Pedro Henríquez Ureña and the Whitening of Dominican Identity

Nothing is vital for science; nothing can be. Its accepted propositions, therefore, are but opinions at most; and the whole list is provisional. The scientific man is not in the least wedded to his conclusions. He risks nothing upon them. He stands ready to abandon one or all as soon as experience opposes them. Some of them, I grant he is in the habit of calling established truths.

Charles S. Peirce

Reality is greater than what we can describe.

Pedro Henríquez Ureña

Pedro Henríquez Ureña’s characterization of Spanish in the Dominican Republic, as I show in this chapter, revolves around two themes. The first theme is the archaic nature of its lexicon and, the second, the scarcity of features of African origin. Through his focus on these themes, Henríquez Ureña produced an image of what he regarded as the standard Dominican dialect of Spanish in which its formal similarities with northern Peninsular varieties were highlighted and its consistency with the Spanish (Castilian and Andalusian) base was affirmed. Spanish in the Dominican Republic is indeed a complex linguistic entity and as such a number of different approaches to its study could be emphasized. And in fact, other scholars, contemporaries of Henríquez Ureña, chose to focus on or at least further investigate other aspects of Caribbean varieties of Spanish (such as their African elements), or their uniqueness (as some Argentineans were doing with respect to their speech). In this chapter, in keeping with the approach to critical linguistic historiography and
methodology outlined in Chapter 2, my focus will be less on the accuracy or inaccuracy of these alternative approaches and more on the question of why Henríquez Ureña chose to emphasize those particular features (archaisms and non-Africanness) and not others.

As the previous chapters have indicated, our analysis requires that we place the author in the precise historical context in which his work was being produced and Dominican identity was being constructed and reconstructed. The following cultural and racial categories and hierarchies are central to the present discussion: Hispanism versus Americanism, Hispanoamericanism versus Latinoamericanism, blackness versus whiteness, Dominicanness versus Haitianess.

**Iconization as a Metalinguistic Device in Henríquez Ureña’s Linguistic Texts**

In Henríquez Ureña’s linguistic texts we find several examples of indexical iconicity. At first glance, these passages appear to contain simple descriptions of linguistic forms and usage, but upon further scrutiny we observe that they also aim to reflect social and cultural categories, especially of racial and ethnic identity. In other words, Henríquez Ureña’s descriptions highlight linguistic patterns while at the same time marking and pointing to racial and national boundaries. The following statement regarding the speech of the descendants of African slaves, originally made by Esteban Pichardo but often repeated by Henríquez Ureña, offers an example:

> Van Name cites observations made by the Dominican Esteban Pichardo, author of the first Dictionary of American provincialisms. According to Pichardo, the African-born blacks who were brought to Cuba used a mutilated and corrupted Spanish while their Cuban-born descendants spoke well like white natives.2

Addison Van Name (1868) was a scholar whose text *Contributions to Creole Grammar* has been said to represent the beginning of the scientific study of Creole languages. His reference to Pichardo lends more credibility to the line of argument pursued by Henríquez Ureña. But what I wish to highlight in this statement is the process by which the particular deployment of linguistic forms is used to determine membership in or distance from a racial group, region, or national identity.

The process of iconization as a metalinguistic and descriptive device appears very early in Henríquez Ureña’s linguistic oeuvre. The first example is found in one of the last paragraphs of *La lengua en Santo Domingo* (1919). In this text, the author attempts to correct Wilhelm Meyer-Lübke’s assertion that a black dialect was spoken in Santo Domingo. In this case,