

The Limitations of Code Switching in Chicano/a Literature

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Many Chicano/a writers create texts designed around Hispanic culture in which they alternate between their native language of Spanish and the most common language of their targeted international readers around the world, English. In other words, Chicano/a writers employ a strategy of code switching in which they create predominantly English texts infused with Spanish words, phrases, sentences, or even entire paragraphs. In so doing, these writers hope to challenge hegemonic attitudes toward Hispanic culture in an effort to, as Mohammad Albakry and Patsy Hunter Hancock suggest, break down the barriers of languages and redefine cultural identity (231). Chicano/a authors live in between a variety of cultures, and the practice of code switching—the refusal to be defined by just one language—exemplifies this life in the borderlands by refusing to fall into one neat and distinct category. Through code switching, Chicano/a writers hope to mold the audience’s opinions on the complexity of Chicano/a culture and identity.

Chicano/a writers have adopted a unique application of English; they are able to use English to transcend the marginalization of their culture by the dominant white, English-speaking society. Lourdes Torres, a scholar of the use of Spanish in the United States, explains, “Immigrant and post-colonial writers create a new variety [of the language] without completely assimilating the norms and conventions of the dominant language. As outsiders, such writers appropriate English from a novel perspective” (76). These writers modify English to legitimize their own native language and thus their own culture. What makes theirs such a novel perspective is that they are able to use the language in a way that native speakers are not. Evelyn Nien-Ming Ch’ien expounds upon this explanation, claiming that those who employ “weird English,” or an English that has been appropriated for the writers’ own purposes,

denormalize English out of resistance to it, and form their own language by combining English with their original language. In immigrant communities where weird English is exclusively an oral phenomenon, pidgins and misspellings may have meant a lack of education or fluency. But for weird-English writers, the composition of weird English is an active way of *takin’ the community back*. (6)

In Chicano/a literature, using Spanish becomes a way of “takin’ the community back.” If Spanish is an essential influence in a novel, then the Spanish language is no longer the inferior language, but one that is able to compete on an equal footing with English; the contributions of each language are equally important to the overall significance of the literary work.

While scholars have extensively researched code switching in Chicano/a literature, none have explored how accommodating an English-speaking audience can negatively impact the perception of Chicano/a culture and identity. Many times the techniques used in a minimalist approach (just a smattering of Spanish infused into the text) work against the legitimization of the Spanish language. In this analysis, I will show that the intentions of Chicano/a authors, with regards to their choice of language, do not always match up with the rhetorical strategies they employ. More specifically, I will focus on three texts that use code switching as a strategy to document the realities of

a multicultural and multilingual identity. In two of these texts, code switching between English and Spanish conveys a distinctive Chicano/a culture and asserts a unique Chicano/a identity that will persevere in American society despite the limitations and prejudices placed upon it; however, in the third, as I will show, some uses of code switching undercut the author's purpose.

Language as a Construct of Identity and the Discourse of Resistance

Chicanos/as have always been an underrepresented group, denied a voice in many different arenas, including, but not limited to, social theory and literature. In "The Chicano Codex: Writing against Historical and Pedagogical Colonization," Damián Baca chronicles in detail the history of the exclusion and subjugation of the Latino people, dating back as early as the Spanish invasion of Central America. Beginning with the Spanish missionaries, he shows how Central American people have had their histories destroyed and then reconstructed to conform to the European tradition. Since then, the people of Central America have had to create their own discursive strategies in order to resist the dominance of the European tradition and recapture their own. Their culture is formed around resistance to this elite discourse; their "rhetorics revise and displace the dominant historical narrative of cultural assimilation" and

promote a new dialectic, a new strategy of inventing and writing between worlds.

This Chicana and Chicano dialectic works to overcome a hubristic historical and pedagogical colonization that disowns and suppresses the intellectual contributions of Mexican cultures, both ancient and new. (565)

And as Baca notes, this repression of the Central American cultures is by no means simply a historical phenomenon. Such repression, and consequently the Chicano/a resistance to it, continue in our society to this day.

Patricia Hill Collins also discusses the oppression that minority groups tend to feel when confronted with elite theories and methods of thought. She writes:

Designed to represent the interests of those privileged by hierarchical power relations of race, economic class, gender, sexuality, and nationality, elite discourses present a view of social reality that elevates the ideas and actions of highly educated White men as normative and superior. Thus, elite discourses measure everyone else's accomplishments in light of how much they deviate from this ideal. (44–45)

As a member of a minority group that does not fit into the elite discourse, Collins identifies with other subjugated groups within the United States. Contrary to claims of the elite discourse that minority groups cannot produce their own analytical thought, she maintains that they do indeed have the power to create their own discourse and that that discourse is "central to [their] political empowerment and search for justice" in that it has the ability to "challenge unjust ideas and practices" (xvi). She describes the importance of combating the opposition and urges minority cultures and ethnicities to defy stereotypes.

In this act of resistance to the oppression of the mainstream, Collins explains, an important way to defy impositions is to assert identity through channels such as writing and literature. She writes, "Individuals . . . who break silence lay the foundation for a collective group voice. . . . By speaking out, formerly victimized individuals not only reclaim their humanity, they simultaneously empower themselves by giving new meaning to their own particular experiences" (48). In shar-

ing their own ideas, these victimized people are able to reflect the reality of the oppressed and thereby resist their own victimization.

Aja Martinez reiterates Collins's theory that elite discourses attempt to impose ideas upon marginalized groups in society, effectively causing them to lose something of themselves that they then endeavor to gain back through writing. Speaking specifically about the effect this imposition has on students, she states,

This assimilation . . . pressures young Chicano/a students to discard their own cultural and ethnic representation. . . . [They] are cast into an ethnicity representation crisis that is riddled with guilt, shame, and trauma concerning who the student is culturally—as this representation is juxtaposed with who the institution is pushing him or her to become. (585)

But Martinez argues that there is something that these students can do to prevent complete assimilation into mainstream culture and accordingly a loss of their own culture. She explains that “rhetoric has the potential to produce understanding, to reveal and/or construct good, ethical realities” (586). It is possible to construct an identity through the literature one writes, especially through the rhetorical strategies one employs. Language has the ability to transcend the classification of mere words and can empower a marginalized individual to represent him/herself as a person with a history and a story to tell.

Chicano/a authors have the ability to use language thus; they can write in a way that will reflect their own history and their own culture, as these scholars have described. By including the rhetorical strategies that Martinez describes, Chicano/a authors can resist marginalization and the pressures of the elite discourse. Instead, they can transcend such repression and empower themselves and everyone else of the same culture and ethnicity through their literature. However, the strategies they use need to be consistent with the goals of empowerment; otherwise, the authors can reinforce a culture of repression.

Representing Multiple Cultures in One Text

Scholars have researched how Chicano/a authors, specifically, can use a language of resistance in their writing. Alfred Arteaga explains the role of the cultural Other in a historical context and the intercultural dynamics that suppress the Spanish language both in everyday discourse and in literature. He examines the ways in which Spanish has traditionally been excluded from both of these venues to “silence other tongues, and by synecdoche, silence other people” (13). In contrast, he argues that Chicano/a literature acknowledges a heteroglossia that English or American literature customarily attempts to constrain by marginalizing the Spanish language. There are various responses that Chicanos/as, the Others, have in the face of this discrimination. In response to an American literature which minimizes the presence of the Other culture within its text, Chicano/a literature embraces this juxtaposition of two languages to pull Chicano/a culture out of the subjection into which it has been forced.

Reed Way Dasenbrock addresses the strategies of Chicano/a literature, narrowing in on how the use of two languages within Chicano/a literature affects the reader. He argues against the accusation that a multilingual text presents unnecessary barriers to accessing and appreciating the work, countering the allegation that writing in two languages results in texts that are inherently flawed by not appealing to a “universal audience.” Rather, Dasenbrock argues, it is more important for the

reader to work in order to find meaning within a multicultural text. Essentially, a text does not have to be easily accessible at first glance to have meaning and value. His analysis is of paramount importance with regards to Chicano/a texts that are not readily understood by a monolingual reader.

Chicano/a writers can use a variety of rhetorical strategies to integrate Spanish into their texts. Lourdes Torres details four options, ranging from intermittent and sporadic use of Spanish to very frequent use of Spanish to reflect the realities of a multicultural country. These four strategies are: (1) the use of only those Spanish words that can be readily understood by a monolingual reader without translation; (2) the inclusion of a Spanish word or phrase immediately followed by an English translation so that the text avoids any barrier to its accessibility for the monolingual English reader; (3) the incorporation of Spanish text without translation and neither italicized nor otherwise marked as a different language; and (4) the employment of calques, or Spanish phrases that are translated literally into English, so that the Spanish still exists in essence within the phrase, though it is in English.

The majority of previous studies of code switching in Chicano/a literature examine its use as a means to evince a cultural identity,¹ and they are generally in favor of code switching in all four of the forms outlined by Torres. These studies agree that bilingual literature has the effect of legitimizing the marginalized language and consequently legitimizing the people who speak that language. I do not disagree that this can be the result of creating a text that employs code switching, but I do disagree with the assumption that the effects of bilingualism in literature are universal, an assumption on which current scholarship relies. Left unexamined are the degree to which code switching is used and the method of its employ within a specific text: different approaches to the application of code switching may actually influence the interpretation of texts in startlingly diverse ways. Specifically, bilingual Chicano/a texts that employ Torres's first and second method, of using unequal amounts of Spanish and English, do not produce the desired political and social message. The inclusion of readily understood Spanish or the immediate translation of occasional Spanish words and phrases works to undermine the author's purpose. Essentially, the use of these two strategies weakens the ability of Chicano/a authors to legitimize their own language and culture.

Three Examples of Code Switching

Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza serves as an example of an effective use of code switching. Anzaldúa uses several techniques within her text, but predominately she alternates between Spanish and English without providing any translation. When she does, it is only to translate long pages of one language into the other, as is the case with many of the poems presented in the second half of the book. In her preface she explains,

The switching of "codes" in this book from English to Castillian Spanish to the North American dialect to Tex-Mex to a sprinkling of Nahuatl to a mixture of all of these, reflects my language, a new language—the language of the Borderlands. There, at the juncture of cultures, languages cross-pollinate and are revitalized; they die and are born. Presently this infant language, this bastard language, Chicano Spanish, is not approved by any society. But we Chicanos no longer feel that we need to beg entrance, that we need always to make the first overture—to translate to Anglos, Mexicans, and Latinos, apology blurring out of our mouths with every step. (Preface)

She switches between Spanish and English in her essay to show her readers that it is not important for her to cater to their wishes by translating her work in a way that would erase a major aspect of her culture. She desires to speak of “the struggle of the self amidst adversity and violation . . . to write about life on the borders, life in the shadows” (Preface).

Anzaldúa writes to anyone and everyone—Chicano/a, American, and all other subsets of humanity. As she is a Chicana woman, her primary audiences are Chicanos/as and Americans, but her theories and ideas are widely applicable to many different people around the world. She opens up the ideas of the *mestiza* and hybridity in order to include everyone in the broad category of the human race. Her text is directed at the Chicano/a in an attempt to help him or her, as a person who is neither completely Hispanic nor completely American, to feel comfortable living between the two groups while wholly a part of neither. Yet she also writes to the American, whose culture is so preoccupied with fitting into norms and categorizing people by distinct definitions. She writes to make it acceptable to be a person who does not fall into just one neat group and to expose the realities of life for people whose lives have long been censored and hidden from view. Anzaldúa uses code switching to give a voice to people who have been denied a voice for so long; additionally, she wants to explain the situation that she and many others find themselves in to white American readers who have not had the same experiences. She intentionally and unapologetically makes the audience work to find meaning in her text, because both languages are important in their own cultures and in their own ways.

Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza is an exemplary combination of Spanish and English in one book. The Spanish is added into English sentences seamlessly, and Anzaldúa does not compensate for her reader’s possible lack of knowledge by translating. She explores what it means for an individual to come from two different cultural backgrounds in a society that has difficulty accepting that people are often defined by multiple identities. Through her incorporation of Spanish phrases into English sentences and Spanish sentences into English paragraphs, Anzaldúa literally shows her audience that two cultures can exist in one individual, that one does not have to preclude the other. Lennon writes, “Anzaldúa consistently pushed back against *translative* publication with a determination that mainstream academic ethnic literary studies, invested as it must be in the continuity and stability of ethnic literary production, is bound to find indecorous” (213). She resisted pressure from publishers to make her text one language so that it could be easily read by a monolingual audience and also easily translated to be made available to another monolingual audience. Her choice was bold and unique, but very effective in representing the life in the cultural borderlands that her work depicts. The book’s very title and its acknowledgments at the beginning epitomize her stylistic choice to feature both languages as equally important within the novel. In her acknowledgments she says,

Gracias a toditos ustedes.

THIS BOOK
is dedicated *a todos mexicanos*
on both sides of the border.

The use of Spanish throughout the novel is so ubiquitous that it is difficult to pinpoint only one specific passage where it is used effectively. She combines Spanish and English in the entire text in such a way that both are essential to the comprehension of the story. Albakry and Hancock explain:

This technique might diminish the readability of [the] text for some readers, because inserting foreignized speech as a discursive strategy tends to increase the difficulty of understanding for the reader not familiar with the foreign language used. . . . The monocultural reader, however, may end up having a richer experience because of all the work he or she has to do. (231)

If you choose to skip over one language or the other, half the meaning of the book is lost. The message is that each language is as important as the other, just as is each heritage to the identity of a human being.

Anzaldúa contemplates the difficulty of representing two distinct and diverse cultures when she says,

Through our mothers, the culture gave us mixed messages: *No voy a dejar que ningún pelado desgraciado maltrate a mis hijos*. And in the next breath it would say, *La mujer tiene que hacer lo que le diga el hombre*. Which was it to be—strong, or submissive, rebellious or conforming? (18)

Here she includes an equal amount of Spanish and English, and the monolingual English reader would most likely be able to deduce the significance of the paragraph. However, there are also paragraphs primarily written in Spanish, and it would be incredibly difficult for the monolingual English reader to comprehend the text. For example:

La travesía. For many *mexicanos del otro lado*, the choice is to stay in Mexico and starve or move north and live. *Dicen que cada mexicano siempre sueña de la conquista en los brazos de cuatro gringas rubias, la conquista del país poderoso del norte, los Estados Unidos. En cada Chicano y mexicano vive el mito del tesoro territorial perdido*. North Americans call this return to the homeland the silent invasion. (10)

In such passages, Anzaldúa is asserting that Spanish can be just as important as English to a society, and that the American character and American culture are not always the most significant.

I Am Joaquín/Yo Soy Joaquín, a poem by Rodolfo Gonzales, effectively uses code switching as it juxtaposes English on one page with Spanish on the facing page, so that the reader sees the two texts simultaneously. Gonzales explains his process in writing this poem: “Writing *I Am Joaquín* was a journey back through history, a painful self-evaluation, a wandering search for my peoples. . . . The totality of all social inequities and injustice had to come to the surface” (1). Gonzales writes of the archetypical Chicano/a as the oppressed minority, infusing his poem with a vision of hope and perseverance. He writes to any and all Chicanos/as to give them a sense of optimism for their future. At the same time, however, he is writing to an American audience, in a way that is difficult to ignore, to point out the injustices that have been committed against the Chicano/a. He wrote *I Am Joaquín* to send a message to both those who are isolated and those who isolate; he expresses the pain that the Chicano/a peoples have been through, as well as their desire to overcome the oppression they have endured. His choice to juxtapose the two languages reflects this decision to write equally to both groups of people; simultaneous translations allow each audience, Chicano/a and American, to fully understand what he is trying to express, yet at the same time he is still able to get his message across.

In Torres’s schema of the four strategies for code switching, the second is the use of Spanish words or phrases directly followed by an English translation. I argue that in many instances this strategy is unable to produce the desired effect if there are only several words or phrases of Spanish

interspersed throughout a primarily English text. This actually works against the attempt to put both languages on an equal footing because it shows English as the primary language, seemingly more important in that it is necessary to a comprehensive interpretation, while the Spanish appears to be inferior and nonessential for understanding the text. I will expound upon that later in my examination of *Bless Me, Ultima*. Presently I would like to clarify that the only time the use of Spanish followed promptly by an English translation is effective in empowering the former is when there is an equal division of both languages within the text.

An example of this equal division can be seen in *I Am Joaquín/Yo Soy Joaquín*, a long poem written primarily to expose the injustice done to Chicanos/as and to give them credibility in the face of overwhelming discrimination and suffering. Gonzales explains in the introduction:

I Am Joaquín became a historical essay, a social statement, a conclusion of our *mestizaje*, a welding of the oppressor and the oppressed. It is a mirror of our greatness and our weakness, a call to action as a total people, emerging from a glorious history, traveling through social pain and conflicts, confessing our weaknesses while we shout about our strength. . . . In short, *I Am Joaquín* was written as a revelation of myself and of all Chicanos who are Joaquín. (1)

Gonzales successfully created a social statement, using language as a tool to do so. Gonzales's poem is a unique juxtaposition of his native language and the language of his English-speaking audience. On each verso page there is a stanza or two of the English version of the poem, while on the facing recto page are the exact same stanzas in Spanish. For example, on one verso page:

I have endured in the rugged mountains of our country.
I have survived the toils and slavery of the fields.
I have existed
in the barrios of the city
in the suburbs of bigotry
in the mines of social snobbery
in the prisons of dejection
in the muck of exploitation
and
in the fierce heat of racial hatred.

And directly opposite is the same stanza in Spanish:

He perdurado en las montañas escarpadas de nuestro país.
He sobrevivido los trabajos y esclavitud de los campos.
Yo he existido
en los barrios de la ciudad
en los suburbios de intolerancia
en las minas de snobismo social
en las prisiones de desaliento
en la porquería de explotación
y
en el calor feroz de odio racial. (86)

When the poem is read, neither language is dominant, and while it is not necessary to read both versions in order to fully understand the significance of the poem, having them both present makes it completely accessible to readers of either culture. In fact, it would be quite difficult for a mono-

lingual reader to be able to understand both because the vocabulary used is not the simple phrases learned in middle school foreign-language classes. Therefore, neither language is held to be more valuable than the other, as both are important to different groups of people. Gonzales clearly had a reason to include both languages in the text, and consequently, neither can be discarded nor ignored. Though they may not both be read, they must simultaneously be acknowledged and recognized as important in understanding the overall statement of the poem.

Finally, *Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya is an example of the ways that code switching can undermine the legitimization of the Spanish language. In an interview Anaya stated:

Stylistically, the Chicanos/as literature has a lot to offer because it reflects that world view, which is very, very different from the Anglo-American world view. Our ties are not only to different social and political realities; spiritually we reflect different myths, which has been one of my concerns in literature: to bring out the myths that are an important part of the core of the world view. . . . So the differences to me are fascinating, and it's part of the reason why I think we're so important. (Anaya, Dick, and Sirias 100)

Anaya directed his novel at a general American and therefore primarily English-speaking audience. He intended to depict and explain the realities of Chicano/a culture that are not usually viewed by the average American citizen, despite the fact that a significant percentage of the U.S. population today consists of Chicanos/as. However, Anaya also includes a substantial amount of Mexican American culture in his novel so as to appeal to the Chicano/a population as well. His use of code switching mirrors his choice to write a social critique for the average American to read, and therefore he designed his novel with a minimal degree of Spanish to reach a wider English-speaking audience. However, although the book highlights the uniqueness of his Chicano/a culture and argues for cultural equality, Anaya's minimal use of Spanish undermines his project. Rather, the book seems to cater solely to an English-speaking audience and to justify a monolingual perspective.

While Gonzales's rhetorical choices mirror his social message, most often, Chicano/a authors tend to employ strategies of code switching that do not thoroughly contribute to the social or political message of the text. These strategies more closely resemble the first two cases Torres describes—when there are only Spanish words that can be easily understood by a monolingual reader, or when there is occasional Spanish text followed immediately by an English translation. Such novels use languages that are “contained—confined to single words, phrases, or brief exchanges of spoken dialogue, as touches of cultural verisimilitude (or its simulation) that ‘season’ the text ever so lightly with the foreign flavor without dulling its domestic flavor” (Lennon 207).

In his novel *Bless Me, Ultima*, there are many reasons why Anaya may have used very little and very transparent Spanish, and I do not mean to assert that the sole reason for his choice was to create a social or political message, but his narrative suggests that he intends to make such a statement. The novel tells the story of a young boy, Antonio Márez, who has to learn to navigate between the culture of his father and his ancestors and the Americanized culture in which he is living. Anaya shows his American readers a different culture than their own. He illustrates a culture that, though every bit as meaningful and intricate as the American culture, is still, today, undervalued as inferior or “Other,” as Arteaga would label it. Anaya juxtaposes two different religious beliefs, Catholicism and the spiritual mysticism of Antonio's ancestors, emphasizing the necessity for Tony (Antonio) to reconcile the two in order to understand his own spirituality. Anaya sympa-

thetically portrays Ultima, the curandera, who undertakes the task of presenting to Antonio the power of his ancestors' pagan mysticism. Ultima, the eponym of the novel, is welcomed wholeheartedly by Antonio and his family, but she is rejected and discriminated against in American society. While we, as readers, can see her inner beauty and her capacity for goodness, the culture in which the Márez family lives is blind to those good qualities, just as the U.S. culture of today is blind to many of the valuable characteristics of its Chicano/a population. In the end Ultima dies a hero, while all along the people of the town have denounced her as a being of the devil. Through Ultima, Anaya creates a sensitivity towards people who have found their culture and beliefs undermined by American prejudices. Thus he is able to advance the argument that the traditions and culture of other societies, specifically the Chicano/a society of which Anaya himself is a part, are every bit as meaningful as the traditional "American" culture and they therefore are deserving of the same recognition and respect.

Although the narrative story itself advances the Chicano/a culture and legitimizes its beliefs in the face of overwhelming discrimination and ignorance, the language that Anaya employs tells a different story. *Bless Me, Ultima* is a primarily English novel, written in an attempt to show an international audience the error of discrediting the Chicano/a population living in the United States. However, at odd intervals throughout the novel Anaya adds a few Spanish words or phrases, incorporating them into sentences and sometimes even adding an English translation in parentheses. If the translation is not added, the Spanish text is, as a general rule, understandable to the typical Anglo-American reader. For example, when Tony is finally able to attend school, he describes his first meeting with his teacher, Miss Maestas:

I told her I did not speak English.

"¿Cómo te llamas?" she asked.

"Antonio Márez," I replied. I told her my mother said I should see her, and that my mother sent her regards.

She smiled. . . . "Do you want to learn to write?" she asked. (61)

Tony admits outright to the reader that he cannot speak English, and therefore the only part of this conversation that he is able to express as a direct quote is his name. Everything else that would have been said in dialogue is instead conveyed through Tony's narration so that the English-speaking reader can understand. Additionally, according to Tony's relation of the dialogue, Miss Maestas asks only her first question in Spanish. What is implied, of course, is that the conversation took place in Spanish but was translated into English for the convenience of the reader. Because "¿Cómo te llamas?" is a relatively widely known Spanish phrase, its presence in this conversation does little to promote the language and the equality of Spanish-speaking individuals. Unlike in the works of Anzaldúa and Gonzales, this use of Spanish reinforces the superiority of the English-speaking reader, who can readily understand what is being said and who may afterwards classify the language as easy to comprehend, one that even they, with their limited comprehension of Spanish, can interpret.

Every once in a while Anaya inserts an entire sentence of Spanish that cannot be effortlessly interpreted, but when he does so he italicizes the phrase, and often indents it as well. The day after witnessing the death of Lupito, Tony describes his perception of the events surrounding his burial,

The bell of the church began to ring, *una mujer con un diente, que llama a toda la gente*. The bell called the people to six o'clock mass.

But no. Today it was not just telling us that in five minutes mass would

begin, today it was crying the knell of Lupito.

“¡Ay!” I heard my mother cry and saw her cross her forehead.

La campana de la iglesia está doblando . . .

The church bell tolled and drew to it the widows in black, the lonely, faithful women who came to pray for their men.

Arrímense vivos y difuntos

Aquí estamos todos juntos. . . . (37)

The way that Anaya has chosen to italicize and separate these few Spanish phrases from the rest of the text emphasizes the difference of the language and consequently the difference of the people who speak it. The effect is as if Anaya is proclaiming that the Spanish language is incompatible with the language of the readers, that it is separate, and that it does not fit in with English. It is almost as if the Spanish phrases are just passing thoughts, isolated from the general storyline and therefore can be ignored completely. If the phrase is not connected to the paragraphs preceding it and following it, then readers can just skip over it and feel as though that action did not detract whatsoever from their understanding of the novel. In his book *Caliban's Voice: The Transformation of English in Post-Colonial Literatures*, Bill Ashcroft discusses the way people react to language when they read a text: “What people think about and feel about language may become mistaken for language itself” (2). If readers do not have to work to understand the meaning of the Spanish language incorporated into the novel, or if they can read the text and designate the Spanish as unimportant to their comprehension, they will begin to believe the language is unimportant as well. Because “we don’t simply *have* a language. We tend to believe that our language *is* us—that it inhabits us and we inhabit it” (Ashcroft 95). Language is inextricably linked with culture, and the way a language is portrayed in literature is the way in which the reader perceives the culture that that language embodies. If the few Spanish sentences in the Chicano/a novel can be taken out with no consequences, if those sentences do not seem to have any importance at all, the legitimacy of the Spanish language is undermined.

There are instances in which Anaya includes proverbs from the culture of Tony’s Latin American heritage, rather than the American culture of his readers. Anaya makes a rhetorical choice to translate the phrases into English rather than leaving them in the original language. It is difficult to translate an adage from one language to another without either changing the saying completely or leaving it vulnerable to depreciation and misunderstanding. In one instance, Tony discusses the feud between Tenorio and Ultima with his friends. His friend Samuel repeats a proverb that he had heard from his father:

“It will only end when blood is spilled,” Samuel said. “My father says that the blood of a man thickens with the desire for revenge, and if a man is to be complete again then he must let some of that thick blood flow.” (157)

While the first part of Samuel’s statement resonates with the English-speaking reader, the remainder of the saying could sound foreign and inconsistent with the typical American proverb. If the reader were to read the proverb literally, it might sound improbable and incorrect. In such an inter-

pretation of the proverb the reader, instead of appreciating its cultural value and what it means to the society in which it originates, could dismiss the proverb as evidence that the culture whence it comes is uneducated and therefore inferior.

Conclusion

As a general technique, code switching in Chicano/a literature can have advantageous effects in transcending the discrimination of Chicano/a society, simultaneously legitimizing Chicano/a language and culture. The use of Spanish in a text where at least one of the primary audiences is English speaking can actually mold the opinions of the work's audience and create a positive reception of Chicano/a identity. The poetry of Rodolfo Gonzales and Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* effectively assimilate two languages within one text. On the other hand, Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* undermines his desired social purpose, even though his text may appeal to a wider audience since it is written almost exclusively in English. Because only minimal Spanish is included, Chicano/a identity, an essential aspect of the text, is almost immediately dismissed. Sometimes code switching can have the opposite effect than that which is intended; rather than promoting the Chicano/a cause through the use of language, it can actually depreciate the culture by creating too much of a gulf between the Spanish and the English languages.

It is true that often the publishers of Chicano/a and other multicultural works make overriding decisions regarding the degree of bilingualism to include in the text—it is in their interests to reach a larger audience and thereby acquire a greater profit. Brian Lennon has done extensive research on the relationship between authors of multilingual literature, the audiences they write for, and consequently the type of publishing company they are able to use to produce their books. His argument is that if authors wish their literature to be disseminated among the widest possible audience, they are restricted in the means of publication available to them; their best choice is a commercial publisher. These publishing houses are designed to chase the greatest profit, and they therefore put a lot of pressure on multilingual authors to present their works with English as the primary or sole language because a monolingual work has a greater potential to sell. Lennon notes, "Virtually all books published for distribution in the United States by US trade publishers are published in English, for a market that is presumed monolingual in English" (206). Conversely, smaller publishers are inclined—for multiple reasons, not limited to sensitivity to the intention of the author and the economic resources of the company—to focus more on the scholarly value of a work rather than the profits it will yield; they have a tendency to give more leeway to the author to decide such a critical issue for him- or herself. Therefore, the degree of Spanish that a Chicano/a author is typically allowed to incorporate into his or her novel is dependent on the nature of the publishing company; it may not be the preference of the Chicano/a author to include only a minimal quantity of Spanish in his or her writing, but rather a "concession to the publisher . . . motivated by profit" (Lennon 209).

However, whether that decision is made by the Chicano/a author or the publisher, my argument is still directed against this minimalist use of code switching, because the end result is the same in either case. By contrasting these three pieces of Chicano/a literature with three different degrees of bilingualism, I hope I have shown that the degree of bilingualism utilized in each work corresponds to the effectiveness of that work in producing a social or political message. The power of language lies in its ability to either reinforce a message or undercut it through the rhetorical

choices the author makes. Particularly in relation to marginalized groups in society, the power of language is something that cannot be ignored, and authors need to make a more concerted effort to treat multiple cultures as equals, rather than portraying one as subordinate to another.

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Note

¹ Mohammad Albakry and Patsy Hunter Hancock, for example, study the use of code switching in a novel by Ahdaf Soueif. They conclude that “hybrid English . . . could become a means by which bilingual writers are able to preserve their cultural identity and capture its flavor while at the same time writing about it in the dominant language” (233).

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