

Europeanized Places, Europeanized People: The Discursive Construction of Argentina

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Abstract

A remarkable feature of Argentine national discourse is the variety of forms which perpetuate the ideologies of 19th century leaders endorsing the absolute Europeanization of the nascent Argentine nation-state. Among these forms are a number of multiword expressions that construe Argentine places and people as essentially “European”, such as the famous *Buenos Aires es la París de Sudamérica* (‘Buenos Aires is the Paris of South America’) and *Los argentinos descienden de los barcos* (‘Argentines descend from the ships’). This paper combines the Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach (Goddard & Wierzbicka 2014; Levisen & Waters 2017; Goddard 2018) and Conceptual Blending Theory (Fauconnier 1999; Coulson & Oakley 2000; Fauconnier & Turner 2002) to explore the conceptual architecture of these two expressions and the discourses around which they are organized, offering original insights into the construal of places and people in Argentine postcolonial discourse.

Keywords: NSM approach, conceptual blending, postcolonial pragmatics, Argentine national discourse, place discourse.

1. Introduction

Many of Argentina’s 19th century political leaders would be pleased to hear today’s Argentines say *Buenos Aires es la París de Sudamérica* (‘Buenos Aires is the Paris of South America’) and *Los argentinos descienden de los barcos* (‘Argentines descend from the ships’). At face value, both expressions seem to confirm that the “civilized”, European Argentina these leaders imagined has indeed come to fruition. The knowledge that *Los argentinos son italianos que hablan español* (‘Argentines are Italians that speak Spanish’) would likewise gain their approval, even if the expression implies an absence of the leaders’ more preferred German, French, and British components.

Argentine national discourse does not fall short of expressions that seek to legitimize the Europeanness of Argentine people and places, and which thereby perpetuate nation-building ideologies advanced by the country’s late 19th and early 20th century elites. This has often been observed in studies of Argentine postcolonial discourse by sociologists, anthropologists, and historians (see e.g. Joseph 2000; Guano 2002, 2003, 2004; Garguin 2007; Kaminsky 2008; Grimson 2012; Gordillo 2016). From a linguistic perspective, however, the meanings of these expressions and their organizing discourses remain largely unexplored. By unpacking their “conceptual architectures”, this paper aims to model these meanings within a postcolonial-pragmatic framework, offering a new perspective on the construal of places and people in Argentine postcolonial discourse.

To this end, I will combine the tools of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach (Goddard & Wierzbicka 2014; Levisen & Waters 2017; Goddard 2018) and Conceptual Blending Theory (Fauconnier 1999; Coulson & Oakley 2000; Fauconnier & Turner 2002). NSM is an approach to semantic and discursive analysis; it employs a minilanguage of maximally simple, maximally cross-translatable words (aka “semantic primes” and “molecules”¹) and grammar to produce high-resolution meaning descriptions with minimum potential for ethnocentric bias. Conceptual Blending Theory is a cognitive linguistic approach to meaning construction; its central concern is with modelling dynamic aspects of meaning-making, in particular operations that recruit and combine concepts to derive novel or highly creative meanings.

The paper is structured as follows. In Section 2, I look at the “historical cradle” of the discursive apparatus that is at the center of the paper; the section provides an outline of the political ideology advanced by Argentina’s 19th century political elites, and of the “civilizing”, nation-building project their ideals eventually translated into. In Section 3, I look at a well-established discourse that invites people to a “Parisian experience” of places in the Argentine capital, and then I model the underlying structure of this discourse using the NSM technique of cultural scripts. Next, I combine Conceptual Blending Theory and NSM to explore the semantics of a key expression which draws upon that discourse: *Buenos Aires es la París de Sudamérica*. In Section 4, I propose a cultural script for a master discourse that secures Argentines a strong link to European people. Then, I combine again Conceptual Blending Theory and NSM to explore one key expression in that discourse: *Los argentinos descienden de los barcos*. This is followed by some concluding remarks.

2. Europeanizing Argentina

Argentina’s first generations of self-proclaimed “liberal” thinkers—among these, prominent figures like Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, Juan Bautista Alberdi, and Esteban Echeverría—longed for the Europeanization of Argentina. To them, *Europa* (‘Europe’) was the epitome of cultural, political, and scientific sophistication—the ideal model of *civilización* (‘civilization’).² By contrast, Argentina was conceived of as being plagued by *barbarie* (‘barbarism’): the country’s *interior* (‘hinterlands’) was inhabited by rebellious, mixed-blood

¹ Semantic primes are building blocks of meaning that are both (a) simple, i.e. they cannot be decomposed (paraphrased) in any simpler terms, and (b) universal, i.e. they can be expressed by words or other linguistic expressions in all languages. Molecules instead are complex units of meaning, and, as such, they are definable in terms of semantic primes. Some molecules are likely to be found in all or most languages, whereas others are language-specific to a greater or lesser extent (see Goddard 2018 for a practical introduction to the theory and application of NSM).

² Typically, the notion of Europe as the source of civilization included countries such as Britain, Germany, Switzerland and France, and excluded regions near the Mediterranean Sea. Spain, Argentina’s former metropolitan state, embodied aspects of both civilization and barbarism, and as such it was generally excluded from the notion of civilized Europe (Shumway 1991; Svampa 2006).

gauchos ('rural men'), and ruled by backward, authoritarian *caudillos* ('strongmen'); in the fertile territories beyond the borders of the country—the so-called *desierto* ('desert')—lived the “savage hordes” of “repugnant” *indios* ('Indians') (Sarmiento 1913; Svampa 2006).

In the mid- to late 1800s, this way of thinking translated into a concrete state-run “civilizing”, nation-building project. Several military campaigns, among these the much-celebrated *Conquista del desierto* ('Conquest of the desert') (1878–1885), resulted in the expansion of Argentina's geographic borders and the destruction of numerous indigenous political autonomies. Mass graves in the Patagonia, Pampa, and North-West regions were held up as evidence that the Argentine state's attempts to exterminate the *indios* were successful, a persistent myth in the Argentine national imaginary (Delrio et al. 2010; Grimson 2012; Gordillo 2016). With thousands of hectares of now “empty” fertile land, the state opened its doors to massive European immigration, in line with the immigration policy stated in the Argentine Constitution of 1853:

Artículo 25.- El Gobierno federal fomentará la inmigración europea; y no podrá restringir, limitar ni gravar con impuesto alguno la entrada en el territorio argentino de los extranjeros que traigan por objeto labrar la tierra, mejorar las industrias, e introducir y enseñar las ciencias y las artes. (InfoLEG n.d.)

'Section 25.- The Federal Government shall foster European immigration; and may not restrict, limit or burden with any tax whatsoever, the entry into the Argentine territory of foreigners who arrive for the purpose of tilling the soil, improving industries, and introducing and teaching arts and sciences.' (Biblioteca Sede Central n.d.)

Between 1871 and 1914, nearly 6 million European immigrants flooded Argentina, injecting the country with the much-needed workforce. There followed a remarkable economic expansion based largely on the export of beef, hides, and grains to Great Britain (Rock 1985). But instead of investing in the development of industries, the Porteño (i.e. Buenos Aires-based) oligarchy used the profits to move north of their colonial-style homes and erect a whole new Buenos Aires. Renown European architects were commissioned to design opulent mansions inspired by French buildings such as the Louvre and the Palace of Versailles, constructed with materials from Europe and filled with European furniture and objets d'art. With its new European facade, Buenos Aires earned its still-famous nickname: *la París de Sudamérica* (Scobie 1974; Pigna 2005: 356–390).

The Argentine elite's project did not go quite as planned, though. The desired immigrants from “civilized” Europe were vastly outnumbered by Southern and Eastern Europeans, mostly Italians and Spanish who had fled from poverty, political turmoil, and wars (Rock 1985). The majority had come in search of rural work, but limited opportunities in the *interior* led them to settle in Buenos Aires, confined to unsanitary, over-crowded *conventillos* ('tenements') in the city's south. At first, these city-based migrant masses, with their impenetrable dialects and political activism, were seen as a threat to the elite's project of national unity and economic development. However, in the context of the favorable economy, the immigrants and their descendants began to move up the socioeconomic ladder, and, with the introduction of free public education, their children effectively assimilated the national language and culture (Rock

1985: 175; Ennis 2015). Before long, this empowered Porteño sector of European descent would become a key agent of Argentine identity, advancing a national discourse that links Argentines and European immigration, famously articulated in the saying *Los argentinos descenden de los barcos* (Guano 2003; Garguin 2007).

3. The Construal of European Places in Argentina

Crucial to the “civilizing” project of the Argentine elites was the construction of places that would give the country a European feel. Architectural projects to erect European-like cities were implemented in regions like Patagonia, with cities like Bariloche replicating the architecture of the Swiss Alps, and in the Pampa region, with cities like Buenos Aires designed to look and feel like a European metropolis (Gordillo 2016: 248). But no city can be fully European without an accompanying discursive apparatus that construes it as such. In this section, I will look at a well-established discourse aimed at shaping our aesthetic experience of Buenos Aires to that end, and I will capture this discourse using the NSM technique of cultural scripts.³ Next, I will combine the tools of NSM and Conceptual Blending to explore the semantics of a key expression in that discourse: *Buenos Aires es la París de Sudamérica*.

3.1. A Guide to Seeing Buenos Aires

Invitations to admire similarities between Buenos Aires and Paris abound in Argentina. In the country’s most visited news website *Clarín*, users are invited to play *Trivia: ¿Es Buenos Aires o París?* (‘Trivia: is it Buenos Aires or Paris?’). The instructions to the game are reproduced in (1).

- (1) La influencia de la arquitectura francesa puede hacer que confundas algunos rincones porteños. A partir de la segunda mitad del siglo XIX llegaron nuevos aires estilísticos a Buenos Aires: se levantaron maravillosos edificios con clara influencia francesa. Te proponemos mirar las siguientes fotografías y que nos digas si es Buenos Aires o París. (*Trivia*, 2017)
- (1) ‘The influence of French architecture can make you confuse some Porteño corners. From the second half of the 19th century, new stylistic airs arrived in Buenos Aires: marvelous buildings with a clearly French influence were erected. We invite you to look at the following photographs and tell us if it is Buenos Aires or Paris.’

The game is quite difficult; despite being a Porteño myself, I scored a mere 5 out of 10. Irrespective of the score, the player is reassured with a photo of two overlapping flags—the Argentine and the French—and the message in (2).

³ Cultural scripts are representations of shared understandings about ways of speaking, thinking, feeling and behaving for a given discourse community, articulated in the NSM metalanguage (Goddard & Wierzbicka 2004; Wierzbicka 2015; Levisen & Waters 2017).

- (2) El resultado importa, pero no tanto como lo bellas que son Buenos Aires y París. (*Trivia*, 2017)
- (2) ‘The result matters, but not as much as how beautiful Buenos Aires and Paris are.’

Efforts to promote and celebrate a Parisian Buenos Aires are perceptible also in the discourse of governmental institutions. In examples (3) and (4), under the headline *Viajar a París sin salir de Buenos Aires* (‘Travelling to Paris without leaving Buenos Aires’), the government of Buenos Aires advertises a guided tour in the city:

- (3) Durante septiembre el programa “Viví Francia” propone visitas guiadas gratuitas a distintos lugares de la Ciudad donde quedó marcada la cultura de ese país. (*Viajar a París*, 2018)
- (3) ‘In September, the program “Experience France” offers guided visits to different places of the City that bear the imprint of the culture of that country in Buenos Aires.’
- (4) Entre el 15 y el 22 de septiembre la Ciudad ofrece el programa Viví Francia, una serie de visitas guiadas gratuitas por distintos barrios, edificios y monumentos donde quedó registrada la cultura de ese país en Buenos Aires. (*Viajar a París*, 2018)
- (4) ‘Between 15 and 22 September, the city offers the program Experience France, a series of guided tours through different neighborhoods, buildings, and monuments where the culture of that country left a mark in Buenos Aires.’

Both the trivia and the local tour carefully select various *lugares* (‘places’) in Buenos Aires, including *rincones* (‘corners’), *barrios* (‘neighborhoods’), *edificios* (‘buildings’), and *monumentos* (‘monuments’). Along with a visual experience of these places, we are offered a lens through which they can, perhaps should, be seen: *like places in Paris*.

For many Argentines, the wide reproduction of this Buenos Aires-Paris analogy by “first-world” media may be something of a confirmation of its truth. Example (5) is from an article entitled *Buenos Aires - A Guide to the Paris of South America*, taken from an Australian online travel magazine:

- (5) Our apartment on the Avenida Rivadavia near the Plaza del Congreso was old-style Parisian: soaring ceilings, parquet floors, shuttered windows. (...) Paris has her Eiffel Tower and Champs-Élysées; BA has the Obelisk and Avenida 9 de Julio, a breathtaking 12-lane avenue that throbs through the city 24 hours a day beneath the vigilant gaze of an enormous image of Evita Perón. (*Buenos Aires*, n.d.)

I propose script [A] to capture the discourse embodied in the above examples.

[A] A script for seeing places in Buenos Aires

- a. when people see many places in Buenos Aires [m]⁴, they can't not think like this:
 "these places are like places in Paris [m]"
- b. at the same time, they can feel something good,
 like people can feel something good when they see places like this in Paris [m]

The script guides our aesthetic (perceptual and affective) experience of Buenos Aires. First, it dictates that, upon seeing places in this city, people will regard them as having Parisian counterparts. Second, it encourages people to respond to this perceptual experience with a good feeling. Importantly, inherent to the script is the assumption that seeing places in Paris triggers an analogous emotional response.

3.2. "The Paris of South America"

The expression *Buenos Aires es la París de Sudamérica* can be conceived of as an evolved form of the discourse captured in script [A]. Speakers draw on that aesthetic analogy to construct a fictive scenario where Buenos Aires, rather than being *like* Paris, *is* Paris. In the remainder of this section, I will provide models of the semantics of the expression and of the meaning-construction process underlying this semantics. To attain this, I will combine the tools of Conceptual Blending Theory and Natural Semantic Metalanguage.

An expression like *Buenos Aires es la París de Sudamérica* is described in Conceptual Blending Theory as an "XYZ construction" (Turner 1991; Fauconnier & Turner 2002). This type of construction consists of three elements which are all noun phrases, in this case X *Buenos Aires*, Y *París*, and Z *Sudamérica*. The elements Y and Z form a possessive construction (marked in brackets) connected by the preposition *de* 'of':

Buenos Aires es [la París de Sudamérica]
 [X] [Y] [Z]

In order to make sense of the expression, speakers must first recruit X, Y, Z, and other formally-missing but readily-available concepts into an integration network. This is modelled in Fig. 1:

⁴ Recall that the aim of this paper is to shed light on the meanings of highly complex discourses and multiword expressions, whose meanings are not simply the sum of their parts. Because of this complexity, some meanings in the NSM analyses have not yet been broken down—this is certainly worth doing, but was not feasible within the scope of this paper. Words that could be further broken down are treated as semantic molecules, and marked with the symbol [m], following the standard notation of the NSM approach.

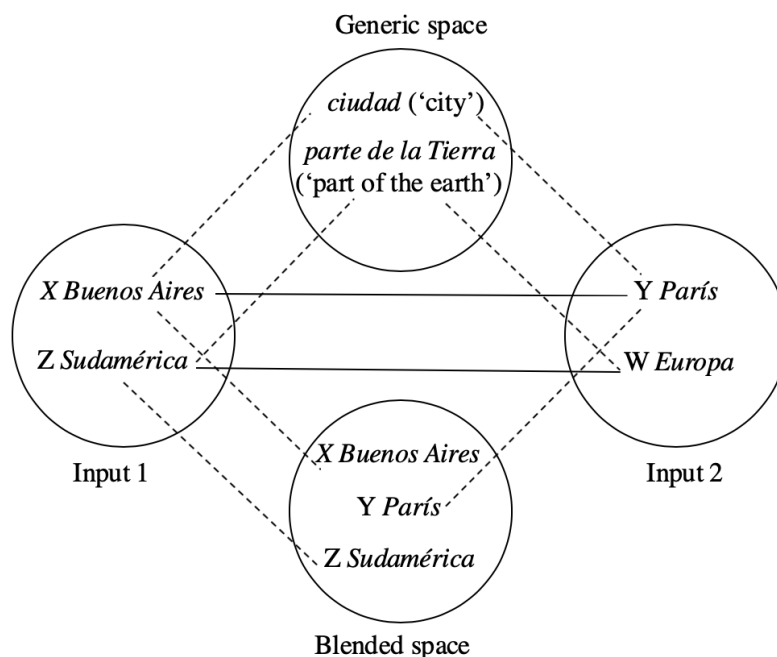


Figure 1. *Integration network for “Buenos Aires es la París de Sudamérica”.*

The four circles represent different “mental spaces” in the network—i.e. different structures into which the conceptual ingredients at play are organized. Underpinning the integration network is the generic space: speakers’ knowledge of the relatively simple concepts *ciudad* (‘city’) and *parte de la Tierra* (‘part of the earth’), and of a basic relationship between them, namely that a *ciudad* is located in a *parte de la Tierra*. This general knowledge prompts speakers to group the elements X *Buenos Aires* with Z *Sudamérica* together (input space 1), and to position Y *París* in a parallel relationship with its counterpart W *Europa* (input space 2). The generic structure common to both input spaces can be modelled in NSM terms as follows:

[B] Generic space in *Buenos Aires es la París de Sudamérica*.

- a. X/Y [m] is a city [m],
- b. it is in one part of the earth [m],
- c. this part of the earth [m] is Z/W

The common structure of [B] invites speakers to identify counterpart elements across the two input spaces, and to relate them by way of analogies (solid lines in Figure 1). NSM models for these cross-space (aka “outer-space”) operations are provided in [C] and [D]:

[C] Cross-space analogy between X *Buenos Aires* and Y *París*

- a. I think like this about Buenos Aires [m]:
- b. “it is a city [m]”
- c. I think the same about Paris [m]
- d. because of this, I think like this now:
- e. “Buenos Aires [m] is like Paris [m]”

[D] Cross-space analogy between Z *Sudamérica* and W *Europa*

- a. I think like this about South America [m]:
- b. “it is one part of the earth [m]”
- c. I think the same about Europe [m]
- d. because of this, I think like this now:
- e. “South America [m] is like Europe [m]”

Next, speakers project and integrate selected structures from the network into a single “blended” space. These structures include (1) elements from both input spaces—namely X, Y, and Z—and, crucially, (2) the outer-space analogy between X *Buenos Aires* and Y *París*. This analogy is now compressed into an “inner-space” relation of identity, i.e. a relation of identity between elements within a single space. This novel relation between the two cities is captured in [E]:

[E] Inner-space identity between X *Buenos Aires* and Y *París*

- a. I think about Buenos Aires [m] like this now:
- b. “this city [m] is Paris [m]”

Now, the city’s new identity does not conclude with [E]. Buenos Aires could be Paris according to potentially infinite interpretations—like Paris, it could be a city of love and romance, of revolution, etc.—, but speakers conventionally (and effortlessly) interpret the identity scenario on the basis of script [A], positing an aesthetic analogy between places in Buenos Aires and Paris (see Section 3.1). Lack of knowledge of this culture-specific script and its function here as an interpretative backdrop may lead to an “incorrect” reading of the expression.⁵

Additionally, the expression aims at granting Buenos Aires a unique status over other South American cities, analogous to the status commonly attributed to Paris among the cities of Europe. The cue to this is the reference to the city as *la París* (‘the Paris’) rather than *una París* (‘a Paris’), which rules out the possibility of any other competing *Parises* within South America. A similar construal can be observed in Buenos Aires’ other famous nickname *La Reina del Plata* (‘The Queen of the River Plate’), which blends the Argentine capital and royal hierarchy to position this city above all others in the estuary of the *Río de la Plata* (‘River Plate’).

The full meaning of the expression can now be articulated in NSM terms as follows:

⁵ Buenos Aires is only one among a large number of cities around the world that have been nicknamed “Paris” via an XYZ (or similar) construction. Lists of such cities can be found in the (English) Wikipedia articles for “Paris of the West”, “Paris of the North”, “Paris of the East”, “Little Paris”, and in corresponding Wikipedia articles in other languages. What basic meanings and scripts are needed for a culturally sensitive interpretation of these various outwardly similar nicknames? This question is worthy of exploration.

[F] Semantic explication⁶ for “*Buenos Aires es la París de Sudamérica*”

BLEND

- a. I think about Buenos Aires [m] like this now:
- b. “this city [m] is Paris [m]”
- c. at the same time I know that it is not Paris [m]

STRUCTURING FRAME (Script A)

- d. I want to think like this because of this:
- e. . when people see many places in Buenos Aires [m], they can’t not think like this:
- f. “these places are like places in Paris [m]”
- g. . at the same time, they can feel something good,
- h. like people can feel something good when they see places like this in Paris [m]

STATUS

- i. people often think about Paris [m] like this:
- j. “this city [m] is very very good,
- k. it is above all other cities [m]
- l. in the part of the earth [m] where this city [m] is”
- m. people can think the same about Buenos Aires [m]

Now, as indicated with component “c” (‘at the same time I know that it is not Paris’), speakers are aware of the fictive status of the blended city. In a sense, no one is actually “fooled” by the blend, as Fauconnier and Turner have it (Fauconnier & Turner 2002: 63). This is because the imagined Buenos Aires in the blended space remains connected to the “factual” cities in the input spaces, towards which it can always be projected back to generate contrasts.

In another sense, speakers are indeed “fooled” by the blend and the script which informs it. Buenos Aires is not only a city of grand French style mansions along the elegant thoroughfare Avenida Alvear, and of *petit hôtels* in a minuscule area known as La Isla (‘The Island’), located in the well-off neighborhood of Recoleta. It is also a city with a continued neglect of public spaces and infrastructure and a lack of building regulations. Many “notable” buildings have been demolished and replaced by large tower blocks, colossal shopping malls, and other speculative real estate, resulting in an odd mashup of eclectic styles that is characteristic of the city today (Guano 2002). Importantly, within walking distance of the Parisian-style facades, Buenos Aires is also a city of *villas* (‘urban slums’) and other informal settlements with poor or no sanitation system (TECHO 2016). In short, there is a Buenos Aires (and certainly a Paris also) that is in sharp contrast with the idealized European metropolis of the blend, and which is also very different from the selection of places that motivates the analogy in script [A]. Albeit temporarily, the blend and the script give locals and visitors the illusion of a “successful”

⁶ In NSM theory, a semantic explication is a “reductive paraphrase” of the meaning of a word, phrase, or lexico-grammatical construction; i.e. “an attempt to say in other, simpler words (the metalanguage of semantic primes and molecules) what a speaker is saying when he or she utters the expression being explicated” (Goddard & Ye 2014: 70–71).

Europeanization of Buenos Aires, insofar as many “un-European places”—and with places, also many “un-European people”—are successfully backgrounded.

4. The Construal of European People in Argentina

Argentina’s people are discursively construed as European, too. This section looks at a well-established master script that secures Argentines a strong link to European people. Next, I combine the tools of Conceptual Blending Theory and Natural Semantic Metalanguage to explore a key expression in that discourse: *Los argentinos descienden de los barcos*.

4.1. The Europeans of South America

Ultimately, the place-informed discourse captured in Section 3 is in the service of a people-informed discourse. If Buenos Aires is indeed the Paris of South America, then it seems legitimate to ask whether Porteños are also Parisians. An article in Argentina’s leading conservative newspaper *La Nación* raises this question; the headline is reproduced in (6):

(6) ¿Son realmente los argentinos de Buenos Aires los parisinos de Sudamérica?
(Pérez 2016)

(6) ‘Are the Argentines of Buenos Aires really the Parisians of South America?’

And the article asserts:

(7) No es la ensoñación de un turista que caminando por Buenos Aires sintió un *déja-vù* parisino al contemplar palacetes y esculturas. Tampoco es el efecto de haber escuchado a demasiadas personas comentando su sesión de psicoanálisis en un *petit café* porteño. Fue un propósito histórico deliberado y ha impregnado la identidad de los argentinos desde los albores de su Estado: la decisión de ser los franceses de Latinoamérica. (Pérez 2016)

(7) ‘It is not the daydream of a tourist that, walking in Buenos Aires, felt a Parisian *déja-vù* upon contemplating small palaces and sculptures. Neither is it the effect of having heard many people commenting their Psychoanalytic sessions in a Porteño *petit café*. It was a deliberate historical plan and it has pervaded the identity of Argentines since the dawn of their State: the decision to be the French of Latin America.’

Historically, however, the hegemonic Porteño discourse has construed Porteños (and, by extension, *all Argentines*) as Italians rather than French. As a local saying goes, *Los argentinos son italianos que hablan español* (‘Argentines are Italians that speak Spanish’). This purported Italianness of Porteños is also often invoked via a meritocratic narrative stating that the large middle class of European descent emerged in Buenos Aires thanks to the hard-working spirit of immigrant ancestors and the privilege of free, public education granted to their children (Guano 2003). As told by a local in (8):

- (8) [T]he *tano* [Italian] immigrants were poor, but they worked hard and wanted their children to succeed, and they sent them to school. And then the children became doctors and teachers. This is the origin of the *clase media porteña* [porteño middle class], and this is why Buenos Aires is so different from other Latin American cities. [Other cities] do not have such a large middle class ... They are not as European. (in Guano 2003: 156, italics and bracketed translations in original)

Alternatively, Argentines may often construe themselves as Europeans tout court, without explicit reference to specific European nations. One common expression to this end is *Somos un crisol de razas* ('We are a crucible of races'). The expression embodies a selective melting-pot ideology asserting that Argentines are a homogenous European-based "race", and that this race resulted from the merging of other immigrant "races" that came *from all over Europe* (Guano 2003; Garguin 2007; Delrio et al. 2010; Grimson 2012). Another much-celebrated expression is *Los argentinos descienden de los barcos* ('Argentines descend from the ships'); its full version is reproduced in (9):

- (9) Los mexicanos descienden de los aztecas,
Los peruanos descienden de los incas,
Los argentinos descienden de los barcos.
- (9) 'The Mexicans descend from the Aztecs,
The Peruvians descend from the Incas,
The Argentines descend from the ships.'

To the reassurance of many Argentines, the Europeanness (or Italianness) of their people is confirmed also by international media, as in example (10) from the Australian website *Traveller*. Here, the journalist's claim to the Europeanness of Porteños seems to be backed up by her experience of Parisian-like places and Italian-like cuisine in the city:

- (10) From El Palacio de Aguas Corrientes water works, which appears to mimic a Parisian palace, to the eccentric whimsy of the Palacio Barolo, the city looks, feels and tastes European, its restaurants filled with that rightly famous beef and plates of pasta, brought to the southern hemisphere by the many thousands of Italian immigrants. (*Buenos Aires: the city*, 2015)

The master discourse embodied in the above excerpts and expressions is captured in the following script:

[G] A high-level script about the Europeanness of Argentines

- a. people in Argentina [m] are like people in Europe [m],
b. many of them are like people in Italy [m]
c. this is good

The master discourse in [G] is essentially about people, but, as the examples show, it is legitimized and maintained by a "place discourse" (namely Script [A]), by "place expressions" (e.g. *Buenos Aires es la París de Sudamérica*), and by various other lower-level scripts which remain to be articulated. These scripts include cultural analogies ("Argentines are cultivated

like the French”, “they eat Italian food like Italians”), linguistic analogies (“they speak like Italians”), societal analogies (“Argentines have a large middle-class like many European countries”), and, importantly, the claim to biological descent from Europeans. Note that the latter stands in sharp contrast with recent genetic research which indicates that 56% of Argentines have at least one Amerindian ancestor (Corach et al. 2010).

4.2. “Argentines descend from the ships”

The key expression *Los argentinos descienden de los barcos* can be conceived of as an evolved form of the discourse captured in script [G]. Speakers draw on a deeply embedded descent narrative to construct a fictive scenario where Argentines, rather than being *like* European immigrants, *are* those European immigrants. Following the approach of Section 3.2, I will combine the tools of Conceptual Blending Theory and NSM to provide models of the semantics of the expression and of the meaning-construction process underlying this semantics.

The first observation is that the original expression consists of three lines (see the full version in Section 4.1), but Argentines typically omit the first two, which assert the Aztec and Inca descent of Mexicans and Peruvians, respectively. The gist of these two lines is nevertheless preserved in the semantics of the shortened version: to make a distinction between Argentines and people in other Latin American countries. According to this distinction, only the latter are regarded as descendants from Pre-Columbian civilizations and aboriginal tribes, and as being therefore largely like these “people of other kinds”. Under the heading *Otros lugares, otra gente* (‘Other places, other people’), the NSM components in [H] aim to capture this distinction:

[H] OTROS LUGARES, OTRA GENTE

- a. people in Argentina [m] are not like people in other countries [m] near it
- b. a very long time ago, people of other kinds lived in many places in these other countries [m]
- c. because of this, now many people in these other countries [m]
are like people of these other kinds

A whole different descent narrative is reserved for Argentines. This narrative is composed of two consecutive sub-narratives, which I shall label “Act 1” and “Act 2”. The expression recruits both of these acts, and each of them is prompted according to a different meaning assigned to the polysemous verb *descender*. Act 1 is prompted by *descender*₁ (‘come down from’). Here, the phrase *descienden de los barcos* (‘come down from the ships’) evokes the widely shared knowledge about millions of Europeans—most prominently, male Italians and Spanish—migrating to the country in the late 19th and early 20th century. For Argentines, the immigrants’ disembarkment in the port of Buenos Aires represents a major event in—and a powerful cue to—the larger narrative, and it is easily visualizable to most given the wide circulation of historical photos capturing the arrivals. I will call this first act *Inmigrantes descienden₁ de los barcos* (‘Immigrants come down from the ships’) and capture it in NSM terms as follows:

[I] ACT 1: INMIGRANTES DESCENDEN₁ DE LOS BARCOS

- a. a long time ago, many people in other countries [m] wanted to live in Argentina [m]
 they lived in countries [m] very far from Argentina [m],
 some lived in Italy [m], some lived in Spain [m],
 some lived in other countries [m] very far away
- b. because of this, they did something for some time
- c. during this time, they were in ships [m]
- d. after this time, they did something else
 because of this, after this, they were not in ships [m] anymore,
 they were in Argentina [m]

Act 2 is prompted by *descender*₂ (‘descend from’). Here, the same phrase *descienden de los barcos* translates as ‘descend from the ships’. In this interpretation, *los barcos* (‘the ships’) stand metonymically for the European immigrants from which Argentines claim descent. I will call this second act *Argentinos descenden₂ de los inmigrantes* (‘Argentines descend from the immigrants’) and capture it in NSM terms as follows:

[J] ACT 2: ARGENTINOS DESCENDEN₂ DE LOS INMIGRANTES

- a. after this, many of these people lived in Argentina [m] for a long time,
 during this time, many children [m] were born [m] here
- b. because of this, people in Argentina [m] now are like these other people
- c. many can think like this:
 “I am like one of these people
 because my grandfather [m] was one of these people”

In Act 2, a long period of time is projected during which the European immigrants settle in Argentina and new generations develop. The consequence of this is that people today are like the European immigrants before them. Note however that the explication does not dictate that all children of the new generations are children of immigrants. Neither does it assert that all Argentines have an immigrant grandfather, although this is often assumed as the typical case. Therefore, although the explication invites us to infer that Argentines are like Europeans due to a biological connection, it leaves open the possibility for other justifications to be recruited. These justifications may involve the linguistic, societal, and cultural analogies mentioned in Section 4.1, and also the place discourse captured in Script A (see Section 3).

Now, to achieve a full explication of the expression, it is not sufficient that we combine the explications for the two acts. The expression assumes that ‘Immigrants come down from the ships’ (Act 1) and that ‘Argentines descend from immigrants’ (Act 2), but also, and importantly, it blends these two scenarios to assert a third one where *Los argentinos descenden₁ de los barcos* (‘Argentines come down from the ships’). The integration network that gives rise to this fictive scenario is modelled in Fig. 2:

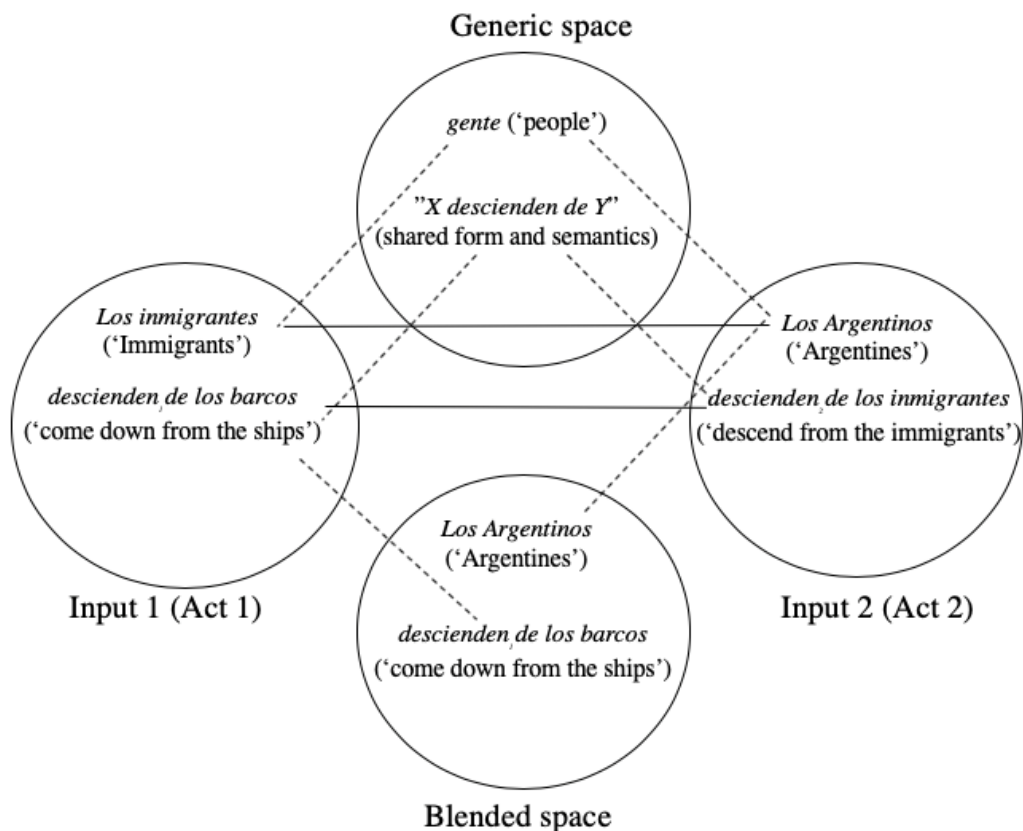


Figure 2. Integration network for "Los argentinos descenden de los barcos".

Speakers are prompted to organize their knowledge of Act 1 and Act 2 into two parallel input spaces: an Input 1, containing the elements *Los inmigrantes* ('immigrants') and *descienden₁ de los barcos* ('come down from the ships'), and an Input 2, containing the counterpart elements *Los argentinos* ('Argentines') and *descienden₂ de los inmigrantes* ('descend from the immigrants').

The identification of cross-space counterparts (solid lines) is motivated by a generic space that recruits basic structures common to both inputs. Common to *Los inmigrantes* (Input 1) and *Los Argentinos* (Input 2) is the knowledge that both of them are *gente* ('people'); also, both can fill the "X" slot in the construction *X descenden₁ de Y* ('X come down from Y'), which structures Input 1, and the "X" and "Y" slots in the construction *X descenden₂ de Y* ('X descend from Y'), which structures Input 2. Importantly, these two constructions are polysemous, which implies they can readily match on the basis of their shared forms and also of their related meanings. It is not the place here to delineate these related meanings via semantic explications for both constructions. It is sufficient to point the following: with *descender₁*, 'X is somewhere below Y after some time'; with *descender₂*, X is not below Y, but, because 'X lives some time after Y lived', one can think of X as being somewhere below Y.

To compose the blend, the elements *Los argentinos* (Input 1) and *descienden₁ de los barcos* (Input 2) are selected and projected into a single space that integrates them, resulting in a fictive scenario where Argentines take the role originally played by European immigrants in Act 1; this role change is captured in [K]:

[K] BLEND: ARGENTINOS DESCENDEN₁ DE LOS BARCOS

- a. I can think about people in Argentina [m] like this:
 “they were in these ships [m] a long time ago”

The full NSM explication for *Los argentinos descienden de los barcos*, rendered in [L] below, results from combining the above sections [H], [I], [J] and [K]. Note that Act 1 has a new component “d” to transition from the descent narrative of other Latin Americans to that of Argentines. Also, there is a new component “m” capturing the speaker’s acknowledgement of the fictive status of the blended scenario.

[L] Semantic explication for “*Los argentinos descienden de los barcos*”**OTROS LUGARES, OTRA GENTE**

- a. people in Argentina [m] are not like people in other countries [m] near it
 b. a very long time ago, people of other kinds lived in many places in these other countries [m]
 c. because of this, now many people in these other countries [m]
 are like people of these other kinds

ACT 1: INMIGRANTES DESCENDEN₁ DE LOS BARCOS

- d. people in Argentina [m] are not like people in other countries [m] near it
 because it is like this:
 e. a long time ago, many people in other countries [m] wanted to live in Argentina [m]
 they lived in countries [m] very far from Argentina [m],
 some lived in Italy [m], some lived in Spain [m],
 some lived in other countries [m] very far away
 f. because of this, they did something for some time
 g. during this time, they were in ships [m]
 h. after this time, they did something else
 because of this, after this, they were not in ships [m] anymore,
 they were in Argentina [m]

ACT 2: ARGENTINOS DESCENDEN₂ DE LOS INMIGRANTES

- i. after this, many of these people lived in Argentina [m] for a long time,
 during this time, many children [m] were born [m] here
 j. because of this, people in Argentina [m] now are like these other people
 k. many can think like this:
 “I am like one of these people
 because my grandfather [m] was one of these people”

BLEND: ARGENTINOS DESCENDEN₁ DE LOS BARCOS

- l. I can think about people in Argentina [m] like this:
 “they were in these ships [m] a long time ago”
 m. at the same time I know that it is not like this

Within the logic of the blend, Argentines no longer need to claim lineal descent from Europeans, for Argentines themselves are already Europeans. *Los argentinos descenden de los barcos* is thus a fictional but effective shortcut that secures Argentines an “impeccable” European pedigree, reaffirming the success of Argentina’s “civilizing” project.

5. Concluding remarks

In this paper I have offered a postcolonial-pragmatic framework for the study of meaning in Argentine postcolonial discourse. Drawing on the tools of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage and Conceptual Blending approaches, I have been able to explore the conceptual architecture of analogies, narratives, “common-sense” knowledges, and fictive blends that lie at the heart of Argentine people- and place-construal in discourse. Furthermore, by integrating the two approaches, I have offered a new methodological avenue for the study of meaning-making in multiword constructions.

The main findings can be summarized as follows. With *A script for seeing places in Buenos Aires*, I have captured a well-established discourse that invites people to a visually and affectively Parisian experience of places in the Argentine capital. This script serves to background un-European places, and, with these places, also un-European people. Furthermore, I have shown how this “place” script is used in the service of a “people” script that celebrates an analogy between Argentines and (most prominently Italian) Europeans, captured in *A high-level script about the Europeanness of Argentines*. Organized around these two scripts are the expressions *Buenos Aires es la París de Sudamérica* and *Los argentinos descenden de los barcos*. The semantic analysis revealed for these expressions a great compression of culture-specific knowledges and narratives, and for conceptual blending a powerful role in the erasure of un-European places and people.

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