Original Article

Mujereo as an Identity-Communicative Device in the LGBTIQA+ Community in Chile: A Sociopragmatic Approach from the Speakers' Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The term *"mujereo"* reflects a set of lexical and morphological strategies that act upon language and serve as an identity-communicative device within the LGBTIQA+ community in Chile. The present study aimed to conceptualize *mujereo* from the perspective of the Chilean LGBTIQA+ community, exploring its relationship with *palabreo* and the gender tensions that emerge from its use. A qualitative design was employed, involving semi-structured interviews with 30 participants from the LGBTIQA+ community. The responses were analyzed using thematic content analysis techniques, supported by ATLAS.ti software. Findings indicate that participants describe *mujereo* as a strategy that feminizes male speakers, typically in humorous or affectionate contexts. *Mujereo* operates both within and independently of *palabreo*, highlighting its significance as a communicative practice with its own internal logic. It is regarded as a meaningful mechanism of identity construction within the Chilean LGBTIQA+ community, one that challenges normative gender structures and reinforces community cohesion through language.

El *mujereo* como dispositivo identitario-comunicativo en la comunidad LGBTIQA+ en Chile: una mirada sociopragmática desde la perspectiva de sus hablantes

RESUMEN

Con la idea de *mujereo* se reconoce una serie de recursos léxicos y morfológicos que operan sobre el lenguaje, y funcionan como un dispositivo identitario-comunicativo al interior de la comunidad LGBTIQA+ en Chile. El presente estudio tuvo como objetivo conceptualizar el *mujereo* desde la perspectiva de la propia comunidad LGBTIQA+ chilena, explorando su relación con el *palabreo* y las tensiones de género que surgen a partir de su uso. Se utilizó un diseño cualitativo con entrevistas semiestructuradas a 30 participantes de la comunidad LGBTIQA+, analizando las respuestas mediante técnicas de análisis de contenido temático con el apoyo del software ATLAS.ti. Los resultados muestran que el grupo de participantes describe el *mujereo* como una estrategia que feminiza a los interlocutores masculinos, generalmente en un contexto humorístico o afectivo. Se observa que el *mujereo* opera tanto dentro como fuera del *palabreo*, evidenciando su relevancia como una práctica comunicativa cuya lógica funciona de modo independiente. El *mujereo* es visto como un mecanismo relevante de construcción identitaria dentro de la comunidad LGBTIQA+ en Chile, desafiando las normas de género establecidas y reforzando la cohesión comunitaria a través del lenguaje.

O "*mujereo*" como dispositivo identitário-comunicativo na comunidade LGBTIQA+ no Chile: Um olhar sociopragmático a partir da perspetiva dos seus falantes

RESUMO

Com a ideia do *mujereo* é reconhecida uma série de recursos lexicais e morfológicos que atuam sobre a linguagem, e que funcionam como uma dispositivo identitário-comunicativo no interior da comunidade LGBTIQA+ no Chile. O presente estudo teve como objetivo conceitualizar o *mujereo* desde a perspetiva da própria comunidade LGBTIQA+ chilena, explorando a sua relação com o *palabreo* e as tensões de gênero que surgem a partir do seu uso. Foi utilizado um design qualitativo com entrevistas semiestruturadas a 30 participantes da comunidade LGBTIQA+, analisando as respostas mediante técnicas de análise de conteúdo temático com o apoio do software ATLAS.ti. Os resultados mostram que o grupo de participantes descreve o *mujereo* como uma estratégia que feminiza aos interlocutores masculinos, geralmente num contexto humorístico ou afetivo. Observa-se que o *mujereo* atua tanto dentro como fora do *palabreo*, evidenciando a sua relevância como uma prática comunicativa cuja lógica funciona de modo independente. El *mujereo* é visto como um mecanismo relevante de construção identitária dentro da comunidade LGBTIQA+ no Chile, desafiando as normas do gênero estabelecidas e reforçando a coesão comunitária através da linguagem.

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INTRODUCTION

Members of the LGBTQIA+ community describe *palabreo* as a conversational style belonging to the collective. This style has distinct characteristics and is one of the identity-specific features that this community of practice actively employs to distinguish itself. Similar phenomena have been documented in other queer communication practices across various languages (Barrett, 2018; Pascual, 2016; Rudwick & Msibi, 2015). In *palabreo*, speakers employ playful impoliteness and interactional humor within dialogue to create an environment of linguistic solidarity and group belonging (Crisosto-Alarcón, 2022).

Despite the heterogeneity of the LGBTQIA+ collective, this study adopts the concept "community of practice" (Wenger, 2001) to highlight a shared sense of symbolic conditions, cultural experiences, sociohistorical resources, and, above all, communication devices available to LGBTQIA+ people in the cultural context of Chile. In doing so, the research complements classical sociolinguistic approaches that have traditionally explained variation primarily through isolated categories such as social class, race, or gender.

These particularities are evident in three main ways. First, classical Labovian or Trudgillian analyses do not account for sexual orientation in their explanations of variation, making the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ membership a novel categorization tool in relation to more traditional analyses. Moreover, the boundaries of such membership are inherently fluid and difficult to define. As Plummer (2016) argues, a form of "thin essentialism" is nonetheless necessary—acknowledging categories as both "humiliating and inadequate" while recognizing their mutable and amorphous nature as part of the political landscape in which speakers interact. Second, considering the LGBTQIA+ community within the Chilean context introduces an intersectional perspective largely absent from mid-20th-century sociolinguistic analyses. It was not until the 1990s and 2000s that a multi-category perspective on linguistic observation gained strength, following the proposals of Crenshaw (1989, 1991). Third, Wenger's (2001) model of communities of practice supports a more horizontal analytic approach compared with classical sociolinguistic stratification models, which are primarily based on other macrosocial categorizations.

The specific practices of the LGBTQIA+ community enable sociocultural and anthropological linguistic perspectives for analysis (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, 2008), from which language is understood as an instrument of self-(re)presentation (Barrett, 2017). Within these perspectives, meaning is constructed relationally, and speakers position themselves in relation to

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others, such that the identities they perform are always mediated, developed, and constrained through language (Baxter, 2016; Butler, 1998). Language, therefore, becomes a tool of resistance against normative impositions that presume essential, fixed, stable, and coherent identities, whose grammatical and extralinguistic boundaries entail invariable contrasts with others (Martínez, 2022).

The notion of *palabreo* emerged in New York's Queer scene during the 1980s and 1990s. In that setting, young African American gay men participated in ballroom competitions involving dance and fashion, where "reading" and "shading"—practices comparable to *palabreo*—were used to express the characteristic extravagance of these events (Livingston, 1990). In the Chilean context, *palabreo* is not inherently linked to racialized dynamics, as it is in the United States, but rather is mediated by the social, economic, political, and psychological factors of the speakers themselves (Crisosto-Alarcón, 2022). Chile's community of drag performers (*transformistas*) has played a central role in popularizing this linguistic practice, which has subsequently permeated the broader LGBTQIA+ collective. It has become a pragmatic communication strategy in which sarcasm, parody, and humor reframe the affective injuries and traumas stemming from experiences of rejection and exclusion shared within the community (Catalán-Marshall & Carrasco, 2022).

The identity particularities manifested through *palabreo* are possible to the extent that it is conceived as a linguistic practice (Pennycook, 2013). This practice involves a set of pragmatic mechanisms whereby speakers adopt specific roles or linguistic usages that acquire meaning through a process of enregisterment (Agha, 2003). Through enregisterment, the signs expressed during communication are reanalyzed and repositioned in each context as behaviors that can indexicalize stereotypical features for interaction. This influences the socialization of roles and relationships within societies and, by extension, the interactions among members of these groups, both internally and externally (Agha, 2018).

One of the semiotic resources available within *palabreo* is the practice of *mujereo* (from the word *mujer* [woman]), understood as a lexical-morphological strategy that challenges the binary designations imposed by the Spanish inflectional system. *Mujereo* is generally used as a feminizing strategy directed toward a speaker in contexts of *palabreo* where both participants are socially assigned as men (Pino, 2016). This formal strategy of effeminization (Sanz, 2009) commonly manifests through the addition of the morpheme -*a* to words that exhibit grammatical gender variation (e.g., *amigo* vs. *amiga*). In *mujereo*, for example, a man might be addressed

with the epithet "amiga" (girlfriend), thereby producing a supposed incongruence between the referent and the form of address. This phenomenon also operates on lexical items without morphological variation that are typically used in Spanish in the feminine. For instance, the noun *comadre* (T.N. a term used for a female friend) (Sanz, 2009) may be employed to refer to a person with a masculine gender identity in the context of *mujereo.*

This practice of sociosexual affirmation provides cohesion and identity for at least a segment of the LGBTQIA+ community of practice in Chile and critically stands against normative discourses. It parallels the marginalization of the feminine relative to the masculine and transgresses established norms (Barrett, 2017; Crisosto-Alarcón, 2022; Pino, 2016; Ramírez, 2020; Ramírez & Herrera, 2018). Consequently, these conditions must be analyzed from a sociocultural pragmatic perspective (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, 2008; Mey, 1993) to establish meaningful relationships between emergent discourse features and the extralinguistic information necessary to contextualize interpretations. This is because the phenomenon is primarily conversational and interactive, and its social, cultural, and historical determinants must be considered to make sense of the communication practices under study.

It is noteworthy that the use of morphological and lexical strategies in *mujereo* is not intended to misgender the addressee. Although such expressions may appear superficially similar, their pragmatic purposes differ. Misgendering occurs when a grammatical gender is used that does not align with the recipient's identity, triggering adverse feelings and negatively impacting their well-being (Cooper et al., 2020). In *mujereo,* the divergence between identity and grammatical gender aims to expose and destabilize cisnormative assumptions while creating a shared ground of identity among speakers (Bunzl, 2000; Ramírez & Herrera, 2018). The inflectional and lexical strategies of *mujereo* may reflect the speaker's intentionality or intended meaning (Haugh, 2013), offering relevant information about their social commitments and deontic possibilities.

The political dimension of *mujereo* is evident: as a strategy of morphological effeminization, it questions the fixed and exclusionary nature of the gender binary and, consequently, repositions the values and practices associated with these categories by favoring pragmatic over grammatical functions (Zelada, 2021). Understanding the political character of *mujereo* requires conceiving it within a sociopolitical context governed by hegemonic masculinity, which is grounded in a patriarchal, heterosexist, and homophobic ideology oriented toward the exclusion and subordination of otherness (Bonino, 2002).

On the other hand, knowledge of *mujereo* and *palabreo* within the

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field of speech-language therapy contributes to the development of an inclusive professional practice. Such knowledge fosters a comprehensive and respectful attitude toward populations such as the LGBTQIA+ community (Trevizani Depolli et al., 2024). Awareness of these cultural practices fosters sensitivity and consciousness, which are essential for developing the cultural competence necessary to ensure communicative well-being (Turner et al., 2006). This is particularly relevant given that up to 40% of patients who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender have experienced some degree of discrimination in health services (Ayhan et al., 2020). Consequently, Queer people may face barriers when seeking healthcare and/or disclosing their gender or sexual identity to health professionals, due to fears of homophobic reactions, concerns about confidentiality, negative past experiences, or fear of stigma (Hancock & Haskin, 2015). These barriers underscore the urgent need to integrate aspects of LGBTQIA+ culture into the speech-language therapy curriculum (Mahendra, 2019).

This study aims to explore the definitions of *mujereo* from the speakers' own perspectives, in order to understand the communicative and gender-related tensions that this linguistic phenomenon entails and to examine its connections with *palabreo*, understood as a style specific to the LGBTQIA+ community. The results reported here are part of a broader characterization of *palabreo*; however, the decision was made to highlight and discuss the specific case of *mujereo* due to the salience of this theme within the interviews.

METHOD

Design

Given that *mujereo* is conceived as a social, cultural, and linguistic phenomenon, this study adopted a qualitative design within an interpretivist epistemological paradigm. Through this lens, the object of inquiry is viewed as a set of constructions mediated by meanings present in social reality and situated locally (Bryman, 2012; Valles, 1999). From this epistemological position, it follows that knowledge is constructed in context; therefore, the results presented here do not seek to reflect an objective reality, but rather emerge from the dialogue between participants' experiences and the researcher's interpretive frameworks. This orientation guided both the analytic process and the interpretation of findings, enabling a contextualized understanding of the phenomena, as revealed in the reflections and new hypotheses that arose from engaging with the data.

Due to the descriptive nature of the study, it did not involve the formulation of hypotheses. Instead, the research followed the guiding question: "How is the notion of *mujereo* conceived within the LGBTQIA+ community regarding its meanings, connections, origins, and functions?" Three research assumptions inform this inquiry: (1) *mujereo* is part of the communicative practice of the Chilean LGBTQIA+ community, as recently documented by Crisosto-Alarcón (2022), Villalobos (2020), and Pino (2016); (2) knowledge from people who use *mujereo* allows for a more naturalistic conceptualization of the phenomenon, given that linguistic ideologies are not uniformly distributed within the population and, under positivist research designs, there is a risk of ethnocentric overinterpretation (Agha, 2004; Preston, 2011); and (3) the proposed analytical dimensions—namely meanings, connections, origins, and functions of *mujereo*—enable the strategic positioning of speakers through recognizing the qualities that are collectively available and therefore fundamental to its indexical role (Agha, 2003).

Accordingly, the study pursues two research objectives: (1) to characterize the concept of *mujereo* based on the perspectives of Chilean LGBTQIA+ speakers and (2) to explore the functions and connections that *mujereo* performs in socio-conversational contexts, as perceived by these speakers.

Data Collection Strategy

Thirty qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted following Brinkmann's (2013) classification. All interviews were carried out via Zoom. Given the iterative nature of qualitative research, the questions and analytical dimensions were modified, merged, reduced, or expanded in response to the data that emerged during the information-gathering process. This adaptability reflects the understanding that the data collection process itself is a tool for generating knowledge of the phenomenon and provides new perspectives for its interpretation (McGrath et al., 2019).

The first explored dimension was (1) *palabreo*, specifically (1.1) its definition and (1.2) its characteristics. Within these themes, the notion of *mujereo* was identified and differentiated in its specific features, initially emerging spontaneously in participants' narratives and later, given its emergent relevance, directly addressed through questions such as: "What is the role of *mujereo* in *palabreo*?", "Why do you think this idea of mujerearse arises in *palabreo*?", "Why is this form of address used?", and "When is *mujereo* employed?" Interview questions were adapted according to the information provided in each preceding turn, allowing for greater depth on the topic, consistent with the interview design (Edwards & Holland, 2013).

The research protocol was reviewed and approved by the Bioethics and Biosafety Committee of Universidad del Bío-Bío (approval dated 06/08/2024).

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Participants

An open call was made through social media to people who met the following inclusion criteria: (1) self-identifying as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, (2) being over 18 years of age at the time of recruitment, (3) being born in Chile, and (4) residing in Chile at the time of the interview. People without internet access were excluded. These criteria were adopted to facilitate an understanding of the phenomenon based on the perspectives of Chilean LGBTQIA+ speakers, while acknowledging that similar manifestations of *palabreo* and *mujereo* may exist in other sociopolitical contexts.

A total of 30 participants, aged 20 to 45 years, were recruited through snowball sampling and subsequently interviewed. Of these, 28 participants self-identified as men and two as women. Regarding sexual orientation, most participants identified as gay, except for one participant who identified as bisexual. With respect to gender identity, most identified as cisgender, except for two participants: one identified as gender-queer and another as nonbinary.

Data Processing

Data were processed using qualitative thematic content analysis (Cáceres, 2003; Díaz Herrera, 2018). This procedure involved: (1) producing an initial analysis with data-processing categories defined from the outset; (2) identifying meaningful content units; (3) specifying the rules of analysis and classification codes; and (4) establishing final categories by refining the codes in accordance with the research objectives.

The data were organized and classified using ATLAS.ti Web software (3.19.1-2022-06-20). The leading researcher coded the interviews based on both the a priori thematic categories and those that emerged through the analysis itself. To ensure analytical rigor, the process was triangulated by two additional researchers, who reviewed the data analysis procedure.

RESULTS

Characteristics of *Mujereo* from the Perspective of Speakers

Participants reported that *mujereo* operates primarily at the morphological level by adding the morpheme -a to lexical roots that allow for gender inflection, thereby designating a masculine referent as feminine. Their examples reveal a tendency to use words with a typically negative load, such as *estúpida* ("stupid [fem.]") or *ridícula* ("ridiculous [fem.]"). Although the affectionate appellation *amiga* was also

frequently mentioned. Participants also asserted that *mujereo* may occasionally involve processes of pronominalization or ellipsis employing feminine morphological forms in discourse; in the case of ellipsis, this is marked by grammatical agreement with the remaining elements of the phrase. For epicene nouns, such as *colega* ("colleague"), for example, the term is feminized by adding the feminine article "la". Informants also highlighted a pragmatic, conversational dimension of *mujereo*, describing it as a mimicry of women's interactional styles:

> *"It consists of, for example, [...] using words [...] that are a bit derogatory, like* 'estúpida' *or* 'ridícula.' *In my case or in my social group [...]* mujereo *is like 'look at* esta ridícula*, what this* estúpida *is saying' [...] for example,* 'la colega' *("the buddy [fem.]")* instead of *'el colega' ("the buddy [masc.]") [to refer to a man]"* (Participant #15, cisgender gay man, 29 years old).

> *"I've seen them change [...] to the feminine pronoun or say something like* 'eeella'*[she]—that's what's common"* (Participant #30, cisgender gay woman, 28 years old).

> *"It's when [...] gay men are given women's appellatives"* (Participant #8, cisgender gay man, 35 years old).

> *"It's like treating each other as girlfriends, treating each other the way one perceives women to interact"* (Participant #9, cisgender bisexual man, 33 years old).

> *"I'll write something like* 'amiga' *[to a male friend], and we both know it's like a joke, that we're* mujereando *each other [...] I find* mujereo *affectionate, like calling someone* 'perra' *['bitch']; it's not [...] offensive"* (Participant #14, cisgender gay woman, 27 years old).

Relationship Between *Palabreo* and *Mujereo*

The term *mujereo* emerged spontaneously in participants' discourse without the need for prompts from the interviewer. Its lexicalization indicates that it is a familiar phenomenon with well-defined characteristics. Participants explained that *mujereo* is part of *palabreo*, yet it can also occur independently. In this sense, *palabreo* functions as a hypernym of *mujereo*, while the latter maintains its autonomy—that is, *mujereo* may appear outside of a context of *palabreo*. Conversely, *palabreo* can unfold without drawing on the dynamics specific to *mujereo*.

> *"I think it's [a] pretty basic [feature] of* palabreo*."* (Participant #11, cisgender gay man, 33 years old)

> *"Not necessarily [does* palabreo *include* mujereo*]."* (Participant #10, cisgender gay man, 33 years old)

> *"Mujereo* is part of *palabreo [...]* palabreo *is broader."* (Participant #14, cisgender gay woman, 27 years old)

> *"Mujereo [...] is within* palabreo*. It's one of the ingredients, like irony and all these other things, the use of swear words, and so on*." (Participant #22, cisgender gay man, 33 years old)

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Several interviewees emphasized that *mujereo* is embedded in their everyday communication practices and, under these conditions, is not necessarily tied to *palabreo*, thereby reinforcing the potential disjunction between the two phenomena:

> *"You know what? Mujereo is my life. I'm not sure if I speak* palabreo *all day or* mujereo *all day and then add some* palabreo. *In general, I'm always* mujereando *with my friends, like '¿cómo estai weona? [How are you, girl?]' It's part of everyday life. [...]I live my life based on* mujereo." (Participant #22, cisgender gay man, 33 years old)

> *"For example, I live with a guy and a girl, both sexologists, and many times gender isn't even a topic—we sometimes talk about* 'las tres' [the three of us, feminine plural] *and it's already so [...] naturalized that in no case does it feel like* palabreo." (Participant #25, cisgender gay man, 36 years old)

> *"When you* mujereai *someone gay—especially a man—I feel it's something allowed; I mean,* mujerear *a gay person for me is already something common."* (Participant #27, cisgender gay man, 28 years old)

Origins of *Mujereo*

The interviewees unanimously associate the emergence of *mujereo* with drag performance. It is known as a linguistic innovation that originated in the 1980s within the national drag scene and was subsequently adopted by the broader LGBTQIA+ community, eventually becoming a part of society at large. The widespread dissemination of *mujereo* has been linked to its presence in media, including Chilean shows on platforms such as YouTube and the reality show *RuPaul's Drag Race*.

> *"[Mujereo] comes from the world of drag performance [...] people have been* mujereando *from the very beginning"* (Participant #6, cisgender gay man, 31 years old).

> *"It comes a lot from national drag; there are many phrases that are well-known and gradually permeate from gay culture into broader social culture. [...] Among non-drag men, there is the notion of acting a bit like a drag queen who is good at wordplay, telling jokes, and teasing—taking those references and using them with your friends"* (Participant #11, cisgender gay man, 33 years old).

> *"[Mujereo] is something that dates back almost to the 1980s, [...] but [...] it became widespread ten or fifteen years ago thanks to YouTube shows, "El Juego de la Botota," "Amigas y Rivales;" now it's much more widespread, I don't know, because of RuPaul's Drag Race"* (Participant #28, cisgender gay man, 39 years old).

The Reclaiming Function of *Mujereo*

The use of *mujereo* is linked to experiences of discrimination, particularly in contexts shaped by the dichotomy between the participants' identity and the hegemonic cisheteronormative ethos of broader society. In this sense, *mujereo* is also viewed as a form of protest and a means of reaffirming one's own sexual and gender experience.

Participants further note that *mujereo* does not convey disrespect for the interlocutor's gender identity. In other words, *mujereo* does not signal perceiving a potential feminine identity; each speaker is aware that the practice involves a grammatical violation of the reality it refers to. It is precisely this transgressive aspect that allows *mujereo* to be a tool of resistance, through resignifying femininity as an insult within a sexist society.

> *"It's a bit like mocking the fact that gay men have always been treated as effeminate, even when they are not; it's a way of being ironic about that"* (Participant #14, cisgender gay woman, 27 years old).

> *"I think that when one accepts oneself or engages with a more diverse community, you can be freely yourself and [...] claim that feminine power, those things for which you might have been teased or humiliated, and now it becomes like a shield or a way [...] of facing the world [...]. It has nothing to do with [expressing a specific] gender identity, it's simply about carrying that with pride"* (Participant #8, cisgender gay man, 35 years old).

> *"Historically, [mujereo] is performed within identities that, through these practices [...], end up partially breaking the excessive masculinization present in the gay world. In that sense, I think it serves as an entry point [...] for questioning gender"* (Participant #12, cisgender gay man, 29 years old).

> "*I believe that* mujereo *comes from a different place. For example, it's like what happens with most [...] marginalized groups, depending on the characteristic that is stigmatized, whether it's skin color or being gay [...]. Within these oppressed groups, there's a process of re-signification [...]. Imagine being called '*mujercita,*' '*cola,*' or '*effeminate*'— when one is young or grows up in a repressive environment, it is obviously offensive, but over time one understands that it doesn't need to be and resignifying that, I think, translates into the use [...] of* mujereo *in everyday practices of gay people [...], maybe I'm generalizing [...], but I think it's*

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understood not as offensive, but as playing with gender performance, [...] turning something offensive into something else" (Participant #23, cisgender gay man, 28 years old).

Identity Function of *Mujereo*

According to the experiences of the interviewees, experiences of discrimination are relatively widespread across the LGBTQIA+ community. Consequently, the tools for protest and resistance provided by *mujereo* are employed—or at least acknowledged—by the entire group. In this sense, *mujereo* displays elements of linguistic solidarity and group-boundary effects, grounded in the existence of a safe communicative space.

Accordingly, there is a tendency to use *mujereo* as a pragmatic marker of closeness and even affection among speakers, even though its content may superficially appear aggressive or insulting. That is, *mujereo* not only has a reclaiming function, but it also shapes certain relational and affective features among communication partners, reinforced by the humorous nature of the dialogue.

"It's one of the ways you can [...] identify someone else as part of the community. [...] For example, I had just started working somewhere, and I immediately met two gay men. One way I tried to identify them—because I had my suspicions but didn't want to make it explicit—was to see if we were 'on the same page,' like using 'eeeella' or a reference from "Amigas y Rivales." When they respond, it's like 'ah, they're one of us.' It makes you feel safe, I don't know. It's very interesting" (Participant #30, cisgender gay woman, 28 years old).

"Given the existence of this mujereo *you ask about, I assume there is a relationship of trust with the person"* (Participant #29, cisgender gay man, 39 years old).

"[Mujereo is used] to foster closeness, empathy, and a kind of connection" (Participant #13, cisgender gay man, 28 years old).

"It also has a role of recognition among peers and carries an identity-related signal because it is part [...] of Chilean LGBT culture" (Participant #18, cisgender gay man, 29 years old).

"Mujereo can even be used affectionately, though always with a humorous tone. [...] I have a friend who, when he wants to call me silly, says, 'ay chanchita ya creyó que no sé qué' and that's his way of saying, like, 'idiot, you fell for it again.' I feel this also comes from familiarity and carries a teasing edge, but it is not meant to be offensive, at least not overtly"* (Participant #22, nonbinary gay subject, 33 years old).

Mujereo, Misogyny, and Feminism

Some interviewees note the potential presence of misogyny in the practice of *mujereo*, as it is sometimes used to demean speakers by attributing feminine characteristics to them. This reflects the historical association between the female figure and a position of social disempowerment within patriarchal society.

"Mujereo does have somewhat misogynistic roots" (Participant #18, cisgender gay man, 29 years old).

"I also think it responds to the misogyny present in culture, where [...] it might seem natural; ultimately, we are denigrating another person in feminine terms. [...] It's easier to denigrate someone if they are a woman" (Participant #19, cisgender gay man, 32 years old).

"It always carries a role of demeaning the other; mujerear *has to do with this somewhat patriarchal view of women as inferior beings, and if I call you 'girl' or something [...] related to the female gender, I am diminishing you in some way. I think [...] unfortunately it has that role"* (Participant #25, cisgender gay man, 36 years old).

However, other interviewees add nuance to this issue, arguing that *mujereo* reflects societal machismo precisely to make it visible and challenge it, allowing for a liberation from rigid gender norms. In this way, communication partners actively assume a feminine role in conversation as part of questioning gender boundaries and strategically positioning themselves on the side of the oppressed rather than the oppressor, even though participants are often cisgender men.

"When we use mujereo, *it's not an insult because the female figure is not degraded for us"* (Participant #1, cisgender gay man, 33 years old).

"With mujereo *[...] I think that when you were a child and were so afraid of being noticed or of speaking, walking, dressing, or using colors like a woman, and now you call me 'amiga'... it doesn't bother me at all; it feels liberating"* (Participant #29, cisgender gay man, 39 years old).

"The role of mujereo *has to do with liberation"* (Participant #6, cisgender gay man, 31 years old).

Additionally, one participant, a cisgender lesbian woman, mentions there is criticism of *mujereo* within certain feminist circles, which perceive it as a subtle form of discrimination against women. This critique is based on the idea that *mujereo* reproduces the patriarchal power structures of heteronormative society within the LGBTQIA+ community.

"I personally do not consider myself a radical feminist because I dislike the trans-exclusionary approach they sometimes have, obviously. But I have noticed, for example, that they do not like it when gay men use mujereo *[...]. I think this comes from a more hegemonic feminism that seeks to regulate a world outside its own sphere [...]. I think it completely escapes their area of influence, because the Queer world, the LGBT world, while it has power asymmetries and internal conflicts, we all share this commonality of being historically excluded and subjected to violence"* (Participant #30, cisgender gay woman, 28 years old).

DISCUSSION

Based on the participants' insights, *mujereo* can be defined as a communicative-identity device that, although initially used by drag performers, transcends the boundaries of that specific community and is currently employed by at least a portion of the Chilean LGBTQIA+ community. This is particularly true of men within the collective. Formally, *mujereo* is characterized by morphological and lexical strategies aimed at feminizing a male speaker, a feature that has been previously documented (Pino, 2016; Ramírez & Herrera, 2018; Villalobos, 2020). However, beyond these formal aspects, participants' responses indicate that *mujereo* conveys a pragmatic intention within interaction, serving to *queerify* conversational discourse (Barrett, 2009). It also exposes particular aspects of participants' identities through a procedure that may be considered subversive or deviant from the perspective of dominant masculinity (Bonino, 2002), yet is regarded as a normative strategy within this community of practice (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013).

This research employed qualitative interviews as a data collection tool to approach the phenomenon from a sociopragmatic perspective. This methodology aligns with folk linguistic approaches and the epistemological view that people's notions of language are integrated into their language use and communication practices (Albury, 2017; Preston, 2011). This approach made it possible to understand how participants conceptualize *mujereo* and relate it to *palabreo* — and other aspects of the LGBTQIA+ community —from their position within the collective. The advantage of this approach is that it enables the linguistic phenomenon to be understood in the participants' own words, providing a non-ethnocentric perspective that respects the viewpoints, values, and reasoning of the studied social group (Guber, 2001).

As with all qualitative research, the results are not generalizable to the entire Chilean LGBTQIA+ community, particularly because most participants were cisgender gay men. Nevertheless, the interviewees do not confine the phenomenon exclusively to this population. It is possible that the diffuse boundaries of *mujereo* use are not strictly tied to any specific sexual or gender identity, and, for example, bisexual, pansexual, or asexual people may also employ this communicative strategy in specific contexts. Likewise, no specificity is established regarding the gender identity of those participating in a conversation; cisgender status alone does not inherently enable the reproduction of these communication dynamics. Therefore, while certain biases arising from participants' self-reported identities are acknowledged, it is not possible to strictly circumscribe the phenomenon of *mujereo* to their experiences and identities.

Regarding its relationship with *palabreo*, *mujereo* exhibits a duality. That is, it can be found within the context of *palabreo*, understood both as a practice and as a global linguistic style capable of governing an entire communicative exchange (Crisosto-Alarcón, 2022). Consequently, its use in this linguistic environment is linked to the other characteristics of *palabreo*. However, interviewees also note that *mujereo* can be used in isolation, no longer as part of the pragmatic agenda of *palabreo*, but rather as a conversational attribute habitually employed by speakers and transferred into spontaneous speech, albeit with certain limitations regarding extralinguistic contexts in which it can be deployed.

The findings of this research suggest that the reclaiming and identity-related roles of *mujereo* carry a strong indexical mark, conveyed through the grammatical modification of selected lexical items. In this way, it communicates information about belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community. It challenges cisheteronormative logics bidirectionally: internally, as a strategy of linguistic solidarity, and externally, as a tool for group delimitation and the re-signification of insult. The use of banter as a relational strategy, primarily among men, has been documented in previous research (Kiesling, 2001, 2005), showing that it is fundamental for the creation of homosocial bonds through the notion of competition and contributes to group solidarity (Kiesling, 2007), in particular, among members of the LGBTQIA+ community (Murray, 1979; Perez, 2011; Ramírez, 2020).

Notably, the use of *mujereo* does not entail, at least on a conscious level for speakers, a strategy of gender-based violence or a patriarchal mechanism that could be interpreted as part of a misogynist agenda. Instead, it functions as a mechanism of horizontal homosocialization among men, characterized by resistance to and rejection of hierarchical relationships based on gender categorizations. Moreover, this socialization is fostered

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through social connections and relationships grounded in emotional closeness, intimacy, and committed friendship (Hammarén & Johansson, 2014). This mechanism serves as a relational tool in a post-homohysteric society, where the distinctions between binary notions of masculinity and femininity, men and women, homosexual and heterosexual people are increasingly unstable and fluid. Here, masculinity no longer has the categorical stratifying power among men that it held in previous generations, which tended toward vertical homosocialization (Hammarén & Johansson, 2014; McCormack & Anderson, 2014). This is evident, for example, in the loss of the insulting quality of feminization of male speakers in the context of *mujereo* within this community of practice, or in the maintained and progressive interaction where none of the communication partners perceive it as a personal attack.

Mujereo can also be understood as a political positioning strategy, as it involves violating cisheteronormative expectations by using gendered linguistic features stereotypically associated with another gender (Motschenbacher, 2007; Rubino, 2018). In this sense, *mujereo* can be interpreted as an anti-assimilationist strategy (Barrett, 2009), as participants publicly perform a morphological violation of the gender expectations of listeners in a conversation. Thus, *mujereo* is primarily conceived as a queer tactic that linguistically exposes the randomness of gender assignment and challenges the stability of grammatical, social, and political systems from an anti-essentialist perspective, without being inherently offensive or violent according to interviewees.

Mujereo is part of the everyday communicative strategies used by the participants and, more broadly, by the LGBTQIA+ community. Given that speech-language therapy addresses the social aspects of communication (Vega-Rodríguez et al., 2017), understanding the use of these linguistic forms is essential, as it allows practitioners to support LGBTQIA+ clients through communication-centered interventions that recognize the particularities of interaction within the collective. This, in turn, bolsters culturally competent communicative interventions that are free from cisheteronormative assumptions (Leadbeater & Litosseliti, 2014; Taylor et al., 2018).

CONCLUSION

This study provides a detailed description of the phenomenon of *mujereo* as a communication device used by at least a portion of the Chilean LGBTQIA+ community. The function

of *mujereo* has been highlighted as a pragmatic strategy relevant to the construction and reaffirmation of identities. The findings show that *mujereo* acts as a stance and a mechanism of resistance against cisheteronormative rules, beyond being a mere morphological variation, thus offering a space for identification and cohesion within the community. Interviews indicate that this practice is used collectively and viewed as a unifying element, as well as a strategy to challenge the binary categorizations imposed by the linguistic system.

This study expands the theoretical understanding of identity dynamics in Queer/"cuir" linguistics, emphasizing the perspectives of the speakers themselves in sociopragmatic analysis. Practically, it provides insight into how language can be employed as a tool of resistance, challenging the binary categorizations imposed by linguistic systems.

Nonetheless, the qualitative nature of this research and its focus on a specific context limit the generalizability of the results. Future research should explore the presence and variability of *mujereo* in other linguistic and cultural contexts, adopting an intersectional approach, and examine the diverse linguistic attitudes it creates both within and outside the collective.

Ultimately, *mujereo* emerges as a potential identity-communicative device that not only reflects but also shapes the experiences of those who employ it, underscoring the profound connection between language, identity, and power evident in the discourse of members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

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