

Code-switching in US ethnic literature: multiple perspectives presented through multiple languages

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For the multilingual author, switching between two or more languages is not an arbitrary act, nor is it simply an attempt to mimic the speech of his or her community; code-switching results from a conscious decision to create a desired effect and to promote the validity of the author's heritage language. This article looks at code-switching in literary texts between Spanish and English, English and Chinese, and English and Jemez, a Native American language. Incorporating native and heritage languages along with English within a literary work, usually through code-switching, creates a multiple perspective and enhances an author's ability to express his or her subject matter.

From 1987 to 1995, I taught English as a Second Language (ESL) classes to immigrant high school students in Phoenix, Arizona. The majority of the students were Spanish speaking. The popular conception at the time, for those who had not had the benefit of any courses in sociolinguistics or second language acquisition, was that switching between Spanish and English, 'Spanglish', was an inferior mode of communication. True, upon first arriving in the US, the students used Spanish when they did not know the English expression. The switching was not under their control and, therefore, could not be seen as code-switching. However, as their skills in English progressed and they began to socialise with Chicano¹ students, the use of Spanish within their English discourse became a conscious choice and was used systematically to achieve a particular style of speech. Years later, now as a university instructor, I focus my research on US literature written in languages other than English. I work with European literary theory, linguistics and the contemporary work of scholars such as Werner Sollors who write about non-English US literature. But, I also find myself remembering the code-switching of my former high school students as a useful key to understanding the dynamics of contemporary bilingual literature. For multilingual authors, switching between two or more languages is not an arbitrary act, nor is it simply an attempt to mimic the speech of their

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communities; code-switching results from a conscious decision to create a desired effect and to promote the validity of authors' heritage languages. Literary code-switching between Spanish and English, English and Chinese, and English and a Native American language, such as Jemez, creates a multiple perspective and enhances the authors' ability to express their subjects. Also, by including their ethnic languages, writers lay claim to the languages of their communities and resist the dominance of English by proposing that these languages can accompany English in the creation of works of US literature.

In an essay entitled 'Discourse in the novel' in *The dialogic imagination*, Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) points out that all literature contains a variety of forms and registers within its national language, a characteristic he refers to as heteroglossia. Heteroglossia, however, may also include the use of *different languages* as well as a multiplicity of varieties within one language, and it is the interactions of these languages and their varieties that are essential, according to Bakhtin, to the genre of the novel: 'The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized' (p. 262).

In light of Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia, the inclusion of languages other than English in US literature is a natural artistic development for the novel (and for other genres of literature as well). Ethnic minorities and their languages are part of the social stratification of the United States, and therefore, a mixture of languages within literary works—and varieties within those languages—reflects the dialogue that occurs regularly within the US. Just as a monolingual writer can achieve varieties of formality and style within one language, a bilingual writer creates those same varieties within both languages.

Spanish/English code-switching

As a variety of Chicano speech, code-switching is sometimes viewed by non-Chicanos, including Anglos, Mexicans and other Latin Americans, to be a low-prestige mode of communication. In *Chicano sociolinguistics*, Fernando Peñalosa (1980) refers to the derogatory term *pochó* as it is used by Mexicans to refer to Chicano code-switching:

The mixed code could be considered a language variety which in certain loci or for certain purposes may be the predominant one. This variety has no widely recognized name but is often called *pochó* or *pochismos*.

The term *pochó* originally meant 'discolored, faded' or referred to a horse whose mane and tail had been clipped. But it was used by Mexicans to refer to their Americanized compatriots in the United States, particularly with reference to their habit of substituting English words in their Spanish speech. (p. 73)

In spite of the negative attitudes that some hold regarding code-switching, linguists who have studied Chicano speech tend to have a positive reaction to the increased linguistic options code-switching provides. Not only can the speakers avail themselves of the resources of both languages, but they can add meaning by choosing when and in what situations to change languages. In a chapter entitled,

'Social cues and language choice: case study of a bilingual child', Alvino E. Fantini (1982) expresses the versatility of the bilingual speaker:

Not only does he command several 'styles' of speech like everyone else, but he also has another option—that of switching from one entire language system to another. He can change from code to code in addition to modifying his speech style within the same code. It is now well documented that such changes in language are not arbitrary nor erratic behavior, but rather are related to identifiable social factors. (p. 89)

Understanding the conditions for code-switching is necessary for fully understanding Chicano literature. In recent years, Chicana and Chicano writers have gained prominence in literature, and particularly since the 1970s, almost all use code-switching to some extent in their writing. Alfred Arteaga explains how the heterotext (a mixture of Spanish and English) reflects the hybrid nature of the *mestizos* (the Mexican race created from the mixture of Spanish and Indian blood). He writes in particular about Chicano authors who must span the differences not only between their Spanish and Indian ancestry, but also between Mexican and Anglo ethnicities. Their use of the heterotext expresses the split they struggle with in their identity as Chicanos and as US Americans (Arteaga, 1997, pp. 24–43).

The work of the Chicana author, Gloria Anzaldúa, offers a clearer understanding of Arteaga's notion of the heterotext. In the preface to her book, *Borderlands/La Frontera: the new mestiza*, Anzaldúa (1987) explains her own use of code-switching and argues for the acceptance of code-switching as a legitimate and vital mode of communication:

The switching of 'codes' in this book from English to Castillian Spanish to the North Mexican 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. Today we ask to be met halfway. (p. viii)

The languages Anzaldúa uses in her book together create the language of the borderlands. Anzaldúa, however, does more than explain her use of codes in *Borderlands* as a reflection of her mixed heritage; she makes an impassioned plea for the acceptance of her language. She recognises the low prestige accorded to Chicano speech by Anglos and by speakers of more standard forms of Spanish, and she firmly refuses to apologise for it any longer. Indeed, in *Borderlands/La Frontera: the new mestiza*, she demonstrates the versatility and artistic potential of code-switching in the hands of a gifted writer.

Anzaldúa's book contains many examples of code-switching. Beyond reflecting common instances in code-switching in Chicano speech, Anzaldúa extends the uses of code-switching in her writing for rhetorical purposes. Rhetorical switches between languages, according to Rosaura Sanchez, may be metonymic (expressing semantic connections), metaphoric (expressing shared or identical traits) or synecdochic (expressing genus–species relationships between expressions) (see Sanchez, 1983,

p. 71). The shifts in language convey a relationship between expressions (although they are stated in different languages) because of the underlying features they have in common. In a metaphorical code-switch, for example, Anzaldúa vividly compares the border to an open wound: 'The US–Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds' (p. 3). By using Spanish to express the open wound, '*es una herida abierta*', Anzaldúa accentuates who it is that bleeds and which culture it is that suffers. The English words surround the Spanish, and with their harsher sounds (such as the 'x' in Mexican, the long 'a' in grate and the 'ee' in bleeds), the English words violently clash against the softer tones of Spanish, aurally emphasising the meaning of her words.

Anzaldúa uses language to emphasise, illustrate and bring alive the splits she sees in herself and in her borderlands culture. The splits and multiple facets of her heritage both frighten and fascinate Anzaldúa as she describes herself gazing at her reflection in a mirror. Switching in the last line to Spanish, she emphasises the multiplicity of her character, as it manifests itself in her appearance, through the multiplicity of language:

During the dark side of the moon something in the mirror catches my gaze, I seem all eyes and nose. Inside my skull something shifts. I 'see' my face. Gloria, the everyday face; Prieta and Prietita, my childhood faces; Gaudi, the face my mother and sister and brothers know. And there in the black, obsidian mirror of the Nahuas is yet another face, a stranger's face. *Simultáneamente me miraba la cara desde distintos ángulos. Y mi cara, como la realidad, tenía un caracter múltiple.* (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 44)²

In this instance, the switch from English to Spanish in Anzaldúa's description of her face does not jar for the reader. As an artist of both languages, Anzaldúa shows how code-switching is not so much a change from one language to the other as it is a continuous discourse, drawing upon the resources of both languages to express coherent thoughts and images. The flow from one language to the other, in this case without the 'grating' of the previous example, emphasises Anzaldúa's own efforts to integrate the different aspects of her multiple character.

In a stanza from '*El otro México*', Anzaldúa uses repetition in both English and Spanish to emphasise the split she feels not only physically, but culturally, as one who lives along the border:

1,950 mile-long open wound
dividing a *pueblo*, a culture,
running down the length of my body,
staking fence rods in my flesh,
splits me splits me
me raja me raja. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 2)

Anzaldúa uses Spanish twice in this passage, first to refer to the Mexican people, *a pueblo*. The use of Spanish in this instance underscores her identification with her people, a common use for code-switching. She then translates 'splits me' into Spanish, '*me raja*'. In each language she repeats the words, emphasising the emotional intensity of feeling culturally, linguistically and even physically torn apart. Here Anzaldúa's poetry works with the contrasting sounds of both languages and

with the visual surface of the page to show aurally and visually the split that so characterises her life.

The mixing of cultures and languages along the Mexican/US border can have a synergistic effect, creating a third mode of expression that leads to a more multidimensional understanding of human life in general. In *Chicano poetry: a response to chaos*, Juan Bruce-Novoa (1982) writes about how expression in two intermixing languages transcends what cannot be expressed by either language alone: ‘The mixing of two languages I call interlingualism, because the two languages are put into a state of tension which produces a third, an “inter” possibility of language. “Bilingualism” implies moving from one language code to another; “interlingualism” implies the constant tension of the two at once’ (p. 226n).

Interlingualism proves particularly effective for expressing the intermixing of cultures in the borderlands. Cultural figures such as the Virgin of Guadalupe encompass more than one culture, and in her case, she represents tolerance and acceptance as opposed to division and ostracism. As the legend goes, the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to Juan Diego in 1531 with dark features: dark hair, skin and eyes. She spoke to Juan Diego in Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs. She combined the Spanish culture of Catholicism with the language, appearance and culture of the Indians, thereby symbolising a melding of the different cultures. To this day, the Virgin of Guadalupe has tremendous appeal to Mexicans, Mexican Americans and others who live along the border. She serves as a mediator between cultures, and in Catholic belief, as a mediator between God and humans; she defends the oppressed. Discussing the mediating qualities of the Virgin of Guadalupe, Anzaldúa, fittingly, uses both English and Spanish, but she goes beyond the literal meanings of what is said in both languages. She achieves the third possibility of interlingualism:

During the Mexican Revolution, Emiliano Zapata and Miguel Hidalgo used [the Virgin of Guadalupe’s] image to move *el pueblo mexicano* toward freedom. During the 1965 grape strike in Delano, California and in subsequent Chicano farmworkers’ marches in Texas and other parts of the Southwest, her image on banners heralded and united the farmworkers. *Pachucos* (zoot suiters) tattoo her image on their bodies. ... In Texas she is considered the patron Saint of Chicanos. *Cuando Carito, mi hermanito*, was missing in action and, later, wounded in Viet Nam, *mi mamá* got on her knees *y le prometió a Ella que si su hijito volvía vivo* she would crawl on her knees and light novenas in her honor. (Anzaldúa, 1987, pp. 29–30)

This passage illustrates Anzaldúa’s use of Spanish within an English narrative to accomplish several different purposes. A reference to the Mexican people is made in *el pueblo mexicano*, and as would be expected, is stated in Spanish to show her identification with her people. The Spanish slang term *Pachucos* appears in Spanish to refer to a particular group of young Mexican American men that have been born in the United States, have taken on US ways, dress in a manner that expresses their rebellion against mainstream US culture and speak in a Spanish/English slang (*Pachuco* is an example of this particular slang). When speaking of her little brother, Carito, and of her mother (both references to family), Anzaldúa’s language is Spanish, the language of the home. Finally, the most intensely felt line, *y le prometió a*

Ella que si su hijito volvía vivo (and she promised her that if her son returned alive), is expressed in Spanish, the language used within the family, to foreground the emotion of the mother's promise and her concern for her son's life. Furthermore, Anzaldúa's switch to Spanish when speaking about her younger brother reveals the irony of a young, Spanish-speaking Chicano caught up in a war perpetrated by a dominant, white culture that does not fully accept him or his language. Working together, all of these switches between Spanish and English underscore not only the bicultural identity of the Virgin of Guadalupe, but also portray the bicultural tensions within the author herself.

Lorna Dee Cervantes, also a Chicana poet, uses the two languages in a manner similar to Anzaldúa to create a linguistic split that portrays the cultural in-betweenness felt by the narrator in the poem 'Refugee Ship'. The last stanza of the poem reads:

I feel I am a captive
 aboard the refugee ship.
 The ship that will never dock.
El barco que nunca atraca. (Cervantes, 1981, p. 41)

Although the last line merely repeats in Spanish the meaning of the previous line in English, it is a repetition with a difference. The use of the two languages in the repetition alone deepens the meaning of the lines and reveals to the reader how adrift the narrator feels between the two languages and the two cultures. The repetition also gives a sense of finality; the ship will never dock, the narrator will never find a home port. The last two lines, in the two different languages, intensify the feeling of dislocation much more so than when the same poem is written entirely in Spanish (see Cervantes, 1981, p. 40).

These brief examples show how code-switching can intensify the meaning of an author's words both visually and aurally. So too in everyday speech, code-switching adds extra layers of meaning, defines situations and expresses ethnic identity simply through the chosen language. As has been shown, code-switching is not the arbitrary use of one language or another, nor the interference of words from one language in another, nor an indication that the speaker lacks the ability to communicate completely in either language. It is a structured system which allows the author to make shifts according to the situation and the effect he or she hopes to produce in a reader.

While some bilingual authors, like Anzaldúa, use code-switching extensively in their writing, often incorporating long passages in Spanish without translation, others code-switch more sparingly. These authors may be concerned that they will lose their monolingual, English-speaking audience if they code-switch too frequently, and therefore, may only code-switch from English to Spanish with single words or short phrases.³ In *Movements in Chicano poetry*, Rafael Pérez-Torres (1995) comments on this concern:

One practical problem in teaching Chicano poetry—or writing about it—has to do ... with the audience's proficiency in languages. At the very least, one would hope that an aversion to Spanish would not preclude communication. Although for many people

responding to a 'foreign' language on the printed page is disorienting, to find this 'foreign' tongue *interalia* imprinted within native speech approaches a violation. (p. 212)

Authors concerned about losing their monolingual, English audience, however, have employed numerous techniques to avoid alienating these readers. For instance, an author might work an English translation into the flow of the text or might use a rhetorical code-switch, such as the synecdochic form of code-switching (expressing genus-species relations), to make the Spanish intelligible to a reader who may know nothing or very little of the language. Both translation and synecdochic code-switching appear in Pat Mora's novel, *House of houses*. First some examples of translation:

He sits with us at the blue kitchen table, and in his rough, teasing mode asks his sister who sees only shadows, our oldest living relative, '¿Y tú cómo estás? No me digas que estás enferma otra vez,' entreating her not to say she's sick again. (Mora, 1997, p. 1)

'Planta flores con nombres religiosos como Varitas de San José,' says Mamá Cleta, my great-great grandmother exhorting me to plant flowers with religious names ... I make a note to look for *Manto de la Virgen*, Virgin's Bower, *Flor de San Juan*, Evening Primrose in English, and *Flor de Santa Rita*, Indian Paintbrush. (Mora, 1997, p. 9)

Often Mora will incorporate Spanish into dialogue, allowing her to translate the Spanish into English by replacing a simple 'he said' or 'she said' with a phrase such as 'entreating her not to ...' or 'exhorting me to ...' which allows her to provide an explanation of what has been said in Spanish. In this way the reader has the cultural flavour of hearing or reading Spanish, yet feels as though he or she understands the language as Mora rarely allows the non-Spanish-speaking reader to be left behind. When she does use Spanish without translation, the phrases are short, simple, and are either understandable from context or are phrases with which most US readers would be familiar even if they have never studied Spanish, such as '¿Cómo estás?'

Synecdochic code-switching also includes the reader who does not understand Spanish by making it possible for the author to state the subject of discussion in English first, and then to provide the details in Spanish. Even if the reader misses the details, he or she will not lose the meaning of the passage overall. This works especially well when the details are either discernible by context or are words that even a non-Spanish-speaking reader might know. Mora makes use of this type of code-switch in *House of houses* as seen in the following examples:

December 31, 1899, the end of a century. Mamá Nina looks around her living room at her entire family, formally dressed, sleepy after the soup-to-dessert dinner, *sopa de verduras, pollo, arroz, camote, natillas y galletitas con café*, poised to welcome the new year. (Mora, 1997, p. 49)

and

In Spanish, Señora de la Torre's daughters teach my mother and her brothers their catechism and to beware of *los Protestantes*. 'Never walk in front of a Protestant church. Cross the street.' The Delgado children learn their prayers,

*Santo ángel de mi guardia,
 Mi dulce compañía
 No me desampares
 Ni de noche, ni de día.* (Mora, 1997, p. 58)

Although the reader may not understand every Spanish word, he or she is not excluded because the context for the Spanish is clearly given in English. In the first example, the Spanish words are obviously foods. In the second example, what follows the English is clearly a prayer. Through the use of Spanish, made understandable to the English-speaking reader, Mora allows the reader to enter into the culture of the novel by means of language and to share in the intimacy of the family.

In their article, 'Marked and unmarked choices of code switching in bilingual poetry', Eva Mendieta-Lombardo and Zaida A. Cintron (1995) look at the nature of code-switching in terms of marked (unexpected) and unmarked (expected) choices made by a poet regarding when to code-switch. First they divide bilingual poems into two groups, one that does not require a bilingual readership and one that does. The first group is characterised by code-switching that 'consists mainly of culturally loaded Spanish words and phrases, items intimately connected to ethnic identity, yet familiar to those outside the bilingual community' (Mendieta-Lombardo & Cintron, 1995, p. 567). Although for a general audience this type of code-switching would still be considered marked, if only to a slight degree, for a bilingual audience, the switch would seem expected and, therefore, unmarked. The second category of bilingual poems, those that require bilingual proficiency on the part of the reader, will still be 'unmarked or expected in informal in-group communication among bilingual peers' (p. 569). Therefore, according to Mendieta-Lombardo and Cintron, even poetry with a high degree of code-switching would be expected in a bilingual community because it would reflect the members' manner of communicating. For monolingual speakers of English, however, this type of bilingual poetry would be highly marked and probably inaccessible to the reader. While both types of Spanish/English poetry (highly marked and only slightly marked for monolingual English readers) commonly exist in the United States, authors that choose to switch between English and a language that is not as widely known as Spanish face an even greater chance of alienating their readers.

Code-switching between English and languages other than Spanish

Authors who are bilingual in English and another language other than Spanish, such as Chinese or a Native American language, have a more difficult task if they wish to code-switch. They cannot rely on their US readers to know even basic, simple vocabulary. As soon as an author inserts a word of Chinese without an explanation, for example, that portion of the work containing the Chinese expression becomes significantly marked and inaccessible for most US readers. Therefore, writers who wish to include their non-English language in their writing, yet still reach a monolingual, English-speaking audience, mostly code-switch on a limited basis. They make the meaning of the non-English passages clear from context or provide translations or explanations of marked passages.

As we shall see, even with a language that is not widely known in the US, the use of the author's heritage language in a work strengthens the tie between the author's work and the heritage culture, making that culture more accessible to the reader. In her novel *Typical American*, Gish Jen (1992) frequently uses expressions from Chinese to enrich the cultural sense of the novel, and she provides explanations or direct translations to keep the monolingual, English reader from becoming confused. In the following examples, the English translations follow directly after the Chinese:

'Lazy,' says his father. *'Stupid. What do you do besides eat and sleep all day?'* The upright scholar, the ex-government official, calls him a *fan tong*—a rice barrel. (Jen, 1992, p. 4)

His father looks away. *'Opposites begin in one another,'* he says. And, *'Yi dai qing qing, qi dai hua'*—one generation pure, the next good for nothing. (Jen, 1992, p. 5)

Jen does not try, as Mora did, to integrate the translation smoothly into the text. She simply repeats the Chinese phrase in English. Whereas Mora can assume that many of her readers would understand the Spanish and, therefore, finds a way to translate the Spanish into English without appearing redundant, Jen can safely assume that most of her readers will not understand Chinese and thus does not have to worry about redundancy. However, since most of her readers will not understand the Chinese at all, she uses it sparingly. Yet some Chinese even when it must be directly translated, gives the reader a sense of contact with the culture and of being privy to the family conversations.

To convey the sense that Chinese is being spoken even when the author is writing in English, Jen uses italics when her characters are supposed to be speaking in Chinese—even though the words on the page are in English. Thus, when two Chinese speakers are speaking to each other, and would normally be speaking in Chinese, the dialogue is set in italics. In this manner, her characters code-switch in their speech, as they naturally might, without the author switching from English:

Today Janis took me to this house with a winding walkway. Really darling! However, it was very overpriced, they're going to have trouble selling it for anything near what they're asking. And yesterday I saw a breakfast nook with built-in benches—. (Jen, 1992, p. 152)

With the italics, Jen gives the reader the impression that he or she is following along and understanding the conversation in Chinese. The switches from italicised to unitalicised words give the sense that the characters are code-switching between Chinese and English. The language remains English, but the English is presented, at times, in a manner to make it intentionally different. The code-switching in the above example takes place according to a general use of code-switching. Words associated directly with US culture, in this case domestic architecture and the housing market, words such as 'winding walkway', 'overpriced' and 'breakfast nook with built-in benches', are not italicised, indicating they are spoken in English. This simulated code-switching not only allows a more intimate glimpse into the life of the character, since the reader can understand the character's 'Chinese' language, but also, the character's use of typical, up-scale American English expressions when discussing real estate emphasises her ambition to buy into the American Dream.

Gish Jen often presents aspects of Chinese culture (as practiced and perpetuated by Chinese Americans) through direct explanations of Chinese cultural concepts, including Chinese terms. To illustrate a concept, she will sometimes relate it to the Chinese language and provide her readers with a short language lesson. In the following passage, Jen describes what she sees as a Chinese cultural attitude of being able to do only so much, of not expecting too much of oneself. She relates this to a grammatical structure, sometimes referred to in introductory Chinese courses as the resultative verb, that indicates whether an undertaken action had the expected results. Below, Ralph, the main character of *Typical American*, is chastised by his mother for not listening during his lessons:

... finally, irked, she says what his tutor always says, ‘*You listen but don’t hear!*’—distinguishing, the way the Chinese will, between effort and result. Verbs in English are simple. One listens. After all, why should a listening person not hear? What’s taken for granted in English, though, is spelled out in Chinese; there’s even a verb construction for this purpose. *Ting de jian* in Mandarin means, one listens and hears. *Ting bu jian* means, one listens but fails to hear. People hear what they can, see what they can, do what they can; that’s the understanding. It’s an old culture talking. Everywhere there are limits. (Jen, 1992, p. 4)

In this succinct manner, Gish Jen relates an aspect of Chinese culture and language, but also lets us know something about Ralph, the main character of *Typical American*. Ralph will travel to the United States, but his tendency to listen without hearing foreshadows his misadventures. Because Ralph cannot let go of the influence of the ‘old culture’, he excuses his limitations and does not push himself to achieve in the US. Consequently, he falls prey to people who seek to use and dominate him.

The concept of change occurring between two opposites (*yin* and *yang*) in a waxing, waning fashion is central to the Chinese classic *The book of changes*, and to the Chinese world-view in general. Gish Jen uses the concept in *Typical American* in the chapter entitled ‘Chang-Kees’ to indicate the Chang family’s cultural transformation from Chinese to US American. Again the concept is presented as a mini language lesson: ‘In Mandarin, change is handily expressed: a quick *le* at the end of the sentence will do it, as in *tamen gaoxing le*—now they are happy. Everywhere there are limits, but the thin fattens, the cloudy clears. What’s dry dampens. The barren bears’ (Jen, 1992, p. 123). Gish Jen uses the Chinese language to explain traditional Chinese cultural concepts. By this means she enhances her text by adding an additional layer of Chinese linguistic meaning to her English descriptions of Chinese culture, giving her explanation a multilingual dimension. She also underscores the cultural changes the Changs experience by explaining, in both English and Chinese, how Chinese speakers express a change in a situation.

When a character lacks familiarity with his or her own heritage language, the author might use the situation as an opportunity to explain non-English words to the reader through an explanation given by another character; but sometimes, the author prefers to leave the reader confused as a means of forcing the reader to share in the character’s lack of comprehension. In *House made of dawn*, N. Scott Momaday (1968) expresses his character’s lack of familiarity with his own native language and

purposely avoids giving translations for Native American words that occur in the novel. Momaday rarely inserts Native American words or phrases, but when he does, the reader is often left in the dark. This is not surprising, since on at least one occasion, the main character, Abel, is as confused by the words as is the reader. Abel, cut off from his traditional life in the Jemez Pueblo in New Mexico, finds he is unable to understand the words of his dying grandfather. His grandfather speaks in a state of delirium, but this is not the only reason that Abel cannot understand him. Abel returns to the pueblo after serving as a soldier in World War II and after suffering a harrowing relocation to Los Angeles which leaves his hands physically crushed from a beating and his whole body sick with alcoholism. Since Abel's grandfather, Francisco, is a man of tradition and speaks the old language, Abel cannot understand his grandfather and feels the loneliness and despair of not only losing someone he loves, but also of being cut off from his own roots. While dying, the grandfather speaks in a jumble of Spanish and the language of the Jemez Pueblo:

But each day his voice had grown weaker, until now it was scarcely audible and the words fell together and made no sense: 'Abelito ... *Kethá ahme* ... *Mariano* ... *frío* ... *se dió por* ... *mucho, mucho frío* ... *vencido* ... *aye, Porcingula* ... *que blanco, Abelito* ... *Diablo blanco* ... *Sawish* ... *Sawish* ... *y el hombre negro* ... *sí* ... *muchos hombres negros* ... *corriendo, corriendo* ... *frío* ... *rápidamente* ... *Abelito, Vidalito* ... *ayempah? Ayempah?*' (Momaday, 1968, p. 195)

Without a translation or a context within which to understand these words, the reader shares Abel's frustration. Although individual words may make sense to the reader, particularly the Spanish words, and the reader can recognise some of the words as names of characters in the novel, the overall meaning of the grandfather's attempt to communicate is lost. Since the reader, like Abel, cannot understand all of the grandfather's words, yet knows that the words have importance, the reader can, to some extent, share Abel's anxiety over the loss of language, communication, tradition and his grandfather.

Momaday also uses Native American words at the very beginning of the novel (the first word in the prologue) and at the end (the very last word of the final section). These words, respectively, are *Dypaloh* and *Qtsedaba*. These are traditional words in the Jemez language used to frame an oral storytelling—*Dypaloh* indicating the story is beginning and *Qtsedaba* indicating the end. By framing the story with these words, Momaday inserts the novel into the conventions of oral storytelling. Although these words might be overlooked by all but the most careful readers, their placement provides a context within which a reader might discern their meanings.

Conclusion

By including words from the character's or author's heritage language, multilingual writers in the United States have explored a myriad of ways to introduce multilingual techniques of writing into their texts. Multilingualism adds dimension to the works, changing perspectives with the changes in language, adding a multiplicity to the

work and drawing the reader into a closer understanding of the character's multifaceted culture. The multilingual aspects allow the authors of these works to reclaim their languages, and the languages themselves, when used in literature describing the US context, become less marked and begin to become part of US language. With the reclamation of language comes the reclamation of social power. As Pérez-Torres (1995) states in *Movements in Chicano poetry*:

... the Chicana/[o] transforms the positions of power implicit in the choice of linguistic expression. Language becomes a marker of displacement and reclamation, a marker of self-identity and self-empowerment. It is also a way of manifesting history with every word. The presence of Spanish is a presence through history of discrimination and exploitation. Every Spanish word represents a refusal to capitulate to English ethnocentricity. (p. 227)

Works that use multilingual techniques make it abundantly clear that some residents of the US speak languages other than English, and that these languages are capable of a full range of expression and can depict circumstances and feelings of multicultural life that are unique to the US.

Using languages besides English in US literature does not reduce the status of English, as some fear. In the introduction to *Multilingual America*, Werner Sollors (1998) writes about the advantages of making a move from an 'English only' to an 'English plus' approach to US literature (pp. 1–13). He emphasises the acceptance of other languages in the United States as a necessary impetus for social change for minority-language people. Sollors asks the question:

Would not a focus on 'English plus other languages' mean a further strengthening of English as the public language and a clearer understanding of language rights of minorities (and thus be likely to reduce social conflicts), bringing about a higher degree of literacy in English as well as more bilingual and multilingual fluency for everybody ... ? (Sollors, 1998, p. 3)

The answer to Sollors's question must be 'yes'. In teaching multilingual works, one must show the richness multiple languages can bring to a work and reassure students that the addition of one language does not erase the other. The alternative, 'English only', not only forces authors to stifle their native and heritage languages, but also ignores the diverse, linguistic environment of the United States and precludes students from experiencing the transcendent, expressive possibilities of interlingualism.

Notes on contributor

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and between: multiple perspectives in ethnic literature of the United States, which examines various narrative strategies used to reflect their characters' bicultural lives.

Notes

1. Here Chicano indicates people of Mexican heritage born in the United States.
2. Translation: Simultaneously I saw my face from various angles. And my face, like the reality, had a multiple character.
3. Some linguists would argue that insertions of single words in Spanish in an otherwise English literary piece do not constitute code-switching. However, since this article is primarily focused on the artistic effect of switching between Spanish and English, the extensive discussion of code-switching versus borrowing is beyond the scope of this study. For a discussion of the differences between borrowing and code-switching, see Carol Myers-Scotton (1993, pp. 163–207).

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