Murcia, 1983, pp. 180-1)). Thus, in this brief assertion, Mario makes a sad and universal point: What you think are friends are not friends. Here, while no concrete referent is made explicit, as the conversation continues, it will become painfully clear that Mario is referring not only to 'friends' of an abstract and universal sort, but also to the two friends sitting in front of him, as well as his own friend who has passed away. Already, Mario indirectly communicates the concreteness of his seemingly abstract reference by adding the word 'homes' which suggests that both his addressees are, indeed, *his* friends. While his first three words warn of the dangers of trusting 'friends,' his final vocative 'homes,' indexes that his current addressees are his friends, fellow gangsters and Latinos (Rymes, 1996). Including the vocative 'homes' a full paraphrase of 1) then might more aptly read as follows: 'What you, my gangster friends, think of as friends, aren't really friends.' Indeed, as Mario's point develops, he suggests that a *gangster* friend is the precise type of friend that cannot be a friend in the long run.

Thus, through a paradoxical association with universal truths about friends-in-general and the Latino, gangster friends of the here-and-now, Mario opens the discussion to a debate about what true friends really are. Indeed, the referentially self-contradictory character of the sentence, "friends aren't friends, homes," is typical of paradoxes and parables in many languages.⁴ In this situation, it provokes a rich debate about the nature of friends, and, through such debate, continual reconfiguration of the referential terms themselves. In their discussion, Mario, Jorge, and Luis cycle through a series of words for friend: As soon as Mario explicates the dire consequences of having one kind of 'friend,' Jorge and Luis, sensing the application of Mario's moral to their own friendship, re-define the term, implying that Mario's definition is at fault. Frequently their new definition involves a new, more specific word for friend. As shown below, as soon as Mario claims that "friends aren't friends" Jorge counters that the reason Mario has this belief is because Mario has never been a true friend himself:

2) You don't look at 'em as friends

Mario:	Friends aren't friends, homes. I'll tell you that.
Jorge:	Yeah. 'Cause you don't look at 'em as friends, that's why. You probably backstab 'em and shit that's why they ain't your friends anymore.

In his response to Mario's utterance, Jorge introduces some additional text which transforms Mario's universalizing utterance about friends in general, into one which is merely about Mario and the kinds of friends he has. Thus, through Jorge's completion of Mario's statement, the entire collaboratively constructed

sentence becomes "Friends aren't friends homes because you don't look at them as friends."⁵ This reformulation of Mario's generalization motivates Jorge's subsequent highly parallelistic metapragmatic gloss: Jorge explains that Mario's statement simply refers to him and his friends. It is not universally true at all: For other people, friends very well may be friends, but Mario probably backstabs his friends, and "that's why they ain't your friends anymore."

Jorge claims that Mario doesn't know what a true friend is because he never was truly loyal to *his* friends. However, Mario immediately counters with his own re-definition and a new term for 'friend,' namely 'family,' a word which may suggest an even greater loyalty than 'friend.'

3) Family and friends

Mario: It ain't like that- I ain't considered them as my friends. I considering them as my *family*.

But 'family' and 'friends' for Mario are equally suspect. Relationships with so-called 'family' and 'friends' can lead to consequences which Mario sees as bad. And, he insists, Jorge and Luis' friendship in particular, can lead to the same miserable consequences:

4) Your family, your friends

Mario: Where did your [family get you homes.
 [(points his hand at Jorge and looks at Luis)]
 Your [friends, ése?
 [(points at Jorge again and looks at Luis)]
 He got you locked up, homes.
 Luis: That's 'cause I wanted to get locked up homes.

Here, gesture combines with words to "make maximal use of symbolic resources" (Streeck, 1993). Mario makes use of descriptive pointing and pragmatic gaze as well as sociolectal and semantic knowledge to simultaneously make his point about friends and index his affinity to Jorge and Luis. As the videotape of this conversation shows (see Illustration 1), the referential value of 'family' and 'friends' is clearly no longer in the realm of abstraction. In this exchange, Mario uses both referential terms and vocatives to make his point absolutely clear: While saying 'family' and 'friends,' Mario points to Jorge; By using the word 'you,' he simultaneously picks out Luis as his addressee, and refers to him as part of a particular speech community by using the vocatives 'homes' and 'ése'. By appealing to a common vocabulary, Mario communicates his affinity with Jorge and Luis, while at the same time using this impression of understanding to make his referent absolutely clear: The kinds of friends that "aren't friends" are seated right before him and they are friendships which are based on gang affiliation. In this brief exchange, referent and addressee are stacked with words particular to the sociolect shared by these three young men (Rymes, 1996). By pointing at his referent, Mario shifts the grounds of the argument away from himself and specifically back to Jorge and Luis;

nevertheless, while his pointing makes his argument more specific, by using vocatives to appeal more generically to their common ground, Mario makes it hard for Jorge and Luis to claim he just doesn't understand their world. Paradoxically, however, Mario is simultaneously critiquing this world whose language he is mining.



Illustration 1: "Where did your family get you homes?"

As indicated in interviews, Mario believes in the speech community specificity of words like 'homes' and '*ése*,' and the affinity or 'friendship' implicit in those words. But in this case, he uses those associations for a different expressive end: To criticize the quality of the gang-related friendship these particular words presuppose. Through co-textual relationships, Mario creatively applies the indexical value of 'family,' 'friend,' '*ése*,' and 'homes.' Specifically, by using parallel structure he equates the relationship Luis has with Jorge with the cause of his prison sentence. As shown below (Fig. 1), the anaphoric 'he' and the consequence "got you locked up" is slipped into parallel position with

family and friend, skillfully woven between the vocatives 'homes,' 'ése,' and 'homes:'

4*) Mario: Where did

your family
your friends
He

get you

got you locked up

homes.
ése?
homes.

Figure 1: Referential Implication by Parallelism

In combination with here-and-now reference to Jorge, Luis's best friend, sitting in front of him, this parallelism has a dramatic effect. Pointing to the best friends while making points about their downside is a bold move on Mario's part. And yet, as Luis's response indicates ("that's because I wanted to get locked up"), for him, the fact that he went to jail for Jorge simply confirms their friendship. For Jorge and Luis, taking the consequences for another gangster (in this case going to jail for them) is the definition of friendship. Thus, they counter Mario's criticism of their friendship with a re-definition of what it means to be a friend, and the re-introduction of the word 'homeboy.' Now, while they see that they have no words specific enough to elude Mario's understanding, they try to claim "extensional warrant" for the meaning of familiar, shared words (cf. Silverstein, 1987):

5) A true homeboy

- Mario: You'd get locked up for a friend homes? That's something stupid
 Luis: Fuck that, I don't get locked up for all my homeboys.
 Mario: Well do your time while their ass is out here,
 Luis: (shit)
 Mario: you know getting smoked on and everything and what do you- what do you find out next time homes?
 Luis: I don't care.
 Jorge: You ain't a true homeboy then. You ain't a true homeboy. You ain't a true homeboy.

When Mario argues that sitting in jail while your friend is out on the streets "getting his ass smoked on" isn't a worthwhile way to demonstrate friendship, Jorge claims, "you ain't a true homeboy then." For Jorge and Luis, a true homeboy is someone who goes to jail for you. For Mario, this is precisely what a true homeboy isn't. This is precisely why "friends aren't friends."

Indeed, Mario refuses to except Jorge's definition and continues to insist that "getting locked up" for someone is a misguided way to prove one's friendship. If this is the criteria, according to Mario, 'family' and 'homeboys' aren't real friends either:

6) Homeboy, family, It ain't

Mario: That ain't family, getting f- getting locked up for a *vato*.
 Luis: That's what we're trying to tell you though. The- that's my homeboy.
 Mario: Homeboy, family, whatever homes.
 It ain't.
 Well I'll tell you that much man.

In this segment, Mario further emphasizes his point (that friends aren't friends) by using the word *vato*. As he has discussed with me on a different occasion, for Mario, *vato* doesn't have the capacity to pick out friends. A *vato* is, in Mario's words "the same as a man" which is "just the definition of a person." This is not the kind of relationship deserving of great sacrifice. Yet while Luis's response shows he clearly understands how Mario is using the word *vato*, he insists Mario is wrong by again re-defining his relationship with Jorge and insisting that Mario doesn't understand the definition of homeboy. Luis didn't spend a year in jail for just a *vato*. He did it for a homeboy. Mario however, flatly rejects this claim. If you are getting locked up for this person, it is not a homeboy. Nor is it family.

Yet, implicit in all of Mario's criticisms of gang-based friendships, is the existence of an alternative, more pure type of friendship. When he takes the role of being someone in a community which says 'homes,' and '*ése*,' friends aren't friends, because one's gangster family of homeboys will never really be friends *outside* of this community. They are only good for upholding this particular type of family and friendship, and it is this type of friends that, for Mario, "aren't friends" anymore. By implicitly maintaining this distinction, Mario salvages his own future and the potential for a better kind of friendship. One can't forget that Mario's statements which seem to degrade the value of friendship in fact are the result of the pain he felt from his own very important friendship. How can one denounce friendship while at the same time maintaining that one speaks from the experience of having a very important friend? Mario resolves this problem by separating the two kinds of friendships into two kinds of worlds: 'gang-related' friends, and non-gang related, true friends. When true friends merge with the world of gang-related occurrences, trouble occurs. While Jorge and Luis still reside in the former world with its definitions for friend, Mario now resides in the latter.

And yet, Mario wants to confront Jorge and Luis with the potential of losing a true friend to the non-true friendship world of gang violence: Mario introduces the important friendship he has had only after Jorge introduces an entirely new, and not necessarily gang-related word for a friend, 'roll dog':

7) Rolldogin' It

Jorge: We're roll dogin' it.
 Mario: Who you [think I wasn't a roll dog for my homeboy *ése*? Huh?
 Jorge: [We've come through everything man.]
 Jorge: Well we're still tight.
 Luis: Yeah.

In this exchange, Mario's own best friend, his "homeboy," is introduced as a referent—and a particular, special kind of homeboy, a "roll dog."

By mentioning his own roll dog, Mario's own adequacy as a friend is once again open for dispute, and Jorge jumps at the opportunity to put Mario's friendship to the test when he asks "what happened to your homeboy?":

8) My best roll dog, my chucho

Jorge: What happened to your homeboy.
 Mario: He got shot homes.
 (): ss.
 Mario: My best roll-dog, homes, my chucho homes,
 he got shot, ése. Fourteen bullets homes.

Here, Mario is talking about the consequences of his *own* friendship, not the friendship of Jorge and Luis. Mario's discursive layering of indexically loaded reference terms and vocatives is quite analogous to his previous statements about getting "locked up" for friends and family. As shown below (fig. 2), the parallelism of these two statement follows a nearly identical pattern.

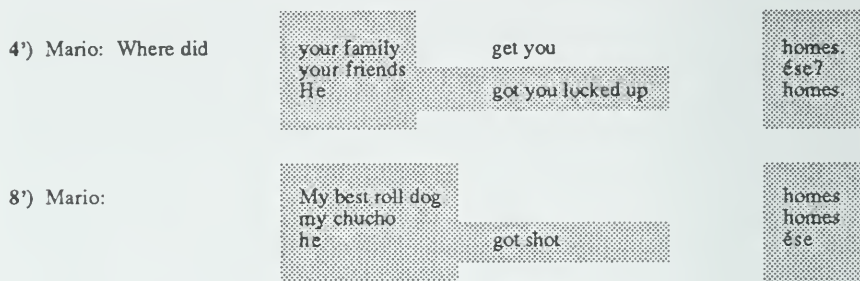


Figure 2: Referential Implication by Parallelism, Part Two

The parallelism within and between these two utterances mirrors Mario's point, which could be paraphrased as: having friends can turn into a painful experience. This is true for you and your so-called family, and it is true for me too. Even roll dogs, the best sort of friend aren't always going to be there. 8' comes across even more forcefully than 4', however, for several reasons: Mario is referring to his own friend, not to Jorge and Luis. Furthermore, in 8', consequences (implied through parallelism) of being someone's friend are more severe. Finally, these consequences do not befall a mere 'friend' or 'homeboy,' but a 'roll dog' and a 'chucho,' two words whose referential value as relationship markers has not yet been contested within this conversation. Thus Mario makes his point clearly and forcefully: Even friendships of the best kind can lead to tragic ends *when they are drawn into gang life*. Even if your friend is a true

roll dog, when "roll dogin' it" becomes a gangland activity, "Friends aren't friends."

Finally, neither Jorge nor Luis counter Mario's assertion by claiming that this bad end is also a part of being a friend. The specter of death is not taken lightly. While they do say that going to jail is a sacrifice they are willing to make, a sacrifice they consider to be an important part of showing friendship, they will not say the same thing about dying for a friend. Friends are too important, especially roll dogs. Now Jorge and Luis begin to see into Mario's world: They are in agreement with Mario on the value of the 'roll-dog' relationship. They do not reject Mario's underlying assumption (that being shot is a negative consequence) as they did when the consequences were merely jail. After Mario reveals that his best friend was shot, Jorge and Luis do not say that he should be happy to have a friend die; To counter the serious claim Mario makes about the death of his friend (and his implication that the same fate could befall his addressees), Jorge and Luis suggest that Mario's friend was not really a roll-dog at all, but rather that he was "just" a homeboy:

9) Best dog vs. homeboy and familia.

Jorge:	So that means that you just had a homeboy.
Mario:	Where's he at now? That was my <u>roll-dog</u> <i>ése</i> . I had a <i>familia</i> , my homeboys were my <i>familia</i> , but that was my roll-dog. He got shot fourteen times homes. He was what, fifteen years old <i>ése</i> . Where's he at now.
():	Sh
Mario:	Underground, homes.
()	
Mario:	You want your- you want your best dog underground homes?

Now the more gang-related word for friend is prefaced by a limiting "just" ("So that means that you just had a homeboy"). Here Jorge, like Mario did in excerpts 7) and 8), conveys his sense that a roll dog is something special: a friend even apart from the dynamics of gang life. But while Jorge may agree with Mario on the definition of roll dog, he denies that Mario ever had one. Real roll-dogs, he seems to be implying, don't get shot. If indeed Mario's "best dog" was killed by gang-related bullets, he was, actually, "just a homeboy."

While Jorge is still not willing to equate his own friend, Luis, with any friend that Mario had, Mario doesn't give up. He forces Jorge to equate his own roll dog, Luis, with the roll dog that Mario lost. In the excerpt above, Mario asserts what has been implied in the former discourse and which he has told me in subsequent discussions: that he had a roll dog once and that to him, 'roll dog' is the best possible term you could use for a friend. In this conversation, the terms 'family' and 'homeboy' had lost their agreed-upon status as terms which refer to valued relationships. Furthermore, they are words which stereotypically index gang-affiliation, which has in this conversation, come to index death. Roll dog, however has not been so emptied of positive associations. Both sides of this argument have used the term roll dog as a word for a very close friend, even in the world of non-gang related activities. As Mario has told me, a roll

dog is the person you are always there for, the person you are "tight" with, the person with whom you've "come through everything." By repeatedly asking Jorge "where's [his roll dog] at now?" Mario tries to use the sequential force of a question to engage Jorge fully, or at least to make him acknowledge, verbally, that Mario did in fact lose a true friend, a roll dog. However, Jorge's response is minimal even in this sequential context. Nevertheless, Mario continues to question Jorge, and makes his next question explicitly applicable to his two addressees by making the parallel between his own lost roll dog and Jorge's best friend, Luis. He asks, "do you want your best dog underground?"

Now Jorge and Luis have no choice but to consider the death of their friend(ship). There seem to be no new words, no new matters of definition or ambiguities of reference to come to their rescue.

Seemingly at a loss, Jorge stammers:

- 10) Jorge: Well don- don- don-
 come out with
 some stupid question like that man.

The truth is, while it may be honorable to say you would die for your homie, it is not so honorable to say you don't mind if your homie dies for you. Jorge doesn't want his roll dog underground, but he doesn't have any other answer right now. For Jorge, his roll dog, Luis, is his one loyalty and this loyalty is expressed through their gang affiliation; for both Jorge and Luis, upholding this loyalty is a powerful ethical imperative and confrontation by a reformed gangbanger like Mario is not a comfortable experience. But without at least a minimal understanding of their world and the words to convey such understanding, Mario could never have confronted these two young men in this way. As Mario remarked to me a few weeks later, he "used to be just like them—so stubborn." But while Mario can reach them enough to make them uncomfortable, Mario hasn't changed their minds. Nor has he found an easy solution. There isn't one. But by using a shared vocabulary, by trying to convey his own sense of experience of the gang life, and the life of a Latino, Mario just wants Jorge and Luis to know that after all, "we all see the same shit" and that hard choices are inevitable:

11) We all see the same shit

- Jorge: I mean we grew up together since we were real small, that's what. >You know<
 Mario: Yeah, and that's cool, homes, but what I'm trying to tell you homes is that- just expect it bro. Expect it homes. I'm telling you- my my look- here, homes, I don't know, it's just a lot of shit that- >you know< that I've seen bro. But I- yo- I mean- we all see the same shit man. And still you guys don't see, man, that, it ain't worth it bro. None of this shit's worth it homes.

Again, Mario weaves immediate and community specific vocatives throughout his more global claims about the world. However, the gang-related 'homes' and the more universally applicable 'bro' are equally invoked. While Mario wants Jorge and Luis to leave the gang world and enter the world of 'roll dogs' and

'bros,' and friendships defined by bonds other than those of the gang, he still reaches out to them with the familiar and gang-related term, 'homs.' He understands what we all should: when we're all seeing the same hardship, it's no wonder that friendship as defined through gang loyalty becomes a last holdout against that "shit." But until Jorge and Luis see a brighter alternative, there really is nothing else more "worth it."

CONCLUSION

The content of the conversation between Mario, Luis, and Jorge first struck me as tragic and incredibly personal. This is not the typical type of conversation one hears during a lull in classroom instruction. These conversationalists elaborate particularities and collaboratively negotiate word meanings and values, and in the process, the meaning of friendship and the ethical values associated with it.

Like Mario, I find it hard to understand how Jorge and Luis can be "so stubborn" about their gang loyalties. Repeatedly during my research at this alternative school, the topics of jail and death test the limits of my cultural relativism. Something seems wrong with our society when teenage boys willingly go to jail and even die for one another. And yet as I look closely at the language used in the conversations I've taped at this school, I marvel at its unending capacity to support and sustain varied perspectives and identities, even amidst all "the same shit" Mario alludes to. As Mario questions the value of Jorge and Luis's lives and their friendship, reference words proliferate, being re-made and un-made as Jorge and Luis's world begins to tumble before them in conversation. Can words save them? Or Mario? New words like 'chucho' and 'roll dog'? Certainly not. But in this conversation, these multi-functional, highly indexical words provide a medium for further talk, for confrontation, and for fighting out those issues many other adolescents may never confront with such life and death force. And they provided me with a window into points of view I still wonder about daily.

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NOTES

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² Mario has described to me how his Latino peers use "ése" as a friendly vocative (or address term) among themselves, whereas African Americans he knows may use the noun phrase "an ése" to refer to (and distance themselves from) a Latino gang member.

³ The following transcription conventions are used in the examples given: Colons denote sound stretch ("Bro: is- just like"); Underlining denotes emphatic stress ("the word like say friend"); Brackets indicate overlapping speech, for example:

Mario: [you know?

Betsy: [right,

Equal signs indicate continuation of an utterance across another speaker's contribution, for example,

Mario: the definition of a=

Betsy: Uh huh,

Mario: =person you know?

Intervals of silence are timed in tenths of seconds and inserted within parentheses; short, untimed silences are marked by a dash when sound is quickly cut off ("they're like- a Latino") or with a period within parentheses (.). Utterance final rising intonation is marked with a question mark, continued intonation with a comma, and falling intonation with a period; faster paced talk is enclosed in less-than and greater-than signs (">you know<"); Descriptions of the scene are italicized within double parentheses (((*points his hand at Jorge and looks at Luis*))); Single parentheses surround items of doubtful transcription; and boldface indicates items of analytic focus.

⁴ Asif Agha, personal communication.

⁵ Cecilia Ford (1993) has named this phenomenon (and others like it) "post-completion extension," meaning that after an utterance is potentially complete, it is continued (by the same or a second speaker) with an added adverbial clause, in this case, a "because-clause."

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