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AUTHOR Aranda, Lucia V.  
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## ABSTRACT

Of the bilinguals in the United States, 22 million are Spanish-English speakers. Spanish-English bilinguals have been producing literature in Spanish, in English, and gradually in mixtures of both languages from the earliest days of contact in the U.S. This paper explores manifestations and meanings of Spanish-English bilingualism in Latino literature and the sense of otherness that it expresses and that derives from it. The paper states that literary codeswitching in U.S. Latino literature--that is, the use of more than one language in a text--are choices the writer makes and that many instances are due to the need to reflect the immigrant experience. And it further states that Hispanic literature has produced the most varied and consistently codeswitched literature in the United States, although Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and Cuban Americans all vary in the extent of their literary codeswitching. The main part of the paper considers diverse examples of literary codeswitching in Latino literature. According to the paper, there are many references to cultural separateness as a consequence of linguistic otherness in Latino literature. As a final point, the paper turns to the question of readership and codeswitching, and ventures a division of U.S. Latino literature into two main groups: a smaller one which would include non-Spanish-English bilinguals; and a larger one which would include English monolinguals. It calls for the elimination of the monolingual illusion of the Anglo-American canon. Contains a 28-item bibliography. (NKA)

# THE LANGUAGES U.S. LATINO LITERATURE SPEAKS

DR. LUCÍA V. ARANDA  
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I  
HONOLULU, HAWAI'I

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## The Languages U.S. Latino Literature Speaks

The assumption that the majority of the almost 300 million people in the United States are monolingual is still widely prevalent although as we well know the actual population of monolinguals diverges far from this supposed uniformity. Bilinguals of English and either Spanish, French, Native American languages, German, Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese, to name but a few, actually amount to a staggering 35-40 million people speaking another language besides English in the United States. Of these, 22 million of them alone are English-Spanish speakers. Spanish-English bilinguals have been producing literature both in Spanish, in English and gradually in mixtures of both from the earliest days of contact in the United States. In this talk I will be exploring the manifestations and meanings of Spanish-English bilingualism on the written pages of its literature and the sense of otherness that it expresses and that derives from it.

...

Literary codeswitching is not new. An early example which predates the Spanish Reconquista, for example, are the 10<sup>th</sup>

century *muwassahas* which are small anonymous poems in Hebrew or Arabic, followed by a two-lined feminine lament in old Spanish, called a *jarcha*. More recent examples are Ezra Pound's modernist *Cantos* or James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*. Of the three instances I have just mentioned, Pound and Joyce were employing other languages as cultured references, the *muwassahas* and *jarchas* mirrored life itself in multilingual Spain during the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The literary codeswitching of U.S. Latino literature is of this type as it stems from actual bilinguals or at least from biculturals with some knowledge of Spanish. As in post-colonial writing, in which the introduction of language variance can be seen as a metaphoric entry of that culture into a until then canonized "English" text, codeswitching in U.S. Latino literature also inscribes difference. These codeswitches are incorporated into the text, signifying a cultural experience of Otherness.

The use of more than one language in a text are choices the writer makes, but in the United States many instances are due to immigration and the need to reflect the immigrant experience. An example from Asian American literature is Wakako Yamauchi's *And the Soul Shall Dance* who sporadically incorporates Japanese phrases and words into the English dialogue:

No use crying about it now. *Shikata ga nai*. It's gone now. No more bathhouse. That's all there is to it.

In Hawai'i, the "other" languages such as Japanese are due to immigration, but the presence of Hawaiian or pidgin in the English texts are due to their having originated there. In Rodney Morales' short story "Ship of Dreams" one can come across Japanese, Spanish and even Hawai'i Creole English (or "pidgin," as it is more commonly known).

...when the Japanese men paraded down the dirt road in only towels on their way to the *furo*  
...the maracas doing things with time that no hourglass would, the joyful if other-worldly singing, and that *da kine, ah, wha-cha-ma-call-it* thing that made the scratchy sound

"*Sinvergüenza!*" Pablo slapped his much larger son in the head.

But it is Hispanic literature which has produced the most varied and consistently codeswitched literature in the United States, although Chicanos, Puerto Ricans or Cuban Americans all vary in the extent of their literary codeswitching. The linguistic presence of Spanish is a prevalent a reality in U.S. Latino literature and it is well known (Carranza, 1982) that the high retention among Hispanics is due to factors such as immigration, socioeconomic factors, sociolinguistic variants, and, in the case of

Mexican Americans, an uninterrupted historical identification and presence in the Southwest. However, English is becoming the main language U.S. Latinos write in because, as Liebkind (1999, 144) so aptly puts it "...identity can, and does, survive the loss of the original group language." This follows Villanueva's (1990, 82) own statement about Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans who are "monolingual in English yet not assimilated in the usual sense." Disregarding even the targeted readership or publishing opportunities, the *Anglicization* of U.S. Latino literature should come as no surprise, especially when considering that the great majority of Hispanic writers who publish in the United States have been educated in American universities in English—regardless of the language they grew up speaking. According to some estimates (Duany, 1989[ based on U.S. Bureau of the Census figures from 1983]), 75% of Hispanics speak Spanish at home.

So then, why does U.S. Latino literature continue to incorporate Spanish in its texts? First and most obvious, because Spanish is still part and parcel of the Latino community and, second, concurrently, because it is precisely through language that cultural loyalty and identification are more strongly preserved among minorities (Fishman, 1966). This second reason is of

paramount importance to Hispanic culture. Much of U.S. Latino literature has at its heart ethnic identity, and language (i.e., Spanish), its most outstanding symbol, is probably the most significant means of appropriating space for its own ethnic identity in an otherwise English discourse. Thus, the codeswitching in U.S. Latino literature can be seen as: 1) a reflection of linguistic reality past and/or present and, 2) the cultural identification Spanish affords U.S. Latinos.

The diversity that is possible in U.S. Latino literature is increased because its writers do not restrict their writings to English or Spanish. The Chicana feminist writer Gloria Anzaldúa enumerates in her seminal *Borderlands/La Frontera* (55) the linguistic possibilities Chicanos have access to:

And because we are a complex, heterogeneous people, we speak many languages. Some of the languages we speak are:

1. Standard English
2. Working class and slang English
3. Standard Spanish
4. Standard Mexican Spanish
5. North Mexican Spanish dialect
6. Chicano Spanish (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California have regional variations)

7. Tex-Mex

8. *Pachuco* (called *caló*)

Other Chicano writers such as Alurista, especially in the 1960s and 70s at the height of Chicano activism, searched for their historical identity by turning to their indigenous past. The occasional instances of Nahuatl, Mayan or Yaqui are then a consequence of the need of Mexican Americans to recover their past and infuse it with a dignity until then denied to them. With names such as *Pepsicóatl* and *Cocacóatl*, in *Dawn*, Alurista creates intralexical codeswitches which function as metaphors of economic and historical relationships.

In Miguel Méndez's story "Tata Casehua" the codeswitches into Yaqui allow not only for political euphemisms, but the codeswitches also allow for pre-Anglo American identification.

–Allá está el *yorí*, el que vuela como *zipi* y se arrastra como *zetahui*.

Among the Spanish-based variations, *Caló* is most probably the extreme linguistic variant for Chicano writers, its secrecy and neologisms unknown to English-speaking America. In Jose Luis



Navarro's "To a Dead Lowrider" the eulogist intentionally charges the Pachuco's language with sociolinguistic significance.

Talking his tongue to others, not  
Knowing his way of life, was like  
Listening to another language: Orale,  
Ese, no se aguite. Te wacho tonight

The literature written by Puerto Ricans in the United States, especially Nuyorican literature, besides English and Spanish draws on Black English. An obvious example is *Down These Mean Streets*, authored by Piri Thomas – a Puerto Rican thrown into Black America because of his dark skin. His speech, which mimics that of New York ("You see any colored cats up there?", 104), is a definite mixture of the linguistic variants accessible in Spanish Harlem:

...if I can only get back to Harlem, everything is gonna be *chevere* again—just get back to Harlem and there ain't a fucking thing can hurt you there. (233)

In "Nigger-Reecan Blues" Willie Perdomo speaks directly to the issue of race, switching back and forth between Spanish and English standards and dialects:

and when my homeboy Davi saw me, he said:  
"Coño, Papo. Te parece como un moreno, brother.  
Word up, bro. You look like a stone black kid."

In *Getting Home Alive*, Aurora Levins Morales makes a direct reference to the distinct cultural codes which come together in New York.

I am what I am. I am as Boricua as Boricuas come from the isle of Manhattan, and I croon sentimental tangos in my sleep and Afro-Cuban beats in my blood...I mean there it was yiddish and spanish and fine refined college educated english and Irish which I mainly keep in my prayers (138)

At another point, the same author unabashedly writes of making history because her native tongue is a mixture of both English and Spanish. "I am new. History made me. My first language was spanglish." This more positive attitude toward bilingualism is obliterated in Sandra María Esteves opinion that "I speak two languages broken into each other."

The construction of Otherness can be just as important in monolingual texts; for example, the mixing of Chicano and Puerto Rican codes can signify hybrid opposition to Anglo cultural and linguistic dominance and assert U.S. Latinness. The following counter-discourse is taken from Tato Laviera's poem "Vaya carnal:

simón, el sonido del este  
el vaya, clave, por la maceta  
que forma parte de un fuerte  
lingüismo, raza, pana, borinquen,

azteca, macho, hombre, pulmones  
de taíno, de indios, somos  
chicano-riqueños, que curado

Cuban Americans have kept their literary output somewhat more separated by mixing languages to a lesser degree. However, José Corrales uses codeswitches to explore precisely how language (the acquisition and gradual use of English by Cubans in America) can become an indicator of cultural distances. The poem “A Long Distance Cry” starts:

Qué lejos estás  
how far away  
y también está el problema de la lengua

It has been recognized that Native Americans articulate otherness by means of metaphorical symbols. A case in point is the visual impact of the totem pole, an effect independent of the use of the Pueblo Indian language, which Leslie Marmon Silko otherwise rarely incorporates into *Ceremony*(206). This cultural symbol speaks for itself.

Hey-ya-ah-na-ah! Hey-ya-ah-na-ah!  
Ku-ru-tsu-eh-na! Ku-ru-tsu-eh-na!  
to the east below  
to the south below

the winter people come.

Hey-ya-ah-na-ah! Hey-ya-ah-na-ah!

Ku-ru-tsu-eh-na! Ku-ru-tsu-eh-na!

from the west above

from the north above

the winter people come.

eh-ah-na-ah!

eh-ah-na-ah!

antlers of wind

hooves of snow

eyes glitter ice

eyes glitter ice

eh-ah-na-ah!

eh-ah-na-ah!

antlers of wind

antlers of wind

eh-ah-na-ah! eh-ah-na-ah!

U.S. Latino literature, in contrast, is much more vociferous about the linguistic circumstances its people live in as it constantly exposes linguistic injustices and sentiments of inadequacies of non-academic bilingualism, of presumed non-nativeness and foreign accents which are thrust upon non-English-speakers of lower economic classes. In "Puerto Rican Obituary" Pedro Pietri

speaks precisely of the hypocrisies of learned versus immigrant bilingualism:

Secondhand shit for sale  
Learn how to say Como Esta Usted  
and you will make a fortune  
They are dead  
They are dead  
and will not return from the dead  
until they stop neglecting  
the art of their dialogue  
for broken english lessons  
to impress the mister goldsteins

References to the children's acquisition of identity within linguistic communities of non-Anglo Americans abound in most ethnic writing. For example, in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* although the mother cuts the frenum of her daughter's tongue "so that it would be able to move in any language" (164), she is unable to save her from silence at school. In the daughter's words: "I knew the silence had to do with being a Chinese girl" (166). In *Silent Dancing*, Puerto Rican Judith Ortiz Cofer also writes of the anguish felt by a child made acutely aware of linguistic distinctions:

As a Navy brat, shuttling between New Jersey and the pueblo, I was constantly made to feel like an oddball by my peers, who made fun of my two-way accent: a Spanish accent when I spoke English; and, when I spoke Spanish, I was told that I sounded like a “Gringa.” (17)

The controversial Richard Rodriguez explains in similar terms the need he too felt at a young age for transcending the social disadvantages of belonging to an ethnic minority, even at the expense of foregoing his own name, unlike “those middle-class ethnics who scorn assimilation...and...trivialize the dilemma of the socially disadvantaged” (27). Rodriguez is able to pinpoint the turning point in his life and identify, how it was the Spanish language of his home which had kept him separated “from *los otros, los gringos* in power” (16) of whom he so wants to be a member of. In his autobiography *Hunger for Memory* Rodriguez wants to belong to the “ideal american family” Pietri speaks of in “Puerto Rican Obituary” and not belong to the society of “black maids / and latino janitors / who are well train [sic] / to make everyone / and their bill collectors / laugh at them / and the people they represent.” In Rodriguez’s own words:

The social and political advantages I enjoy as a man result from the day that I came to believe that my name, indeed, is *Rich-heard Road-ree-guess*...I celebrate the day I acquired my new name. (27)

There are, of course, examples of optimism towards multilingualism such as Ed Morales' in "Rebirth of a New Rican"

The revolution is right here, man.  
The groove that's in our hearts  
Con esta situación, culturally unique  
Tú sabes la cuestión de usar las dos lenguas  
New and revolutionary communication  
Comes into being  
Porque only a multicultural pueblo can understand  
El adentro y the outside of the dynamic.

Nevertheless, there are many more references to cultural separateness as a consequence of linguistic otherness. The Cuban-born playwright Dolores Prida bases an entire play exactly on the premise of cultural distinctiveness as encompassed by language. *Coser y cantar* is a bilingual monologue that a young Cuban immigrant has with herself, each culture made distinct by its own language. SHE, her American side, reads *Psychology Today* and drinks Pepsi, while ELLA, her Hispanic side, reads *Corín Tellado* and drinks "un guarapo de caña." The schizophrenic component of the new person that ELLA has become in the United States is voiced at one point by SHE, who attempts to come to terms with her biculturalism by reminding ELLA that the young woman who

immigrated from Cuba has become this new persona because of the new reality, language and all: “if it weren’t for me you would not be the one you are now.” The anguish in self-perception and identity due to cultural awareness in this play are played out in the bilingual dialogue and the switches from English to Spanish between SHE and ELLA.

In the poem “Para Ana Veldford,” the Cuban American poet Lourdes Casal expresses a similar angst as she begins to realize that she is becoming a U.S. Latino and not just Cuban: “Por Nueva York soy extranjera ya en cualquier otra parte.” Just as prevalent are the references to the anguish felt as biculturalism is found not to have a definite counterpart in bilingualism. In Sandra María Esteves’ own words:

I speak the alien tongue  
in sweet borinqueño thoughts

While Tato Laviera states:

i think in spanish  
i write in english

I would like to turn as a final point to the question of readership and codeswitching, and venture a division of U.S.



Latino literature into two main groups: one smaller which would exclude non-Spanish-English bilinguals, and a much bigger group which would include English monolinguals. An example of the first is the postmodern *Reto en el paraíso*, by Alejandro Morales, which switches back and forth between Spanish and English at all syntactic levels. There are insertions of lone words (usually not translated); intrasentential codeswitching (i.e., short clauses and phrases in the other language); intersentential codeswitches with one sentence in one language followed by a sentence in the other; and even chapters in completely different languages. This work, which is certainly one of the most extreme cases in U.S. Latino bilingual literature, has then a limited readership and is directed solely to a bilingual audience. There are many more examples in all the genres from which monolinguals are excluded due to the type of codeswitch the writer has chosen (e.g., “Visiones otoñales/Autumn Visions” by A. Gabriel Meléndez or Rolando Hinojosa’s *Dear Rafe*).

There are, however, many more instances of U.S. Latino texts which “include” monolinguals as readers. The type of codeswitching these writers have chosen one might say is circumstantial, sometimes still glossed, others untranslated but

usually not central to the text as a whole—but that is not to say that the Spanish does not hold meaning specifically for the bilingual. For example, in Sandra Cisneros' short story "Woman Hollering Creek," the desperate circumstances of Cleófilas are furthered by her two Mexican neighbors (Soledad, "Loneliness" and Dolores, "Pain"), who have common Mexican names but which here signify a cultural rapport of the writer with her Spanish-speaking readers that is otherwise lost on her monolingual readers.

Except in the cases where Spanish signifies no more than a touch of ethnic flavor, it is imperative to view the other language as more than a multivariant linguistic possibility. We must eliminate the monolingual illusion of the Anglo American canon. While the codeswitching in U.S. Latino texts grammatically mirrors that of the spoken community quite closely, on the written page it becomes a political choice, whose power, derived from a continued presence, has over time managed to restore confidence in the identity and the languages the U.S. Latino population speaks.

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