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SPANISH-ENGLISH BILINGUALISM IN

JANE THE VIRGIN

Introduction

- Peak TV
  - Coined in 2015 by FX Networks president John Landgraf
  - Rise in overall number of scripted television programs
- More content, means more diversity of content
- More Hispanic characters are shown speaking Spanish as the Latino-oriented television industry continually expands in the US (Piñón & Rojas, 2011)
  - *How to Get Away with Murder*
  - *Orange is the New Black*
  - *Modern Family*

Introduction

‣ Question: What does bilingualism look like on TV?

‣ Goal: Explore the language use of the bilingual Villanueva family from *Jane the Virgin*

‣ Why *Jane the Virgin*?

  ‣ Spanish-English bilingualism in every episode
  ‣ Built-in case of intergenerational (G1, G2 and G3) speakers
  ‣ Prime-time show on a major broadcast network

About the Show

‣ *Jane the Virgin* is a contemporary series on the CW
  ‣ Premiered in October 2014; Season 3 just finished in May 2017
  ‣ Averages about 1.5 million viewers per episode (de Moraes, 2017)
‣ Loosely based on the Venezuelan telenovela *Juana la Virgen*
  ‣ American remake centers a young Latina woman living in Miami as she balances her love life, family, and career
‣ Spanish-English bilingualism plays a supporting role

Framework

‣ Milroy and Wei's (1995) index for language choice

   ‣ "[T]he general assumption underlying our approach is that variation in the structure of different individuals' personal social networks will, for a number of reasons, systematically affect the way they use the two languages in the community repertoire" (Milroy & Wei, 1995, p. 138)

‣ Given the confines of TV show data, identifying who individuals interact with and the types of relationships they have is feasible

Social Networks

‣ Web of connections that unite individuals in society

    ‣ Different types of connections are delineated, i.e. *weak* vs. *strong*

‣ Milroy and Wei (1995) adopt Milardo's (1988) notion of *exchange* vs. *interactive*

    ‣ Exchange links include "direct aid, advice, criticism, and support" (Milroy & Wei, 1995, p. 138)

    ‣ Interactive links have no such personal reliance, even if there is regular, prolonged interaction

Disclaimer

‣ Medium of TV is obviously inherently different than actual communities of language use

   ‣ Linguistic data is not natural in the sense it is scripted and performed

‣ Nonetheless, by analyzing it as if it were an actual community, we can begin to ascertain as to how true-to-life the bilingualism is on screen

Comparing the Communities

Tyneside Chinese Community	*Jane the Virgin*
English-Chinese (several languages)	English-Spanish
Migrants	Migrants
Family as primary unit of social organization (with abundant intergenerational interactions)	Family as primary unit of social organization (with abundant intergenerational interactions)
Multiple families	Singular family
REAL individuals	**NOT REAL** individuals

Characters

1. Gina Rodriguez as **Jane Villanueva**

2. Brett Dier as **Michael Cordero, Jr**.

3. Justin Baldoni as **Rafael Solano**

4. Ivonne Coll as **Alba Villanueva**

5. Andrea Navedo as **Xiomara "Xo" Villanueva**

6. Yael Grobglas as **Petra Solano**

7. Jaime Camil as **Rogelio de la Vega**

S01E01: Language Use by Character
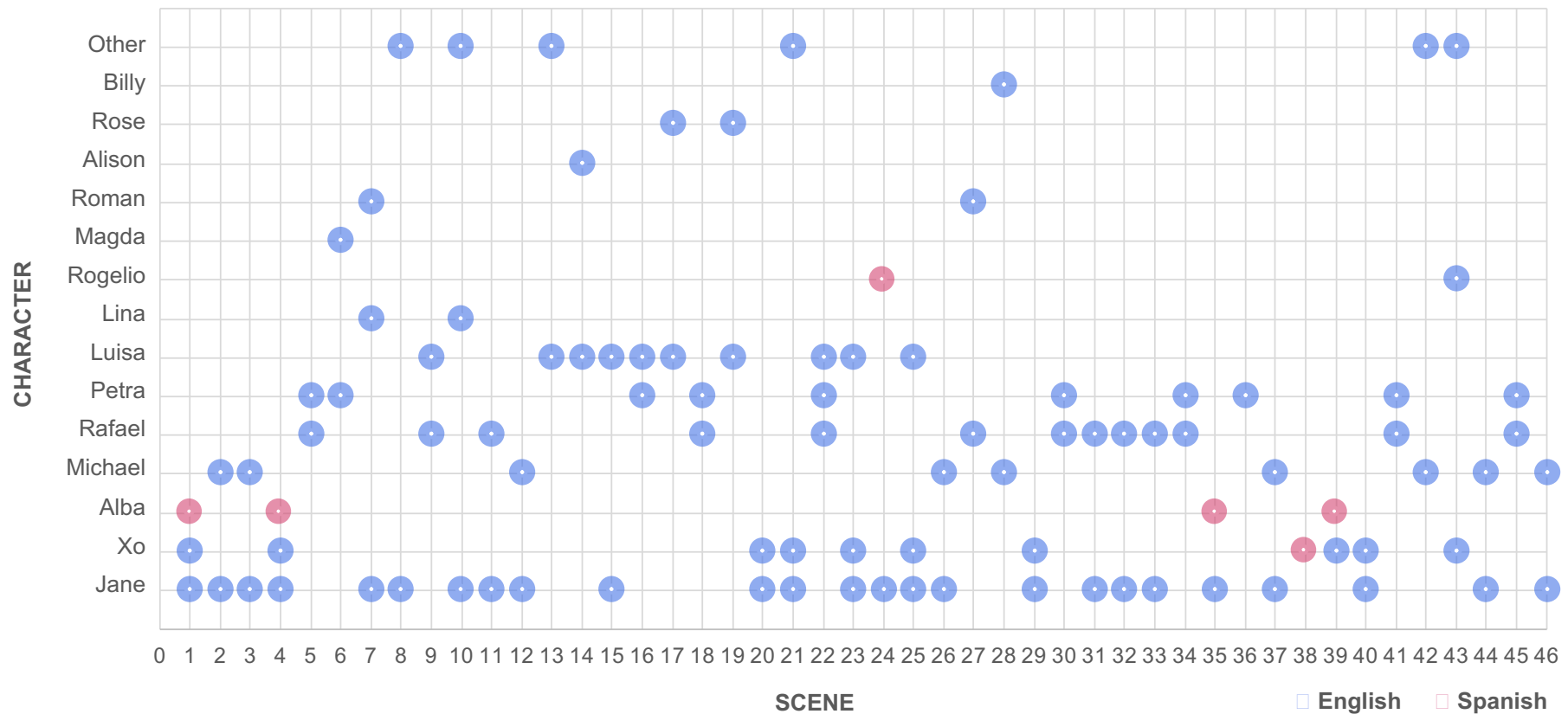
Language Use in S01E01

- Primarily English
  - Only 13.0% (N = 6) of scenes include some Spanish
  - Only 21.4% (N = 3) of named characters use Spanish
    - * Xiomara's only use is when performing a song at a club

- When Spanish is used, it is always a bilingual scene
  - Two-way conversation, where one interlocutor uses entirely Spanish and the other interlocutor(s) use(s) English

Alba

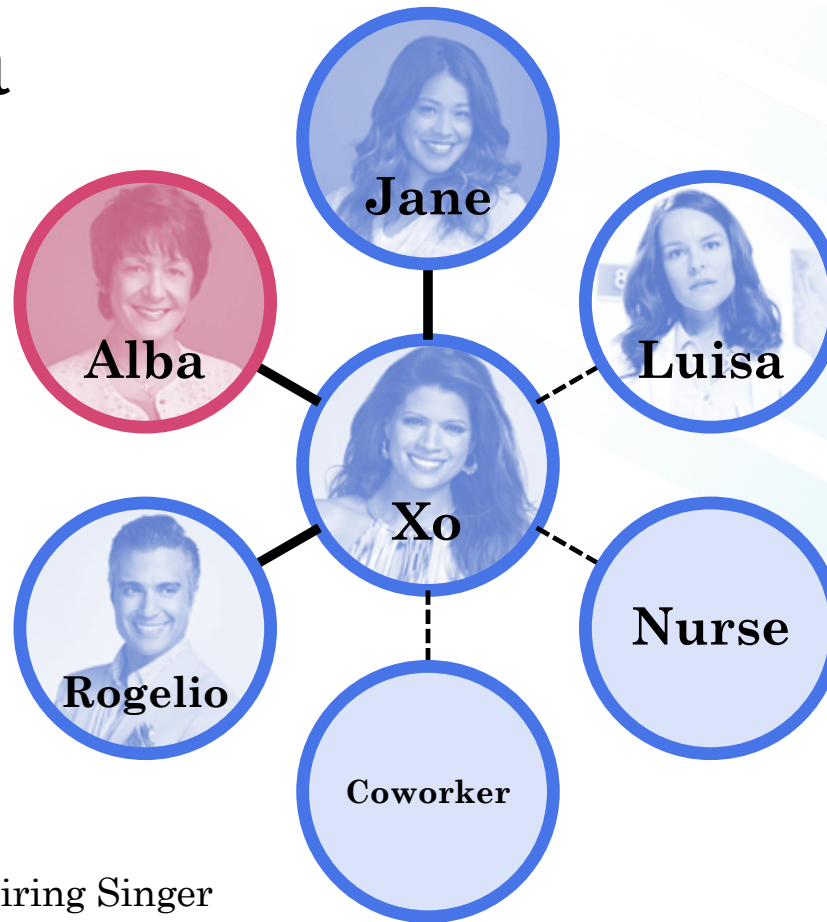- 64 years old
- Venezuelan, G1
- Retired Nurse

Alba

‣ Strong (or exchange) family links that are bilingual

‣ Unknown / Incomplete aspects of her social network

    ‣ Day-to-day interactions in Miami? Church?

‣ Similar to the monolingualism found with Milroy and Wei's (1995) older, G3 speakers

   ‣ However, (grand)children also used Chinese *to* their (grand)parents
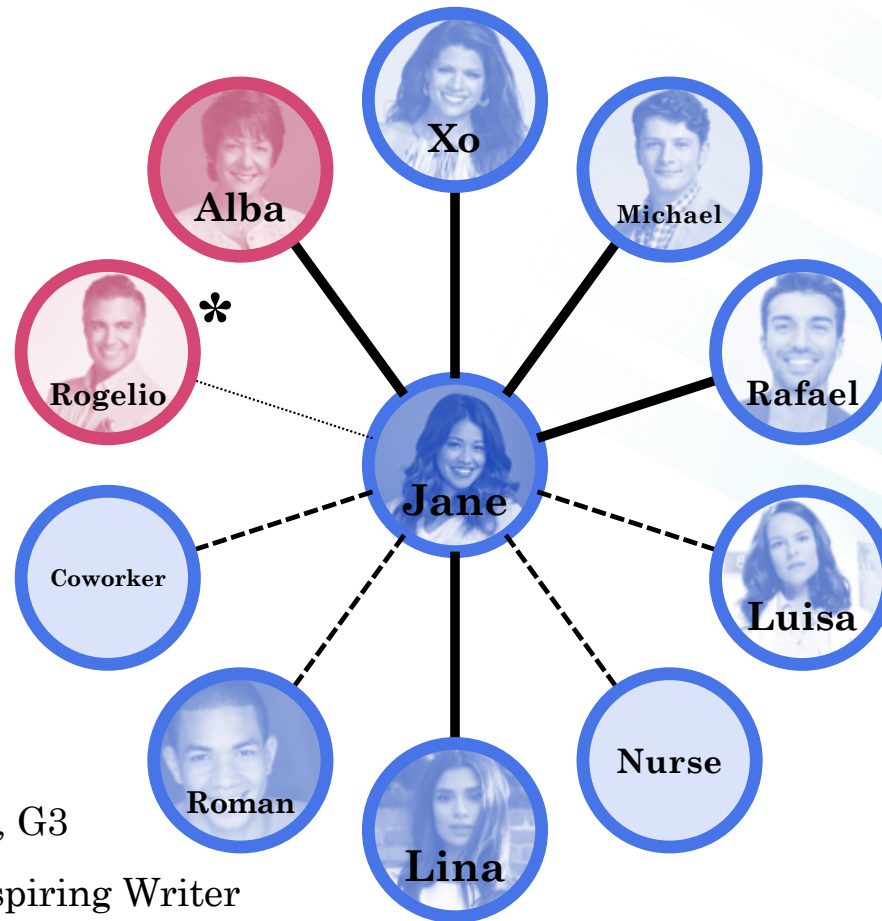

Jane

Alba

Xo

Xiomara

- 40 years old
- Venezuelan, G2
- Dance Instructor / Aspiring Singer

Xiomara

‣ Strong (or exchange) family links
  ‣ Bilingual with her mother (G1)
  ‣ But monolingual with her daughter (G2) and former love interest
‣ Other weak (or interactive) links that are entirely English
‣ More English-based than the G2 speakers for Milroy and Wei (1995)
  ‣ More optionality between English and Chinese for parent-child communication
  ‣ Nonetheless, speakers within the same generation showed differing degrees of bilingual use
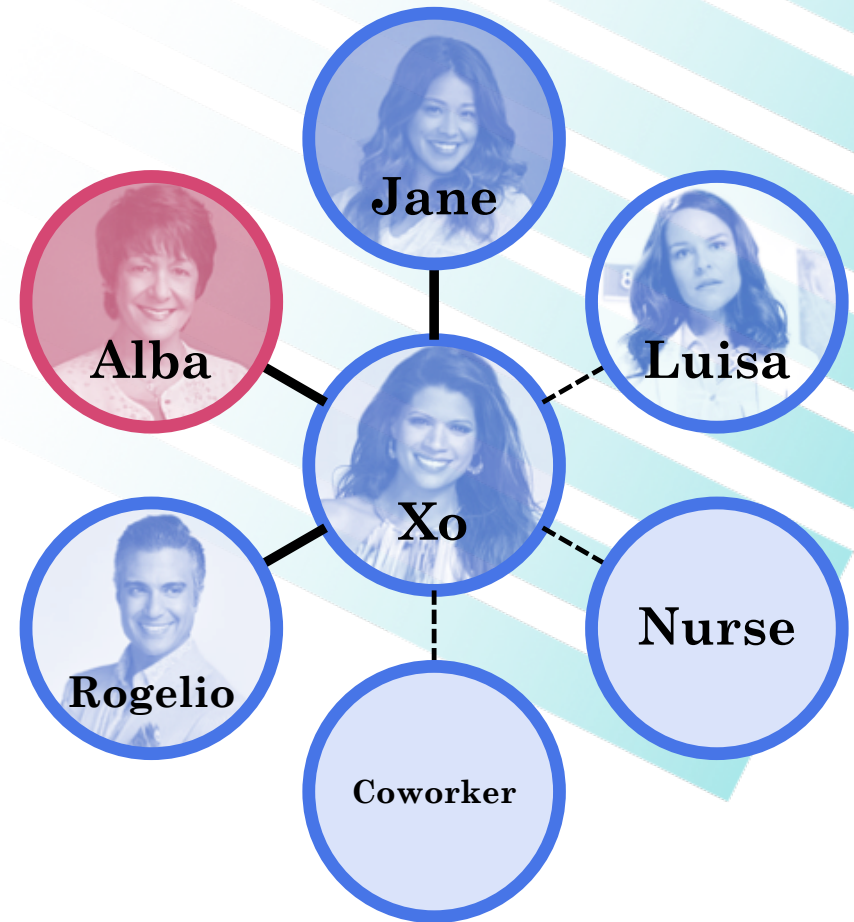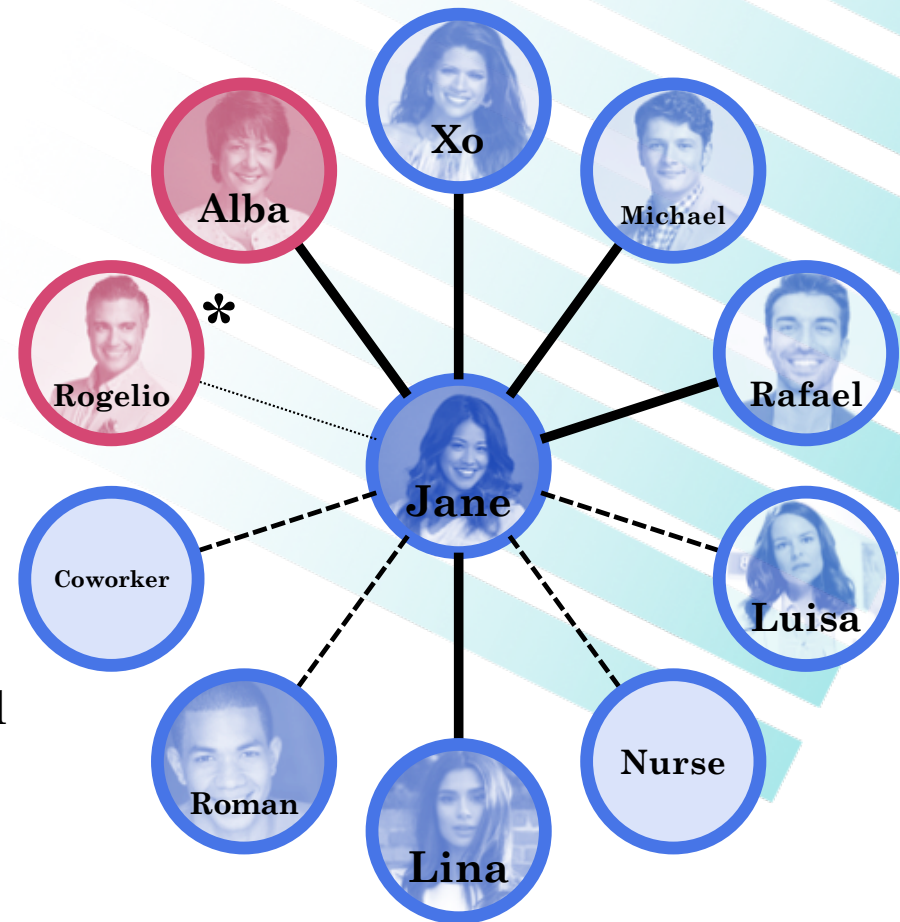
Jane

- 23 years old
- Venezuelan-Mexican, G3
- Lounge Manager / Aspiring Writer

Jane

- Strong (or exchange) family links
  - Bilingual with her *abuela* (G1)
  - But monolingual with her mother (G2)
- Other strong (or exchange) links that are entirely English
  - Romantic and platonic links
- Other weak (or interactive) links that are entirely English
- Somewhat similar to the G3 behavior found by Milroy and Wei (1995)
  - More likely to use English with each other
  - However, more English-based with family

Xiomara & Jane

‣ Is it realistic that Xiomara and Jane are so English-heavy?
  ‣ Yes, based on the social network data available
  ‣ Both have heavily English-based social networks, which leads to more English use even in bilingual links

‣ Recall:
  ‣ "[T]he general assumption underlying our approach is that **variation in the structure of different individuals' personal social networks** will, for a number of reasons, systematically affect the way they use the two languages in the community repertoire" (Milroy & Wei, 1995, p. 138)

‣ It is also realistic to assume that the rest of Alba's social network is quite distinct from Xiomara's and Jane's (i.e., more Spanish-based)

Alba, Xiomara & Jane
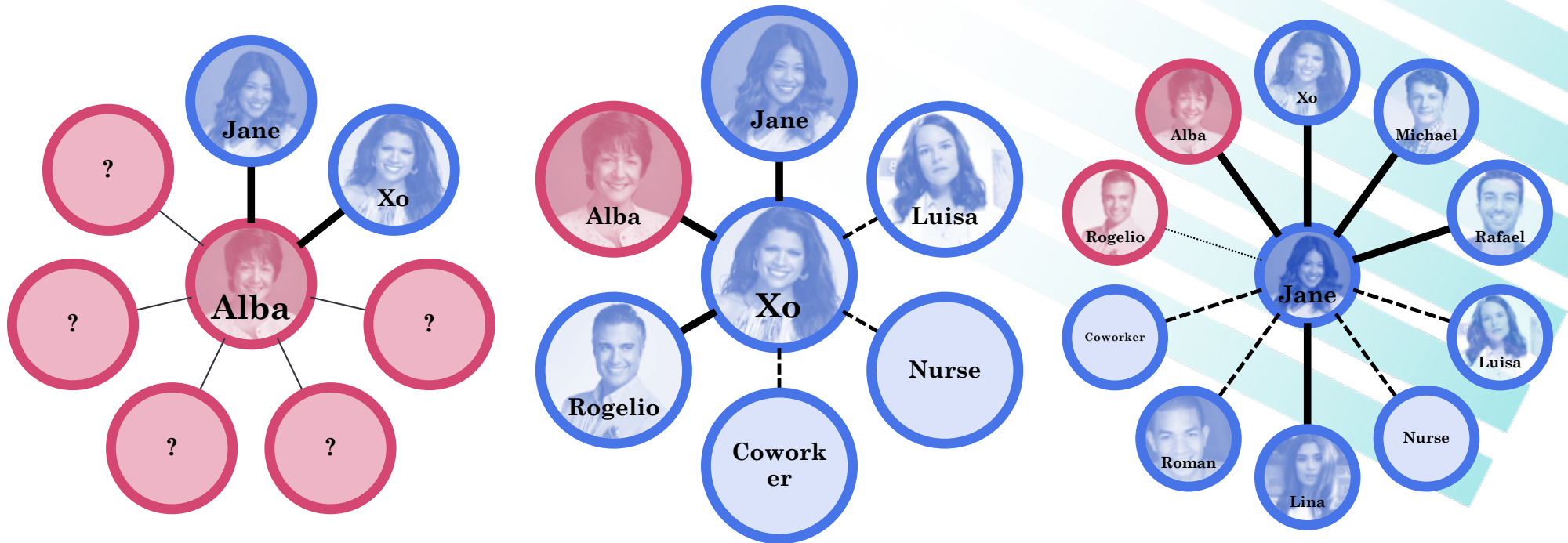
Summary

‣ Bilingualism represented on the show does mirror linguistic research

‣ Age, generation, and network all play a role in language choice for the three women

    ‣ Particularly salient depiction of G1 differences

    ‣ However, G2 and G3 do not seem differentiated

    ‣ As Milroy and Wei (1995) argue, network influences more than generation

‣ Unique in that its depiction is almost entirely done through passive bilingualism

    ‣ Inter-sentential code-switching between different speakers

Final Thoughts

‣ Glosses over other bilingual realities

  ‣ Intra-sentential code-switching

  ‣ Language choice based situational variables (cf. Sankoff, 1980)

‣ Departure from other uses of bilingualism on TV

  ‣ *I Love Lucy* used bilingualism sporadically as a mere source of comedy (Kirschen, 2013)

  ‣ Bilingualism (or Spanish) on *Jane the Virgin* is never the joke

‣ Future directions

  ‣ Exploring bilingual viewers' perceptions

  ‣ Pedagogical uses

¡Gracias!

‣ **References**

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‣ Sankoff, G. (1980). The social life of language. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.