

Embracing the Second Soul:
Bilingualism in Caribbean-American Spanish-English Texts

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Abstract

While some critical works have been written acknowledging multilingualism in contemporary literature, much of the criticism written about bilingual Hispanic literature has been unfairly one-dimensional. At times, the use of both languages is ignored, or seen as a superfluous aesthetic choice, while at others, the use of Spanish is recognized without truly being analyzed. Even when an author's bilingual texts are recognized as such, the criticism tunnels its focus on a single work without examining the work in a larger context.

It is therefore the purpose of this dissertation to begin to fill this gap by examining three Caribbean-American authors and their bilingual works: *Soledad* and *Let It Rain Coffee* by Angie Cruz; *La vida es un special*, *Raining Backwards*, and *En la Ocho y la Doce*, by Roberto G. Fernández, and *Language Duel/Duelo del lenguaje* by Rosario Ferré. I consider why each author chose to include both Spanish and English in the texts that I study. What is the discursive or sociolinguistic purpose of this bilingualism within the texts? Do the authors use their bilingualism in similar ways, or are their bilingual uses different? Furthermore, as each of the works that I study was published in the United States, I also consider the effect of the texts' bilingualism on a monolingual reader. How much access does a monolingual English reader have to each specific text?

While this study of the bilingualism of three authors is only the beginning of the study of U.S. Latino writers who write bilingually, it provides one blueprint for how to begin studying works published in the U.S. and written in both Spanish and English. It acknowledges that bilingual works each use their language uniquely, and encourages readers to cast a critical eye at why an author has chosen to incorporate more than one language into the text. In this way, I hope this dissertation spurs future study of the

bilingual nature of texts, and thus continues to encourage writers to take advantage of any or all of their personal languages so that Spanish continues to thrive within the U.S.

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Introduction

To have another language is to possess a second soul.
-Charlemagne

In August of 2017, Simon Romero of the New York Times published the article, “Spanish Thrives in the U.S. Despite an English-Only Drive.” In it, he states that, despite multiple states enacting English-only laws and President Trump’s campaign promise to require English before obtaining a green card, the United States “exemplifies how the movement of people throughout the Spanish-Speaking world is taking the language in new directions.” One of these many directions can be seen in Latino literature published in the United States by authors that identify, at least tangentially, as American. Many of these works speak to the importance of Spanish to the heritage or identity of the authors and characters, either through explicit lamentations or through use of both of the authors’ languages in their text.

While some critical works have been written acknowledging multilingualism in contemporary literature, most notably Evelyn Nien-Ming Ch’ien’s *Weird English*, much of the criticism written specifically about Hispanic literature written bilingually has been unfairly one-dimensional. At times, the use of both languages is ignored, or seen as a superfluous aesthetic choice¹, while at others, the use of Spanish is recognized without truly being analyzed². Even when an author’s bilingual texts are recognized as such, the criticism tunnels its focus on a single work of a single author without examining the work

¹ See, for example, Kirkus Reviews’ review of *Soledad*, which refers to Cruz’s “unnecessary Spanish.”

² Consider, for example, Guillermo B. Irizarry’s article, “Cadavers Encountered: Identification and Community in US Latino/a Cultural Production.”

in a larger context that acknowledges that each bilingual work, even by the same author, might not use its two languages to the same extent or with the same purpose.

It is therefore the purpose of this dissertation to begin to fill this gap in the scholarship by examining three Caribbean-American authors and their bilingual works. In so doing, I will consider why each author, all of whom have also published monolingual works, chose to include both Spanish and English in the texts that I study. What is the discursive or sociolinguistic purpose of this bilingualism within the texts? Do the authors use their bilingualism in similar ways, or are their bilingual uses different?

Furthermore, as each of the works that I study was published in the United States, it is not an absurd assumption that at least part of the audience is viewed to be monolingually English-speaking. Is the bilingualism of each work sufficient to discourage or even alienate a monolingual English reader? If not, how much access does a monolingual English reader truly have to each specific text?

To answer these questions, I have organized my dissertation into four chapters. The first chapter examines necessary sociolinguistic theory in regards to bilingualism. In it, I will consider the different ways that bilinguals speak to other bilinguals as opposed to how they speak to monolinguals, including a discussion of the sociolinguistic functions of code-switching. I will also examine the societal view of bilingualism within the United States, since it is the setting of each of the works studied in this dissertation. In particular, I will consider the perspectives that U.S. society has in regards to Spanish-English bilingualism and Spanish-speakers.

In chapter 2, I turn to the close reading of the primary texts. I begin with Dominican-American Angie Cruz's two novels, *Soledad* and *Let It Rain Coffee*. In this chapter, I will

analyze the ways in which characters in each novel differ in their personal bilingualism. I examine the ways in which each character's voice represents a unique blend of Spanish and English, both in the way that each character uses and perceives their language. I conclude that, while it does not alienate monolingual English readers, Cruz's bilingualism nonetheless serves an important part of her novels' character development, and provides more depth of understanding to these characters, their motivations, and obstacles than can be achieved solely by reading the English text.

In chapter 3, I turn to Cuban-American Roberto G. Fernández and three of his works: *La vida es un special*, *Raining Backwards*, and *En la Ocho y la Doce*. I will compare these works through two lenses. First, I will examine the ways in which their very different uses of both Spanish and English predispose each work to different audiences, at times to the extent that some audiences are excluded. In the second half of the chapter, I will compare the discourse on bilingualism that each novel presents, showing how Fernández endorses bilingualism in each text, but also examines the issues that both monolingualism and bilingualism present to characters and readers.

In my final chapter, I turn to Puerto Rican Rosario Ferré and her book of poetry, *Language Duel/Duelo del lenguaje*, which presents each poem both in the original Spanish and in self-translated English. In the chapter, I will examine the ways in which Ferré presents this proposed "language duel" between Spanish and English, thus analyzing the source and implications of the conflict as the book presents it, including the book's encouragement of cultural and linguistic bilingualism in its readers. I will also consider the ways Ferré's self-translation is a continuation of this proposed duel by studying how

reading the Spanish and the English side-by-side, rather than choosing one or the other, provides a deeper level of analysis to the poem and the book in turn.

It is my hope that through close-readings of these texts, which all use both Spanish and English very differently, I can begin to lay a framework for the reading of bilingual texts in such a way that both languages are given their proper weight in the scholarship. However, before entering into the analysis of the primary works, let us first consider the sociolinguistic implications of language contact in the United States.

Chapter 1: A Review of Bilingualism in Literature and Linguistics

A brief examination of the linguistic study of bilingualism can undoubtedly inform our understanding of the impact that language contact between Spanish and English has in the United States, on both a personal and national level, and particularly as reflected in both the authors and the primary works studied in this dissertation. However, as this study focuses on literature, it should be noted that the linguistic theory presented here is meant to serve as an overview, rather than as a comprehensive evaluation of all of the language-related topics discussed, for most of which decades worth of scholarship exists. My purpose in introducing this research is to understand first, the reasons that linguists have proposed for a bilingual's use of one language over another, second, the impact of multiple language use in society generally, and finally, the situation of Spanish and Spanish-English bilingualism within the United States specifically. Each of these three components will offer important insight into the readings of the primary works in the following chapters.

Review of Scholarship on Multilingual Literature

By far the most cited book relating to bilingualism in literature is Evelyn Nien-Ming Ch'ien's *Weird English* (2004). The book opens with the recognition that more and more English language literature is being written in what she calls "weird English": English that blends one or more languages in a way that is often and purposefully unintelligible except to specific minority in-groups. Her aim in studying these works and their language is "to show that weird English constitutes the new language of literature and that it brings new literary theory into being" (4). Specifically, she wants to emphasize and show how the "use of weird English is a calculated effort . . . a conscious appropriation of hybridity" (5). This

conscious and calculated effort is important to show that part of the aesthetic of a multilingual work is its “weird English,” and therefore this inclusion of other languages is worthy of further academic study. In addition to the aesthetic value of weird English, she asserts, “varieties of English are codes for communities – the less orthodox and more subversive, the stronger the impact” (5). The use of weird English marks a book and its author as part of a group of outsiders, but it is a political and social choice to subvert the status quo of monolingualism – by using weird English, the monolingual English-dominant reader is actually the one outside of the community of readers. Indeed, Ch’ien states that this inaccessibility is purposeful: “The best uses of weird English are terrible in their intelligibility, because they demonstrate that certain lives are linguistically disenfranchised and thus that some communities are excluded from mainstream discourse” (11). This political component to the language allows her to study “how weird-English writers become conscious of language as a practice of their ethnicity” (20).

The value of this book cannot be understated in the study of bilingual works. However, it is limited in two key ways. The very nature of being the first major work of its kind means that she could not study all or even a majority of authors who wrote bilingually; she studies only five (Vladimir Nabokov, Maxine Hong Kingston, Arundhati Roy, Junot Díaz and Salman Rushdie). While her choice of authors makes sense, in that it allows her to study different time periods and ethnicities, it does not allow a deeper look into one specific blend of languages, or into the far wider (and growing) list of multilingual authors. However, this limitation in *Weird English* presents the opportunity for further scholarship on the many bilingual texts that Ch’ien did not study.

The second limitation of *Weird English* is the focus on the authors themselves. While Ch'ien makes extensive use of quotations from each author's primary works in her arguments, the conclusions drawn focus on those authors. For example, in her chapter on Díaz she writes about his personal reasons for using weird English:

For Díaz, the presence of Spanish signifies explosive agency and lack of self-consciousness simultaneously . . . Spanish is both an expression outside the American majority and the language that brings *him* into a psychological comfort zone. (208, my emphasis)

While this is solidly backed up with quotations from both novels and interviews, it limits the text's weird English to a representation of the author, not of the characters of the work or the complexities of a community the author might experience but not embody. It is my hope that, by focusing on the texts rather than the authors in this study, I can separate text from author, and thus look at the multiple and evolving languages or language blends that an author might produce, and differentiate the purpose of this variety or evolution.

Also relevant to the establishment of a theory for reading multilingual literature is Maria Lauret's *Wanderwords*. In this work, Lauret focuses on migrant writing in which "fragments of other languages . . . set up camp in English only temporarily" (1). She describes these fragments as wanderwords: words or phrases from non-English languages and usually marked by italics, whose purpose is to "disrupt, enchant, occlude or highlight the taken-for-granted English of American literature and can thereby perform wonders of poetic signification as well as cultural critique" (2). What is perhaps most helpful about her analysis is that it "stresses movement and trajectories, rather than attachment to sought-for or invented origins," meaning that she looks for movements, change, and travel (7). For

Laurent, an author's (or character's) use of non-English language has less to do with their ethnicity or roots, and more to do with their movements into and out of different environments. Furthermore, like Ch'ien, she focuses on the foreign feeling of these wanderwords, describing "the opacity of language itself as *material*, but material pregnant with social and cultural meaning and the intentions of others" (66, emphasis original).

Indeed, she argues for the importance of reading multilingual American texts "creatively, imaginatively and *in difference*" rather than "seeking to domesticate [them] in translation or explication" (66, emphasis original). Less helpful for my particular work is that she is not a Spanish speaker, and, while she does include Spanish-English bilingual authors (Junot Díaz, Susana Chávez-Silverman, Gloria Anzaldúa), she does so as a monolingual English reader. However, she notes that these multilingual works are aware of their monolingual audience and what they might not be able to read:

The paradox of reading bi- or multilingually without adequate knowledge of all the languages involved is not that you don't know what you are missing (as a monolingual reader reliant on translation would) but that you do, and this is the point. (232)

This recognition of the intentional gaps might assume too much as to whether or not all multilingual authors truly *intend* for their monolingual audience to not understand their non-English language. Nonetheless, the fact that a monolingual audience is missing out on the in-group non-English language is critical to understanding any multilingual work. For example, a work written multilingually but with a clear glossary of all non-English words functions differently with its monolingual audience than does a work that unapologetically refuses both translation and italics, as a novel by Junot Díaz does. It is for this reason that

one of the questions that this dissertation addresses to all of the primary works studied is the readability and accessibility of the Spanish to a non-Spanish-speaking reader.

Among articles that have had a significant impact on the study of multilingual or Spanish-English bilingual writing, linguist John Lipski's "Spanish-English Language Switching in Speech and Literature: Theories and Models" is helpful in establishing that "writing involves a clear exercise of self-consciousness" (192) and thus "[i]t is obvious that language switching in literature is not the result of confusion or inability to separate the languages, but rather stems from a conscious desire to juxtapose the two codes to achieve some literary effect" (191). As we will see later, code-switching in literature is thus similar to oral code-switching in that it is intentional. Similarly, another linguist, Cecilia Montes-Alcalá, studied a corpus of 34 poems, six plays and three works of fictional prose from Chicano, Cuban American and Nuyorican authors and cataloged each switch within the works. Her intention was to classify the various functions of the code-switching incidents and match them to known purposes of oral code-switching. The study identified five major uses of code-switching (or *CS*) in the corpus studied: (from least to most common) quotations, emphasis, stylistic reasons, clarification or elaboration, and lexical or cultural need. The conclusions of the study indicate that "literary *CS* is quite representative of the bilingual speech community rather than purely rhetorical inasmuch as the works analyzed conformed to at least one, if not all, of the pre-conditions that have been established in previous studies for literary *CS* to be deemed 'authentic'" (276). She also notes that "biculturalism, not just bilingualism, accounts for the vast majority of switches found in the corpora" (277). In line with other studies on bilingual literature, the article concludes that language choice marks the work and the author as inhabiting a specific, multicultural space

within the United States. These two studies are helpful in showing that analyses on oral code-switching and bilingualism can be applied to written CS; they further demonstrate the validity of studying the purpose and use of a second language within a given text.

Torres expands upon these ideas in the article “In the Contact Zone: Code-Switching Strategies by Latino/a Writers” by pointing out the cultural or contextual choices that might also be implied in literary code-switching: “Given language politics in the US, a writer’s linguistic choice can be a political act, but it also speaks to the reality of the market place” (77). That is to say that using (or refusing to use) one or the other language in work can make a political statement about the right to use a given language, but, especially in the cases of works published by large or mainstream publishing houses, also must grapple with the reality that readership is “largely imagined as a monolingual English speaker. Questions of italicizing Spanish, providing translations, and adding glossaries must be negotiated between authors, editors and publishers” (77). The article continues by providing brief categorizations of bilingual Latino/a texts. In the first, listed as the most common, only Spanish words obvious through context are allowed, and then only to “Latinize” the text (78). The second option is one in which more obscure Spanish is offered, followed by an English translation. Torres’ article points out that both of these strategies create an exotic text, but also one in which the “monolingual is catered to and the bilingual reader must endure redundant references” (78). I have tried to avoid these types of texts in this dissertation and instead have focused on texts that meet the article’s last and least common option, in which Spanish appears without translation, italics or being marked as foreign in any way. As this article points out, this last category seems to prioritize the bilingual reader and “may cause instances of discomfort or annoyance to the monolingual reader” (78).

Since this group of texts has the largest possibility of alienating a large portion of their potential readership, it is these that I am most interested in, first to see the exact extent to which the monolingual readership is alienated, and second, to see what the minority language does in the text that makes it integral enough to the text for the author to risk alienating readership.

Torres's article does acknowledge that texts by Latino/a writers provide a range of linguistic strategies in regard to the two languages presented, which "make clear that there is not just one English or even one Spanish/English bilingual experience; they capture the multiple ways in which Spanish is seeping into the English language prose texts" (92). This too points to one of my goals in this study: to examine how authors and texts can be bilingual in different ways, and to push questions of bilingualness beyond a binary ("is it or isn't it?") analysis and into a more complex ("in what way is it?") frame of thinking. Naturally, this does require a close reading of the texts and their particular brand of bilingualism to understand its specific and particular effects within the work.

In addition to the scholarly attention paid to multilingual literature as an overarching group, there is also important scholarship that specifically considers Spanish-English bilingualism in literature. The first is Ilan Stavans's *Spanglish: The Making of a New American Language*. While most of the book is devoted to a Spanglish-English dictionary, the introduction provides important information about Stavans's considerations of Spanglish as a phenomenon. In some ways, he is – or has been throughout his academic life – conflicted about Spanglish. He recognizes that many consider it "the tongue of the uneducated . . . a hodgepodge" (3) and associated with the lower, less educated classes of Spanish-English bilinguals (17). On the other hand, he expresses his ever-growing

admiration for Spanglish (3), and an acknowledgement that, although Spanglish might originally be associated with the lower class, “it is the lower class where the most spontaneous aspects of culture are to be found. Sooner or later, others steal away those aspects, turning them into highbrow items” (17). This latter role is in some ways the purpose of his book – giving a dictionary and legitimacy to an already existent phenomenon that Stavans and others had been using for years.

On the other hand, Stavans acknowledges the limitations of his own project. He points to criticism against the *Real Academia Española* (RAE) to underscore that such a Spanglish dictionary is necessary; the RAE is highly unlikely to start including non-traditional words on a grand scale (31). On the other hand, a major limitation is that “there is really not one Spanglish but many” (13). It is a sentiment that López García-Molins echoes when he describes “[l]a enorme variación lingüística que se observa en el Spanglish” (39). To create a single dictionary of Spanglish – especially one on paper that is thus difficult to update in a timely manner – is almost impossible. Stavans’s dictionary does include words from a variety of dialects and origins, but he himself acknowledges that his dictionary could never include each Spanglish word that might exist.

A question that might arise out of Stavans’s work is whether or not Spanglish can be defined linguistically as a language or as a dialect. As Romaine points out in *Language and Society*, language and dialect “are not linguistic but rather social matters” (1). The lines between them are established by societal constructs, not linguistic definitions. Penny comes to similar conclusions in his work *Variation and Change in Spanish*. He asserts that what we now consider languages (English, French, etc.) begin as dialects of other languages and thus “it follows that there cannot be any difference of kind between these concepts, but

only differences of degree” (9). Furthermore, since Spanglish does not have a universally accepted definition, my use of the term, given that I study how each author uses his or her Spanish and English differently, must necessarily include a great deal of flexibility in terms of lexical choice, semantics, grammar, and degree. I will not wholly avoid the term throughout the dissertation, but my use of it does not – cannot – imply that all Spanglish, even in this dissertation, is the same.

Also important to consider are the thoughts on bilingualism that Gustavo Pérez-Firmat provides in his work, *Life on the Hyphen*, which continues to be a seminal work in U.S. Latino and Cuban-American studies. In the work, he defines the *one-and-a-half generation*, into which he places himself. For Pérez-Firmat, the one-and-a-half generation describes those immigrants who were born in Cuba and moved to the United States before they were adults. Specifically, they lived in Cuba long enough to remember it, but moved early enough to spend many or all of their formative years in the United States. The expanded 2012 edition of *Life on the Hyphen* includes an additional seventh chapter that speaks directly to the topic of this dissertation: Spanish and English language use in Cuban-American literature. While he does acknowledge that Cuban-American literature at the time of his writing does tend to be published in English, he tries to differentiate it from other Latino writing: “unlike Latino literature, in which the Spanish language tends to be used ornamentally, as a dash of Latin spice or a dab of exotic color, Cuban-American literature has not abandoned the Spanish language” (173). Although I strongly disagree with the first part of his statement (see Chapters 2 and 4 on Dominican-American Angie Cruz and Puerto Rican Rosario Ferré, respectively), he provides interesting insights into some of the limitations of generalizing Cuban-American writers’ language preferences. As

he points out, generational differences do not account for all or even most of their language choices, and only some can be said to be using language as a sort of “existential appraisal, an assessment of who one is as a person and a writer” (174). This assessment lends credence to the need to deeply study each author’s individual language usage in his or her works, as sweeping generalizations (ironically like the one Pérez Firmat makes about non-Cuban Latino literature) rarely stand up to academic scrutiny.

Bilingual Speech

Before beginning to examine how linguistics, particularly sociolinguistics, has studied bilinguals, it is necessary first to actually define bilingualism. However, this is not as simple as it might appear. In Romaine’s book, *Bilingualism*, the author addresses multiple studies that have defined bilingualism in a variety of ways, from complete, native-like control in two languages, to minimal meaningful production in the second language, to passive or receptive bilingualism, in which the speaker can understand his or her second language but cannot produce it (10). There is no current consensus on the definition of bilingualism in the field of linguistics, as each study will define the term most appropriately for their subjects. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will be using the definition provided by Silva-Corvalán, an authority on the topic of bilingualism: “el uso de dos lenguas (multilingüismo sería de tres o más) por un mismo hablante, al que se denomina bilingüe” (269). I am not excluding the possibility that any of my authors speak a third language (which would mark them as multilingual), but as this work focuses on only two languages, I will use the terms bilingual and bilingualism throughout.

In this dissertation, the most relevant parameters in terms of bilingual speech are the following concepts: language choice, code-switching, and diglossia. If we begin with the study of language choice, the most important factor to understand is that a speaker – or writer – does not choose their language randomly. Instead which language they choose to communicate with is determined by a large group of factors. Fishman states that “habitual language choice is far from being a random matter of momentary inclination, even under those circumstances when it could very well function as such from a purely probabilistic point of view” (55). Alternatively, he identifies group membership, situation and topic as factors that influence language choice in a given communicative act (56-7). In terms of group membership, a bilingual might choose a different code to identify him or herself with a “different group to which he belongs, want to belong, and from which he seeks acceptance” (56). Alternatively, a bilingual might choose *not* to speak in both of his or her languages if the interlocutor(s) are monolingual; indeed, “[b]ilinguals who have reflected on their bilingualism will often report that they change their way of speaking when they are with monolinguals and when they are with bilinguals” (Grosjean 428). This indicates that bilinguals speak bilingually with other bilinguals, but choose to speak monolingually with other monolinguals³. This is a highly significant comment. If linguists such as Lipski and Montes-Alcalá (both quoted above) are able to find that authors and speakers code-switch in similar ways and for similar reasons in both life and literature, it stands to reason that scholarship that concludes that bilinguals *speak* bilingually to other bilinguals might also apply to written communication. In other words, it is likely that authors of bilingual

³ Although neither Grosjean nor Fishman directly addresses this in these two particular chapters, it should be noted speakers might be limited by their ability in one or the other language – if the speaker is not equally competent in both of his or her languages, this could impact the ability to speak purely monolingually, even with a monolingual.

texts intended their works for a bilingual audience. However, author intent does not necessarily block certain readers, as we will see in upcoming chapters.

Code-switching is a key paradigm when discussing bilingualism in general, and the literary texts I study in particular. Gardner-Chloros's concise definition of this phenomenon is perhaps the most useful: "varied combinations of two or more linguistic varieties" (4). In other words, code-switching involves the use of two or more codes (which may include not only languages, but also dialects, registers, etc.) within the same communicative event (conversation, speech, text, etc.). This use of both codes, and the act of switching between them, is intentional, not random: "code switching cannot be dismissed as merely a matter of idiosyncratic behavior" (Gumperz 70). If we then accept that code-switching has a purpose, whether conscious or unconscious, the question then should revolve around determining *what* those specific purposes are. Gumperz introduced one paradigm: *we-codes* versus *they-codes*. According to Gumperz, *we-codes* are associated with "the ethnically specific, minority language" and are more typically used for given group and informal activities (66). On the other hand, *they-codes* are associated with the majority language, commonly used in more formal, less personal communications (66). Gardner-Chloros expands upon this distinction: "the characteristic ways in which bilinguals combine their languages in a particular community constitute a way of expressing their group identity – like a characteristic accent" (5). Gal also suggests that code-switching is often used in situations where there is a majority state-supported language that bestows power and prestige in addition to a minority language lacking that prestige (247-8). Heller underlines this view by identifying code-switching as "a resource for the exercise of, or resistance to, power" (164), as well as a coping mechanism for the subordinate social

position that a minority language gives its speaker (170-1). Thus, code-switching in one regard can be seen as a means for members of a minority group to self-identify as part of that group, but also to show resistance or distancing from the dominant language and culture.

Not all research on code-switching has determined that code-switching serves a political or identifying function. Gumperz describes other uses, including quotations, interjections, reiteration, and addressee specification (in which the switch in code “serves to direct the message to one of several possible addressees”) (77). Gardner-Chloros also suggests that code-switching “can serve as a compromise between two varieties, where these carry different connotations or social meanings for speakers and interlocutors,” and that the practice may be “the only possibility open to a speaker where there is a mismatch between their level of competence in the relevant languages and that of their interlocutor” (78). Thus, in addition to political uses of code-switching, the practice can serve multiple communicative functions.

In terms of attitudes towards code-switching and those that use the phenomenon, Gardner-Chloros summarizes three general mindsets: code-switching is “(1) thought to be an easy or lazy option; (2) generally disapproved of, even by those who practice it; (3) below the full consciousness of those who use it” (15). However, she also indicates that differing attitudes and the way these studies are conducted “suggest that attitudes to CS [code-switching] are learned rather than spontaneous” (81-2). Those who code-switch are told – implicitly or explicitly – that their use of both codes does not always fit into their society’s accepted linguistic model.

Another far more expansive study was performed by Deweale and Wei, in which they analyzed attitudes towards code-switching across multiple language combinations and in terms of personality, environment, age, gender, education, and language knowledge/use. According to their study, the following characteristics correlated with more positive attitudes towards code-switching: emotional stability; high tolerance for ambiguity; growing up or working in an ethnically and/or linguistically diverse environment; living abroad; being female; and having either less than a college education or, alternatively, post graduate studies. Those participants who self-reported using code-switching also viewed code-switching more positively. More surprising to the researchers were the characteristics that had negative or no effect on code-switching attitudes. For example, number of languages known did not have a statistically significant effect on code-switching attitudes. Younger participants as well as those who had completed an undergraduate degree held more negative attitudes towards code-switching than older participants or those that had a graduate degree or no college education at all. As with Gardner-Chloros, this study shows that an individual's relationship with code-switching is complex, and seems most strongly correlated with environment (and possibly learned attitudes) than most other characteristics, including a participant's own monolingualism or bilingualism.

Also important to our study is the phenomenon of diglossia, defined as a contact situation where two different languages or varieties of a language co-occur. Often these two languages have different functions, and almost always there is a difference in prestige, with one language or code marked as High (H) and the other marked as Low (L) (Ferguson 34). Key characteristics of H mark it as superior in many respects: H almost always has a large

or larger body of written literature, is learned formally in school and tends to be more standardized (i.e. it is defined by grammarians with specific rules to govern its use) (36-9). L codes, in contrast, are less likely to be found in canonic literature, and are often learned in the home and by children, and are thus associated with lower education (37-8). While a diglossic community does not necessarily have to be bilingual (different dialects could also make up a diglossic situation), this phenomenon may describe well the situation of Spanish-English bilingualism present in each authors' works studied in the following chapters. The entrance of bilingualism into canonic and academically studied literature opens the door to discussion of more acceptance of bilingual codes within the United States, although arguably such an entrance is far from sufficient to convert Spanish-English bilingualism, use, or code-switching, into a high language.

Language and Identity

If language is a political choice, it is also an identity choice. Romaine, in her chapter titled "Identity and Multilingualism," identifies language as "an important boundary-marking function between groups" that "once lost . . . is far less easily recoverable than other identity markers that might stand in its stead" (9-10). Language becomes the way to identify a person's in-group (as seen above with Gumperz's description of *we-codes* in code-switching). However, identity is not only bestowed by *using* a language; it can also arise from *refusal* to use a minority or a stigmatized language. Abandoning a language can be a way of "distancing oneself from the negative identity" of that language, or, in more extreme cases, "an act of survival or self-defense in situations where they feel threatened"

(Romaine 11). Winford provides an example of this in his book *An Introduction to Contact Linguistics*:

Man: Could you tell me where the French test is?

Receptionist: En français? (In French?)

Man: I have the right to be addressed in English by the government of Quebec. (123).

In this example, the man in question has arrived to complete a French proficiency test, indicating that he should be able to ask the relatively basic question of where he should go. However, he chooses not to, asserting his right to speak – and be spoken to – in English, his preferred language.

The Routledge Companion to Sociolinguistics expands upon this idea that language is imbued with the characteristics of its speakers with its discussion of indexicality, in which “a whole language or just one linguistic form can become an index of, or a pointer to, a speaker’s social identity, as well as of typical activities of that speaker” (102). In other words, “listeners sometimes associate a particular dialect with a corresponding set of social characteristics” (103). Spanglish itself, and the stigma associated with it, is an example of this phenomenon. We have already seen how Stavans’s study of Spanglish noted that it has often been associated with a lower education, and Morales, in *Living in Spanglish: The Search for Latino Identity in America*, notes that, “[t]o almost everyone, Spanglish is an ugly word. In its most literal sense, Spanglish refers to a bastardized language, an orphan, a hybrid, a mule” (4). This shows how indexicality can work against the speaker in that a dialect and language can be used to mark him/her as inferior. In cases such as these, Giles’s Speech Accommodation Theory becomes relevant. Giles maintains that speakers can and

do actively and consciously change or adapt their speech to “align or distance themselves from their interlocutors” (*The Routledge Companion to Sociolinguistics* 104). Particularly important to this research is the “**agency** of speakers in their ability to manipulate linguistic resources available to them and the ability to actively project different identities through language with various interlocutors” (105, emphasis original). That is to say, first, that the decision to adapt one’s language because of one’s interlocutor is – or at a minimum *can* be – a conscious one, and that this speech accommodation means that the speaker has multiple patterns of speech depending on the identity desired or needed at the moment. It is in this way that *The Routledge Companion* notes that language “is considered to be *constitutive* of social identity . . . and is not merely a *reflection* of one’s general social position” (106, emphasis original). Romaine echoes this in addressing Latino Spanglish in particular: “For some Latinos, Spanglish is more than just a habitual strategy of speaking to other bilinguals, it embodies the linguistic and cultural hybridity of its speakers” (“Identity and Multilingualism,” 21). Language *creates* identity; it does not merely reflect it.

Spanish-English Bilingualism in the United States: Perspectives and Policies

Up until the mid nineteenth century, the U.S. was generally⁴ tolerant of English-European-language bilingualism. German, especially, had a strong presence, with over 8.5% of the US’s European population identifying as German-American in the late 1700s (Cashman 43). This popularity, particularly in Pennsylvania, led to a 1795 bill in Congress that all laws be printed in German as well as English – a bill that failed by only one vote (Green 228). Nevertheless, some linguistic diversity in the United States began to be

⁴ The word used here is to underline that linguistic tolerance was not universal. Benjamin Franklin, in particular, was highly critical of his German-speaking neighbors.

tamped early, with the isolation of African enslaved workers to prevent growth of African languages, and the forced assimilation of Native peoples (43-4). Between the large number of deaths in both groups and Whites who forbade them use of their languages, African and Native languages were greatly reduced or eliminated in the United States early in its history. European and Asian languages lasted longer, but World Wars I and II, combined with a significant American nationalistic fervor in the mid-20th century, has led to strong stigma against any language other than English (Cashman 44).

For many conservative Americans, this stigma against non-English languages continues today, often in conjunction with anti-immigrant sentiment. The topic of Latin American immigration in particular has been consistently in the news since before the 2016 American election, particularly with Donald Trump's largely inaccurate but persistent accusations of criminal behavior, including rape and drug use and distribution. His campaign promise to build a wall on the border between the two countries was also particularly popular among his Republican base, although the recent month-long government shutdown over issues of funding the wall greatly decreased voter approval. This characterization and demonization of Latin immigrants contributes to the demonization and problematization of Spanish in the public sphere as well.

These fears regarding minority languages are addressed by Jane Hill in what she calls language panics, defined as " a period of intense debate and heightened emotions over relatively obscure and technical [language] issues" (Martínez 11). Examples of such issues include the designation of AAVE [African American Vernacular English] as a dialect or a distinct language, or the most effective mix of native and target language to use with ELLs [English Language Learners] in primary school classrooms (11). Both examples are, taken

on their own, reasonable questions worthy of academic consideration. However, the ‘panic’ arises when the issues become politicized and publicized, at which point, Hill argues, “the technical becomes intertwined with racial relations” (11). The public debate is less about – for example – appropriate pedagogy or ELLs, and more about societal acceptance of racial and ethnic minorities that use non-English languages.

Martínez argues that language panics are more widespread and sometimes more subtle than Hill claims. For Martínez, “mock Spanish,” or the “overly Anglicized use of Spanish that corresponds with violence, *Hasta la vista, Baby*, with hypersexuality, *caliente mamacita*, with subservience, *sí, Señor*, or with laziness, *mañana*” is equally a part of language panic, as it contributes to the ways in which the Spanish language is used to characterize and delegitimize Hispanics (11). He also attributes prejudices against certain dialects of a language, or against Spanglish in particular to these language panics (11). These prejudices against language or dialects, reflect and are intertwined with prejudices against their speakers as well.

While this view might be seen as more common among the far right or the less educated, political scientist Samuel P. Huntington also took a strong anti-Latino immigration stance in his final book, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity*. In it he argued that the United States was founded by, and should remain, Anglo-Protestant in its values, and that Latin immigrants threaten this with their – in his view – resistance to assimilation, particularly in terms of language. In his view, Latin American immigrants, particularly from Mexico, “threaten to divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages” and that the “United States ignores this challenge at its peril” (Huntington). Indeed, he is explicit about the need to *linguistically* assimilate:

“There is no Americano dream. There is only the American dream created by an Anglo-Protestant society. Mexican Americans will share in that dream and in that society only if they dream in English” (Huntington). Such rhetoric moves beyond rational debates of documentation, or lack thereof, or economic concerns of immigrants. Instead, such unfounded fears of a Latino takeover – fueled by such disparate voices as a Harvard University professor and the President of the United States – mark a culture in which anti-Hispanic racism and prejudice are prevalent and explicit.

In direct response to Huntington’s book, Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes published the essay “El racista enmascarado” in 2004. He criticizes Huntington for ignoring the myriad non-Anglo influences on what is today the United States (French, Indigenous, Russian), and characterizes Huntington’s anger against Hispanic America as “el peligro indispensable para una nación que requiere, para ser, un peligro externo identificable” (Fuentes). This danger he compares to Captain Ahab’s infamous Moby Dick, claiming that Huntington’s first Moby Dick was the USSR and communism, but, as that threat became less culturally relevant, he moved onto Hispanics, particularly those from Mexico. Fuentes also attacks Huntington’s specific claims that Mexicans (but not other immigrants) invade and exploit the United States, pointing out that immigrants often take jobs that WASP Americans won’t, and that their economic contribution to the country far outweighs tax money spent on them or their children. He also contradicts Huntington’s claim that Mexican immigrants to the United States are the least amenable to (linguistic) assimilation, as Potowski does below, while simultaneously stating that “el monolingüismo es una enfermedad curable,” rather than a universally recognized benefit. Fuentes’s essay emphasizes the contradictions inherent in Huntington’s claims while underlining the

contributions both the Spanish language and Mexican immigrants can and do make to the United States.

Fuentes is not the only one to address persistent myths about Hispanic immigration and immigrants to the United States. In her book *Language Diversity in the USA*, Potowski details three of the most common myths in regards to language in the United States:

- 1) English is the official language of the US.
- 2) Immigrants today are not learning English as previous immigrants did, to the extent that today's immigrants seem to actively resist or refuse to learn English.
- 3) Language diversity has only become an issue recently, and only due to increased levels of immigration. This linguistic diversity is harmful to national unity and identification.

Potowski dedicates the first chapter of her book to dispelling these three myths. In addressing the first, she points out that, despite multiple attempts to amend the Constitution, there is no official language in the United States, although half⁵ of the states of the union do have such laws on the books classifying English as such. Whether or not the founding fathers were even in favor of an official language is up for debate, as can be seen by the earlier mention of widespread German use in early America.

She also points out that, contrary to the second myth, immigrants and their families in the United States learn English upon arrival, and often very quickly, citing that 70.9% of Spanish-speaking immigrants to the United States self-identified as speaking English “very well” or “well” in 2007 (3). Furthermore, she points to multiple studies that have shown

⁵ Currently, 25 states have adopted English as their exclusive official language. These states include: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, and Wyoming.

that non-English languages rarely survive past the third generation, with some studies citing that non-English languages do not survive to the second generation (4). Indeed, this linguistic assimilation is so complete that Green describes the United States as a “graveyard of languages” since “[d]espite past waves of immigration . . . inevitably social forces render immigrants’ children English-speakers and their grandchildren monoglot English-speakers” (233). Foreign languages simply do not survive in the United States beyond the first or second generation, regardless of fears to the contrary.

The final myth Potowski wishes to dispel is the argument that minority languages are somehow damaging to national identity or unity. This is by far the hardest to dispel, since national identity or national unity are extremely subjective terms. However, Potowski provides some data that helps to better understand how this argument against minority languages is unhelpful at best. She notes that, while overall numbers of immigrants are, in general, higher than they have ever been, the percentage of the US population that is foreign born is lower than ever before (10). As a different means of dispelling the myth that minority languages are damaging to national identity or unity, Potowski cites a study by Fishman that “found that linguistic heterogeneity [in other countries] could not predict either civil strife or gross national product” (12). In other words, there is little evidence to suggest that minority languages must inherently lead to national strife.

Although Fuentes, Potowski, and others have addressed such myths against minority languages in the U.S., many in the country continue to be prejudiced against non-English speakers. Often this prejudice arises from identity politics, as Potowski points out: “for some monolingual English-speaking Americans, knowing English is not sufficient to be considered a true American. One must completely abandon the language of their country of

origin, as a rite of passage or a cost of entry, as if retaining a heritage language reflected divided loyalties” (13). Speaking a language other than English implies an identity divided, not wholly or even primarily American, which some conservative Americans resist. This is not a new sentiment; Potwoski cites Teddy Roosevelt in saying: “There is no such thing as a hyphenated American who is a good American. The only man who is a good American is the man who is an American and nothing else” (13). This distrust of a possibly divided loyalty has led to a difference in how different groups approach English Language Learning and English Language Learners. On one side, Potowski and others promote a concept of English Plus, which promotes English language acquisition *alongside* the maintenance (or even learning) of heritage languages (16). This concept comes from those who recognize that it is increasingly difficult to live monolingually in the United States if one’s language is not English, and that far more opportunities are open to those who speak English.

Nevertheless, English Only campaigns, which promote English as the sole and official language of the United States, continue to flourish in different areas of the country. However, these campaigns have been problematically connected with racist or white supremacist thoughts. Crawford, in *Hold Your Tongue: Bilingualism and the Politics of English Only*, points out that large amounts of funding to FAIR (the Federation of American Immigration Reform) has been connected to Nazi ideology or white supremacists (158-162). A study of regular contributors to U.S. English, a non-profit organization dedicated to making English the official language of the United States, indicated that “a sizable minority harbored anti-Latino biases” (163). English-Only movements do not seem to derive solely from linguistic motives: they are in part driven by prejudice or racism against certain groups of people, separate from their linguistic background.

Consequently, an alternative reading of the stigma of language comes from Urciuoli, in which she maps language prejudice onto racial prejudice. She argues that race and racism have shifted from biological markers to linguistic ones:

In effect, race has been remapped from biology onto language in key ways: in the idea of inherently superior or inferior varieties; in the way that intellectual traits are 'naturally' attributed to those varieties; in the way that, for example, Spanish is seen as 'invasive.' All these elements had a place in the biologized construction of race. What is different about their relocation in language is that, supposedly, people can and should control their language (whereas no one was expected to control biological race). If people cede control over language, it is considered acceptable for them to take the economic consequences. (201).

Since, in this view, people can – and should – control their language, prejudice against the language is less against one's ethnicity, race or class, but against their character. The argument becomes: *I'm not racist, I simply won't condone laziness*. While this (willfully or not) ignores the concrete and real impediments to language acquisition, it also becomes problematic in that the narrative of linguistic purity is one-sided:

While many Anglos habitually criticize what they see as the inadequate or 'broken' English of people whose first language is Spanish, it is quite acceptable for Anglos to market bits of Spanish with little regard for grammatical coherence in street or development names ('Rancho Vista') or humorous tags on greeting cards (the dog in the Santa Claus hat bearing the

caption “Fleas Navidad”) or in menu items or on television (“No problemo”).

(201)

The result is a mindset in which anything less than perfect English is stigmatized, yet non-English languages are free for exploitation by English speakers. It is also one in which bilinguals whose first language is English are praised in a way that bilinguals who learn English as a second language are not. The first group’s mastery of English present no threat to a linguistically standard or “pure” English, whereas the second group’s learning of English is guaranteed to – at least during the process of acquisition – be “incorrect” or “broken.”

Also important, however, is to understand how Hispanics view the Spanish language while living in the United States. Fought’s 2003 *Chicano English in Context* provides a useful study of heritage speakers and their attitudes towards Spanish and their own English. In her findings, Fought notes that attitudes of the participants towards Spanish varied widely, with some feeling that Spanish was intrinsic to their identity, while others stated that Spanish was not the core of ethnic identity, but rather how one felt about their heritage. Perhaps even more interesting, these attitudes had no correlation in Fought’s study with linguistic ability in Spanish, a finding she shares with other researchers (197). Furthermore, the interviewees showed generally positive attitudes towards code-switching. This can partially be explained by again associating language with a specific ethnic or national identity – as Mexican or Chicano specifically, in the case of this study. However, the other benefit of code-switching for the interviewees, especially those with limited Spanish fluency, was the ability to understand more Spanish than when the language was used without English (208-9). Indeed, Fought noted that, in her interviews,

participants were far more likely to code-switch back into English when speaking Spanish, rather than inserting Spanish into their English, a phenomena she attributes to less confidence in their fluency. Schmidt also points out that larger scale studies over the past 25 years have also indicated that the majority of Latinos (of different national origins) are in favor of a language policy that “would ensure that their children would become bilingual adults, fluent in both English and Spanish, and that would provide ‘linguistic access’ rights to those who have not yet acquired English proficiency” (137). However, this does contrast with studies of second or third generation immigrants, who generally prefer English over Spanish (137).

Another legal facet of minority language use is that there is, to date, “no civil rights statute that specifically targets discrimination against language minorities in their specific roles as language minority users as opposed to their possible status as ethnic or national origin minorities” (De Valle 88). Indeed, the courts have intentionally refused to include language minority use as a protected class; previous court cases on the matter – for example *Garcia v. Gloor* (1980) and *Garcia v. Spun Steak* (1993) – have ruled that firing an employee for violating English-only workplace rules was not a violation of anti-discrimination laws (80). De Valle points out that this is because, unlike race, sex, national origin or other protected classes, language is not permanent, and thus not protectable (88). Indeed, in the case of learning English, courts have consistently taken the approach that immigrants *should* learn English, implying that they are to blame for discrimination, and it is their responsibility to change if they wish to avoid future discrimination.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been twofold. First, it outlined major studies of multilingual literature, particularly those that speak directly to Spanish-English bilingualism. While these works exist, they are limited, partially by the specific goals of each project, partially in scope: no study can provide an in-depth analysis of all multilingual works to date. My work aims to add to this literature in the following ways. First, I address multilingualism via close reading of texts rather than focusing primarily on the author's intentions; secondly, I consider previously unstudied authors, or reconsider canonic authors through a new lens.

The second purpose of this chapter was to examine critical linguistic theory and terminology that will be used in the following three chapters to study the primary works. Bilinguals speak differently to monolinguals than to other bilinguals; this fact allows us to understand that the bilingual works studied in this dissertation are intended for other bilinguals, although this does not necessarily preclude monolinguals from reading them. I have also examined code-switching as a purposeful choice with explicit and implicit connotations – CS is not random nor should it be read as *simply* another way of saying the same thing. In the same vein, language has a strong link to identity, and thus its use by both characters and authors tells us something about the works beyond the simple use of those words. Finally, I have examined the current state of perspectives on bilingualism within the United States. Although there is a growing number of immigrants and there have consistently been groups that advocate for minority languages, there persist myths and stigmas against bilinguals, Spanish-English bilinguals in particular. This turbulent climate

informs each of the works studied in this dissertation, which all, to different extents, address and combat this stigma.

Chapter 2: Head in the Campo, Heart in Love with Americanisms: Linguistic and National Identities in Angie Cruz's *Soledad* and *Let It Rain Coffee*

When, in the previous chapter, I mentioned one of the limitations of Ch'ien's *Weird English* was her focus on the author over the text, it was Angie Cruz's two novels, *Soledad* and *Let It Rain Coffee* that I had in mind, as the use of Spanish within her novels tells us less about her own views about the Spanish language, and more about the beliefs and prejudices of her characters. Unfortunately, Cruz's use of Spanish has not received the attention it deserves. For example, while the two novels have garnered positive reviews, she has also gotten criticism about her use of Spanish in them. For example, Kirkus's review of *Soledad* states that the novel "bleeds into unnecessary Spanish," and Publishers Weekly's review of *Let It Rain Coffee* contends that without "a smattering of Spanish, the events of the novel can be hard to follow." Other reviews leave out entirely this interesting and crucial element of the novel in their reviews (Scone, *Kirkus LIRC review*). However, in this chapter I argue that the use of Spanish in Cruz's novels is neither unnecessary, nor is it an element of the novels that can be overlooked. Rather, Cruz also uses oral Dominican Spanish as a key means of character development, by enhancing explicit national identities for some characters and for others actually contradicting their explicitly stated desired identifications. After a short examination of contemporary Dominican immigration to the United States, I will show this significant feature of Cruz's Spanish in the novels by examining the following characters and their differing relationships to Spanish and the Dominican Republic: Soledad and Flaca in *Soledad*, and Dallas, Bobby, and Esperanza in *Let It Rain Coffee*.

Dominican Immigration to the United States

The families of both of Cruz's novels are composed of first and second-generation Dominican immigrants who have settled in New York. They are thus part of the single largest immigrant group in the state of New York, and part of a group of immigrants that has been steadily increasing in number since the 1960s (Pessar xi). While in the 1960s many Dominican immigrants moved in opposition to the Bosch government, since the 1970s and 80s, more and more have immigrated for economic reasons, specifically to avoid the declining incomes and growing unemployment rates of the Dominican Republic (Pessar 4-5). However, even during these decades, economic immigrants from the D.R. remained middle-class, since the poorest of Dominicans lacked the resources to obtain the expensive visas necessary to legally enter the United States. Indeed, current visa laws still keep the poorest and most desperate Dominicans from immigrating. Most legal immigrants are granted a visa through the family unification provision, meaning they must be related to a permanent resident or U.S. citizen. Such a provision privileges those who already have family in the states, i.e. middle class families, while hindering those whose families have consistently been too poor to immigrate. Even those who might have family or might otherwise qualify, perhaps by having a highly-marketable skill, are inhibited by the sheer cost of obtaining a visa: obtaining the necessary documentation can be difficult and expensive and the forms can be problematic to fill out, thus leading many to obtain a lawyer or other specialist to complete the documentation for them – an easier, but still quite expensive, process (Pessar 6-7). It is thus not surprising that the two lower-class families represented in the novels arrived in part because of illegal immigration – Olivia in

Soledad had a black market passport and *Esperanza* in *Let It Rain Coffee* sailed illegally from the Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico.

Like many immigrants, Dominicans tend to group themselves upon arrival to the United States. In their case, many ended up in New York City, in Washington Heights, also informally known as Quisqueya Heights, a reference to both a municipality in the current day Dominican Republic and a Taíno name for Hispaniola. Pessar describes Washington Heights as a mix of both American and Dominican, featuring both American and Dominican products in the stores, bilingual place names, and “corner newsstands [that] sell numerous Dominican newspapers, flown daily from the island, alongside locally printed Spanish- and English-language publications” (24-5). This neighborhood is where Cruz grew up, and she has spoken about the area in multiple interviews. Her portrayal of the neighborhood in her novels is as one populated by Dominicans. This was Cruz’s experience growing up, although the neighborhood has since become gentrified and expensive, pushing many of the Dominican immigrant residents out of the neighborhood (Latorre 479). In regards to Cruz’s specific experiences in Washington Heights growing up, she states: “For me, growing up there, well... I don’t know. I can only say it was life. It wasn’t good or bad. It was the only world I knew” (Latorre 479). Cruz’s ambivalent opinion of Washington Heights differs from some of her characters, as will become clear later in this chapter.

As the Dominican population grew in Washington Heights, they became increasingly involved in local politics and campaigns to improve local public services (Pessar 26). However, despite success in making these improvements, their efforts were not always appreciated, since it meant that the community’s small Jewish population, which had previously been in control of local government, quickly became outnumbered by

Dominicans (Pessar 29-30). There have also been tensions between Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, with the former accusing the latter of taking lower wages and thus displacing Puerto Ricans from the available jobs (30). Finally, Dominicans and non-Hispanic Blacks, particularly Haitians and other darker skinned Blacks, have clashed, despite the fact that many Dominican youth tended to assimilate African-American music, language and dress into their own culture (Pessar 31). Simmons's more recent book, *Reconstructing Racial Identity and the African Past in the Dominican Republic*, notes that increasing relations between the Dominican Republic and the United States, both on the island and via immigrants who have returned from the United States, have somewhat increased the awareness of similarities between the Black American and Dominican communities: "the black, or African American, community is composed of people who resemble Dominicans in many ways – from light to dark – with parallel experiences with intra-group naming (colorization), marrying up, lightening creams, hair straighteners, and other cultural practices" (74). These shared experiences, combined with the pride that many African Americans show for their African ancestry and traditions have helped soften the stigma against recognizing Dominican African ancestry, and has thus eased tensions between Dominican American and African American communities in New York.

Also important to consider about Dominican migrants is that, by and large, the trend is to migrate to the United States only temporarily, and then to return to the island once they have earned "enough" money to improve their living conditions and social station back home. Indeed, since amendments to the Dominican Constitution in 1994, Dominicans who become American citizens have the option to retain their Dominican citizenship. In this way Dominican immigrants can continue to live in both worlds: they can become U.S.

citizens and thus improve their American living conditions and more easily bring their family into the United States, and yet still remain active in Dominican life and politics, both while abroad and upon their return. Further, as Duany points out in *Blurred Borders: Transnational Migration Between the Hispanic Caribbean and the United States*, Dominicans are among the immigrants most politically active in their home countries, with higher percentages of Dominicans following nation of origin politics, voting in their home country, giving money and attending rallies for home country candidates when compared to Puerto Rican, Mexican and Salvadorian immigrants (190). However, this connection to the island and desire to return is far from universal. Pessar notes that, broadly speaking, more men want to return to the Dominican Republic than women, for men wish to return to the freedom and camaraderie they enjoyed in their country of birth, while in general women prefer the freedom they enjoy in the United States as joint heads of household (79-81). Children of immigrants who are raised in the United States often also find it more difficult to return to the Dominican Republic, partially because the cultural assimilation that took place in the United States hinders the immigrant's ability to fully (re)integrate into the home country, leaving an awkward situation where "the migrant is perceived as a foreigner in both societies" (Howard 106). This provides important context to better understand the families of Cruz's novels, who show mixed reactions to living in the United States and to the idea of returning to the island.

Soledad

Soledad (2001, Simon and Schuster) tells the story of college-age Soledad and her family of Dominican immigrants who live in Washington Heights. At the beginning of the

novel, Soledad reluctantly returns home from college to help care for her mother, Olivia, who has been stricken with an unknown illness that leaves her mute and practically catatonic. Soledad lives with her family over the next weeks, and during this time she slowly grows closer and more accepting of her family. While going through her mother's private things, Soledad discovers a list of men, which leads her to an understanding that her mother was a prostitute on the island, and came to the United States after getting pregnant by one of these men. The novel closes with Soledad taking her mother back to the Dominican Republic in a successful attempt to cure both Olivia's illness and the relationship between mother and daughter.

My analysis of the novel will be divided into four sections. First, I will provide a description of how the novel is narrated, since it is a complex and important component of the novel. Next, I will examine whether, and to what extent, the novel is accessible to a monolingual English reader. Finally, I will devote the majority of my analysis to the language of two of the main voices, that of Soledad and of Flaca. In so doing, I will examine each woman's distinct relationship with Spanish and English, and how that relationship helps to define her identity along a spectrum of American, Dominican-American, and Dominican.

The Narrative Situation

Understanding how the novel is narrated is an important component to understanding the novel and its language. The individual chapters are broken down into shorter vignettes that focus on different members of the family: Soledad, Flaca (her younger cousin), Olivia (Soledad's mother), Gorda (Olivia's sister and Flaca's mother),

Victor (Olivia and Gorda's younger brother), and Doña Sosa (Olivia, Gorda and Victor's mother). Each short vignette focuses on a different character and, through actions and thoughts, gives the reader an increasingly intimate understanding of their self-perception and familial or sexual relationships. However, the narration varies throughout the book and across characters. Victor and Doña Sosa, the two characters that appear the least, are narrated in subjective third person. Gorda is far more important than her brother or mother, appearing approximately as often as her daughter and niece, but is also narrated in close third person. Olivia's past is narrated in close third person, but she also speaks in the present in first person, shorter italicized vignettes that demonstrate that, while she is mute and catatonic, she is aware of and processing her surroundings and current state. Flaca's vignettes also vary. Towards the beginning of the novel, her sections appear in first person, directed not at the reader but at her Tía Olivia, with whom she has a better relationship than with Gorda, her mother. However, later in the novel, Flaca's vignettes shift to close third person, although they maintain more of Flaca's particular dialect than any other character, save Soledad. Similarly, Soledad's vignettes are also a mixture of first person and subjective third person with the latter predominating later in the novel. However, it is less clear to whom Soledad is speaking. There are no references to writing her story, nor does she direct herself to anyone within the novel. However, her narration also includes background and reminders of what had happened in the past ("A few weeks ago I receive (*sic*) this urgent phone call from my aunt Gorda"), which would be both redundant and unnecessary if Soledad were narrating to herself (11). The best conclusion is that Soledad, alone of all of the characters, is addressing the reader.

To what extent can a monolingual read the novel?

Spanish appears without italics, without glossary, and from the very first page. Nonetheless, the use of Spanish does not prevent a monolingual English reader from enjoying the novel, as Cruz employs multiple techniques to open the novel to non-Spanish-speakers. At times Spanish is made more accessible through the use of translation. For example, the following statement appears on the first page: “She tells people that I was born con la pata caliente, feet burning to be anywhere but here” (11). Soledad, who is narrating here, translates the statement for her reader. This early translation eases the reader into the Spanish without the need to limit or italicize (and thus make foreign) the minority language.

Another strategy the novel uses is the use of solitary Spanish words that are either easily researched, understandable through context, or, worse case scenario, not necessary to understanding the sentence. Take, for example, the following sentence: “She always looked as if she had a headache; preocupada, tired, achy, with dolor” (16). Both words in Spanish are easily – and relatively accurately – found in a dictionary or Google Translate⁶. However, the sentence loses little if the Spanish words are not understood; the reader still knows that the woman often appears to be in pain and tired, perhaps overworked. It is this strategy that appears most commonly in the novel. The strategy allows consistent reminders that the novel and its characters are bilingual, yet does not employ so much Spanish that the monolingual reader finds the text inaccessible.

⁶ I reference this resource here and throughout not because it is the most accurate or best online resource, but rather because it is one of the most – if not *the* most – well-known and accessed online translator and dictionary.

Finally, the novel does include longer untranslated Spanish text. This is most common in vignettes that take place in the Dominican Republic, such as a vignette from Olivia's youth, when she first moved to the coast and became a prostitute. Consider the following example: "Mira morena, no tiene lengua, said a woman so thin you could see her ribs right through her skin" (56). However, even in this case, the following sentences provide context that a close reader can use to access the Spanish: "Sí, tengo lengua, Olivia bleeped in such a low voice she touched her tongue to see if it was still there. It was the first time she had spoken in days" (56-7). If a reader can research and discover that *lengua* means tongue, the sentences become understandable enough to the monolingual reader. However, even if the reader does not take this step, little information is lost. The Spanish alludes to the fact that none of the other prostitutes have heard Olivia speak, information that is also provided when we are told that Olivia hadn't spoken for days. The monolingual English reader might experience more discomfort in the Dominican Republic scenes because of increased Spanish, but they do not miss key information because of their monolingualism.

While the monolingual English reader is not excluded from the novel, that does not mean that the Spanish does not serve a crucial purpose in the work, thus privileging a bilingual reader. I propose that the combination of Spanish and English serve as a critical part of various characters' development and description. For example, Doña Sosa's vignettes include more individual words in Spanish, indicating her more strong association with the island. However, language is most important to understanding the characters of Soledad and Flaca, and more specifically their relationship to both the Dominican Republic and the United States.

Soledad

We as readers meet Soledad first and on her reluctant return from college to her family's home in Washington Heights, having been called back because of her mother's unusual illness. The reason for her reluctance soon becomes apparent: she despises the neighborhood. She is unapologetic in her description of Washington Heights as "a war zone filled with cop killers, killer cops, crack dealers, gang members and lazy welfare mothers" (12). The neighborhood also seems to sense her reluctance; as if to prove Soledad's description of Washington Heights as a war zone, the street attacks her: "I trip on the uneven sidewalk. The air-conditioners spit at me. The smell of onion and cilantro sting my eyes . . . Hydrants erupt, splashing cold water over the pavement" (13). All of this description culminates in Soledad's fervent desire to escape: "I know I should turn back while I still can, before anyone in my family sees me" (13). Soledad's disgust and disdain in her return to Washington Heights and her family introduce the reader to her consistent desire to distance herself from her Dominican heritage. Throughout the novel it becomes clear that, even though she had a good relationship with her aunt, that relationship is unique among those with the rest of her family, and was insufficient to bring her home over the past year. Furthermore, Soledad routinely tells her college friends that she is from the Upper West Side, her means of "keeping nasty stereotypes of Washington Heights out of people's minds" (12). Ever since she left for college, she has done everything she can to pull back from things that would remind her and her peers that she is Dominican.

At the beginning of the novel, Soledad's disdain for Washington Heights and her family could be seen as stemming from class and status rather than heritage and ethnicity,

as her disdain is pointed specifically to Washington Heights rather than to the island.

However, later in the novel, as Soledad speaks to one of the young Dominican-American men around Washington Heights, it becomes clear that her resistance is also to the island:

You go home a lot? [Richie said.]

What do you mean? [Soledad said.]

Plátano land.

I haven't been there in a while. But I remember it though. Sometimes I have nightmares about it, where I somehow land in Dominican Republic, and I have no papers to get out of the country, no extra clothes to wear and I need to go to the bathroom but the toilets don't flush. (137)

Elsewhere in the novel, Soledad reveals that when she was young she would spend short periods of time on the island with family. In the above conversation, she is most explicit in her feelings of the island. First of all, in contrast to Richie, she does not see it as home – she doesn't even know to what he is referring when he uses the word. Furthermore, her memories of these trips to the island are mixed with her nightmares of the island. These nightmares even surpass her actual memories: images of not being able to leave overshadow her actual memories of leaving the island. For Soledad, despite her strong desire to travel the world, the Dominican Republic has no appeal and exists largely in her nightmares.

Although Soledad doesn't want to be seen as Dominican or Dominican-American, that does not mean that she has not figured out who she is or wants to be. Soledad loves to travel, but she doesn't long for the Caribbean, but rather for Venice, Machu Picchu, and Spain. Indeed, part of her anger over having to return to her family is that, in so doing, she

had to give up an apprenticeship in Spain. Her fantasy of Spain contrasts starkly with her nightmares of the Dominican Republic:

Finally I was offered the opportunity to travel far away to Europe, where I could taste grilled champiñones and tortillas españolas, leisurely sit at a café during siesta and drink strong espresso in front of an ancient church. (13)

When Soledad envisioned herself in the Dominican Republic, she sees nothing more than lack: a lack of papers, of clothes, of a working toilet. In contrast, Soledad sees herself as *belonging* in Spain, sitting leisurely while eating local food. In her fantasy, she is not a tourist, she is instead European, assimilating in a way that she cannot do in her own neighborhood of Washington Heights, or in her native Dominican Republic.

Soledad has left home to attend art school, and she supports herself by working in a local art gallery. Comparing Soledad's perspective of her job to the perspective of her close Chicana friend, Caramel, provides a clearer idea of the world that Soledad lives in and how she identifies herself. Caramel is skeptical of the art gallery in which her friend works, particularly in terms of whether or not she (Caramel) could belong: "Soledad, we need to start our own thing, make our own rules, where the sky is the limit. A place where our mamas can come and visit and not feel like they don't belong" (67). Caramel is proud of her Hispanic heritage and sees the lack of representation in the White-owned art gallery:

Everything is white, the walls, the ceilings. She [Caramel] doesn't understand how I do it everyday. She says if she surrounded herself with work by mediocre artists all day she'd slit her wrists with frustration.

What do you mean? I find it inspiring.

When was the last time you saw a Latina artist in a gallery?

I never thought about it like that. (66)

For Caramel, the lack of representation in the gallery is stifling. In addition to not seeing herself on the walls, Caramel doesn't even see herself as a patron or visitor of the gallery, leaving quickly because "God forbid they [the other patrons] see two spics in here, they might just start hiding their pocketbooks" (68). Caramel sees what Soledad has not: the art gallery, in both representation and in decor, is White. Soledad seems oblivious to the exclusion of minority artists. Because she does not see herself as Dominican or Hispanic, she has not noticed this lack of representation, even going so far as to find the white/White environment inspiring. Caramel even tells us why Soledad was hired in such a White establishment: "They hired you because you're not brown like me and you have Cooper Union⁷ as your passport" (68). Here, Caramel makes clear what Soledad has not said explicitly: Soledad looks and passes as White, not as Hispanic. In her dreams of a European apprenticeship and in her job at a white/White art gallery, Soledad chooses to identify herself as White rather than Dominican or Dominican-American.

Caramel's description of a passport is also reflected in Soledad's use of both Spanish and English throughout the majority of the novel. Her English marks her as White, especially compared to her cousin, Flaca (see below). She speaks in precise, correct, even literary English: her neighborhood is a "war zone" about which she "embroiders" the truth, and when she arrives at 164th street, she is attacked and air conditioners "spit" at her (12-13). Soledad's language choices show education and a use of metaphor and personification that indicates that she has been able to read considerably, and she assimilates that reading into her way of speaking. Her elevated English style lifts and accents her White appearance,

⁷ A prestigious art school in New York

especially when scant references to her reading in the novel reveal that she has likely read mostly White authors - for example, she has no idea who James Baldwin is (14). However, her use of Spanish is another example of Soledad's "passport." Much of the Spanish that appears in her vignettes appears in translation, for example with her aunt's description of her: "born con la pata caliente, feet burning to be anywhere but here" (11). Slightly later in the first vignette she wonders why her grandmother continues to wear corsets: "Maybe after wearing them for so long she needs them to hold herself together. Or maybe she still has gusto. Womanly desires" (22). Even when Soledad does not translate her words, they are still easily understandable. For example, when she returns home, she asks her aunt what is going on: "Qué paso (*sic*)? I ask as I try to remember to breathe through my nose" (20). Soledad's Spanish is the most accessible in the novel for monolingual English speakers, allowing her to serve as a bridge between both the White world of her college (or of her readers) and the Hispanic world of her family. Even still, she is not ashamed of her Spanish; it is her Spanish that would have allowed her to enjoy her apprenticeship in Spain. What she does not want is to acknowledge where her Spanish comes from: not from Spain but from the Dominican Republic. Her Spanish is yet another component of her passport, it allows her to move between worlds, in her case not only the United States and the Dominican Republic, but also the United States and Europe.

Spanish-English bilingual readers are still slightly privileged, despite the novel's accessibility to monolingual readers. For example, Soledad's grandmother, in dismissing Soledad's concern that her mother has fallen into a coma, states that Olivia is simply overburdened with thoughts, adding that she (Doña Sosa) "truly think[s] that algo le pasa las mujeres cuando le dan demasiado tiempo para pensar" (23). Even though Soledad

provides a translation from Gorda directly afterwards (“Something happens to women when they have too much time to think”), what is more notable is how Doña Sosa’s Spanish speech is similar to Soledad’s (23). Earlier, Soledad speaks without the necessary accent on *pasó*. Similarly, careful Spanish readers will notice a missing prepositional “a” before “las mujeres” in the grandmother’s statement. The lack of the preposition would probably not sound incorrect when spoken – after all, the sound would merely be absorbed into the last syllable of “pasa.” The lack of transcription of that preposition suggests a lower education level in terms of written Spanish. The question then arises whether it is the grandmother’s error – showing another instance in which Soledad’s university education separates her from her family – or Soledad’s, showing that, while she speaks Spanish, she might not have been formally taught it at any point, causing grammatical errors common in heritage speakers who write based on what they have heard. It also serves to introduce a pattern of Spanish consistent throughout the novel: the Spanish presented is almost exclusively oral, with non-standard accents, and spellings that denote a Caribbean pronunciation, as the above example does. While it could be argued that such “mistakes” (from a grammarian’s standpoint) indicate Cruz’s knowledge of Spanish is far more oral than written, the effect presented ironically brings Soledad closer to her family, showing that she has not been able to distance herself completely from her family. Her Spanish, like that of her grandmother, is colloquial, not grammatically standard in the same way that her English is.

Soledad’s language also changes towards the end of the novel, albeit in relatively subtle ways. Her Spanish continues to be more oral and colloquial than prescriptive (the use of *mandaos* over the grammatically precise *mandados*, for example), but her English also changes (217). Whereas her English in the beginning of the novel is carefully

prescriptive, she moves towards a more casual English toward the end: “Me and Gorda didn’t know what to expect” (222). Although it is a small change, considering her meticulousness at the beginning of the novel, it is still significant, signaling not only a relaxing of her language, but also of herself around her family.

Towards the end of the novel, Soledad comes to better understand her mother by finding evidence of her prostitute past, which led to Soledad’s own conception. With this greater understanding, Soledad agrees to take her mother back to the Dominican Republic in the hopes of finally curing her mother’s strange illness. Soledad’s arrival to the island marks an important shift in her self-identity that has developed over the past few weeks and with greater understanding of her mother. Earlier, when she spoke of travel, she had little desire to see her island of origin, instead preferring to imagine herself fully immersed in Spain. At the end of the novel, however, as she flies over the Dominican Republic, she is able to see the beauty of the island, which she describes as “a sequined dress” – feminine and elegant (223). Her arrival at her family’s house also proves her nightmares are not based in reality, as the house is clean, colorful, and “most comforting of all is that Cristina has a bathroom with a working toilet” (224). There are even moments of familiarity, as she sees her own bed sheets on the beds, hand-me-downs from the family in the U.S. Soledad, despite her previous misgivings, can find herself at home here, even if not permanently.

This acceptance of the island and of her family on the island only grows with the next, and final, chapter of the novel. In this chapter there is a slight, but noticeable increase in Spanish, much of which remains un-translated, but not inaccessible to monolingual readers. Bienvenido becomes Primo Bienvenido, sodas become refrescos, and workers become trabajadores (228). Through all of this, Bienvenido reminds Soledad, “Don’t worry,

Soledad estás en tu casa,” reminding her, in Spanish, that she belongs there, in the Dominican Republic. Although Soledad responds defensively, she also reflects on the República Dominicana, the name she uses for the island in this chapter, as “home.” She does not romanticize the island: in describing the Dominican Republic, mango trees and plátanos are mentioned just as much as apagones and strikes (229). Nevertheless, the trip allows her to see the vision her family has of the island, as “a place of rest, a place to live” (229). She does not see the island in the same way, but she finally understands its appeal to the rest of her family.

Despite the increasing use of Spanish, English still predominates Soledad’s final thoughts and scenes on the island. By expressing her final thoughts on the island in English, Soledad cements herself as more American than Dominican, or even Dominican-American. However, the novel ends with Olivia (re)naming Soledad; the mother takes Soledad from the water and lovingly explains the significance of the daughter’s name. The fact that her Spanish name is highlighted in the last paragraph of the novel inextricably links Soledad and her heritage, and for the first time in the novel Soledad does not shy away from this connection. At the end of her novel, Soledad is finally able to admit that her family is Dominican, and while that may not be who she is, she is ready to accept that it is where she came from.

Flaca

Flaca, Soledad’s 14-year-old younger cousin, is unique in the novel as the only member of the family that has not been to the Dominican Republic. Perhaps for this reason, Flaca’s language distinction in the novel is less one between Spanish and English, but rather

between Soledad's more literary, prescriptively correct English and Flaca's more casual, African-Americanized dialectal English. Consider the following quote, from the second paragraph of Flaca's first section:

I mean I'll do anything to get myself out of this neighborhood 'cause no matter where I go it's as if Mami could watch me from the back of her head. And now Soledad is around to be Mami's spy. As if anyone should listen to Soledad after she went away and she didn't visit us since Christmas. What excuse she got? Not even Mother's Day did she come. Tía, you said it yourself how ungrateful Soledad is. You remember how everybody talk about her, how she dissed la familia. But Mami don't shut up about her. She's like, Flaca why can't you be more like her. As if I want to be more like her boring-ass.

(26)

Soledad's English, as we saw above, was educated and generally correct, with no discernable accent or dialect other than Standard American English. Flaca's speech, on the other hand, is far more colloquial and clearly oral. Even the rambling quality of her paragraph, in which she jumps from topic to topic indicates a more conversational tone lacking in the careful precision and forethought that might be attributed to Soledad's language. Flaca here speaks and is concerned only with her interlocutor, the currently mute and catatonic Tía Olivia.

In addition to her oral language, Flaca's dialect is less mainstream, Standard English, and far more African American Vernacular English (AAVE), as can be seen when she drops the auxiliary in "What excuse she got?" and the use of *don't* instead of *doesn't* in "But Mami

don't shut up" (26)⁸ However, this use of AAVE does not necessarily imply that Flaca identifies as Black or Black Hispanic. As previously mentioned, Pessar, in *A Visa for a Dream*, points out that while the relationship between African-Americans and Dominican-Americans in Washington Heights has historically been tense, "Dominican youth borrow elements of Afro-American culture and add them to their music, *language*, and dress" (31, emphasis added). It can therefore be said that, rather than detracting from her Dominican heritage, Flaca rather fits in better with other young Dominican immigrants by speaking English the way that they would likely speak. Her English marks her as belonging in Washington Heights among other Dominican immigrants far more than Soledad's does.

Furthermore, while Flaca does not use much Spanish, what she does use deserves to be studied. In the paragraph quoted above, Flaca uses Spanish three times, and two of them are titles for her family members. Her third use is also related to family: specifically, "la familia." In contrast to Soledad, she does not translate, but she does not need to, as she is speaking to her Spanish-speaking Dominican aunt. Flaca's Spanish is family-related, thus creating a strong tie between her family and her thoughts of Spanish. Flaca's dialect greatly contrasts to Soledad's "blanquita" speech; Flaca's oral, dialectical English and family Spanish marks her as Dominican-American.

However, there are also moments in which Flaca shows herself to be more American than Dominican-American. For example, although she associates Spanish with family and family with holidays, the holidays she mentions are American holidays, since those are the only ones with which she is familiar and that she celebrates. Furthermore her possible

⁸ For more on characteristics of AAVE, consult Green, Lisa J. *African American English: A Linguistic Introduction*. Cambridge UP, 2002.

identification as Black or Black Hispanic is more complex and American than her Dominican mother's. As I mentioned previously, she never calls herself Black the way that she calls herself Dominican (see below). However, she does describe herself as strongly resembling her Haitian-American friend, Caty, in that they “both have skin the color of cinnamon sticks, thin eyebrows and a tiny birthmark on their cheek” (51). At one point in the novel, Flaca does want to get her hair braided, not because she wants to look more Black, but rather to more closely resemble her friend. Gorda forbids her from doing so, even for free: “(“I don’t want you to look like a cocola⁹, Gorda said, as if it were the most terrible thing in the world” (51)). When her mother forbids the braids, Flaca simply turns her thoughts to a different hairstyle: she and Caty both get their hair straightened. This exchange makes clear both Gorda’s and Flaca’s perceptions of race. Gorda, despite allowing her daughter to befriend Caty and supplying headache cures for Caty’s Haitian mother, holds a strong prejudice against Caty and her family. Gorda’s concept of race, and the language she uses to describe it, is based on her Dominican heritage, which privileges lighter skin and White characteristics (including hair straightening) over darker skin tones and natural or African hair. This prejudice comes from a prejudice against Haitians, who are often portrayed and thought to be darker and generally more “African” than Dominicans, even those who (likely) have African ancestors. Flaca, on the other hand, sees no difference between herself and her friend either culturally or in terms of physical appearance. Her desire to braid her hair is not meant to be a racial statement, merely one

⁹ “Cocolo” is a Caribbean, particularly Dominican word that used to refer to non-Hispanic or non-Hispanophone African people within the Caribbean. Nowadays, however, it is largely used to refer to darker-skinned people more generally. Although Flaca states that her skin tone almost matches Caty’s, Gorda uses this generally derogatory term for Caty because she and her family are Haitian.

that brings her closer to her friend. Similarly, she decides to straighten her hair not to appear more White, but because it is the style that she and Caty will be allowed to share. Indeed, if Gorda *had* been explicit in allowing Flaca to straighten her hair to look more White, it is less likely that Flaca would do it, given her strong prejudice against “fugly white bitches” (54). In Flaca’s eyes, she and Caty share the same neighborhood and the same cinnamon stick skin tone, and are therefore equal in their race, despite having come from different countries. Such a racial perspective marks her as more American than Dominican-American.

The only time Flaca explicitly identifies herself, however, she calls herself Dominican rather than Dominican-American. At one point in the novel, Soledad describes her as wearing a shirt that boldly proclaims “DOMINICANS GO ALL OUT” (41-2). When Soledad calls her out as not Dominican (enough), since she has never been to the island, Flaca responds: “I’m still Dominican. Mami tells me we (*sic*) supposed to be the most beautiful women on the planet” (42). It should be noted that Flaca’s DOMINICANS GO ALL OUT shirt is described as skin tight, and she has paired it with bright red lipstick. The combination, especially when Flaca sees Dominican women as “the most beautiful women on the planet” indicates that Flaca wants to be Dominican not because she has a strong connection to her heritage, but because she has great pride in her physical appearance, and thinks that being Dominican adds to her beauty. Being Dominican or Dominican-American is a source of pride only in that it makes her more attractive, not because she truly sees herself as from or connected to the island.

Soledad and Flaca represent the ways in which language use in *Soledad*, far from “bleeding into unnecessary Spanish,” forms a key component of character development. It

is through language that we can see Soledad's distance from her family at the beginning of the novel, and how she grows closer to them throughout the novel. It is also through her language that her self-identity, although never stated explicitly, is shown to be far more White and American than Dominican-American. It is also through her language that we can identify Flaca as Dominican-American, and proudly so. However, the relationship between language and identity in *Let It Rain Coffee*, Cruz's second novel, becomes far more complex and multifaceted, as we will see below.

Let It Rain Coffee

Let It Rain Coffee (2005, Simon and Schuster) is Cruz's second novel. Like *Soledad*, *Let It Rain Coffee* focuses on a family of Dominican immigrants living in Washington Heights, and also begins with one of its characters reluctantly traveling to live with the family in New York. In this second novel, however, instead of the self-exiled daughter, the traveler is the elderly, recently widowed patriarch, Don Chan, a Chinese-Dominican former revolutionary of great respect in his home village of Los Llanos. After the death of his wife, Don Chan goes to New York to live with his son, Santo Colón, and the rest of his family, consisting of Esperanza, his wife, and Santo's two children, Bobby and Dallas. The family, already stressed from cultural and financial difficulties, only struggles more in the years following Don Chan's arrival. Santos is murdered when his taxicab is robbed; Esperanza becomes increasingly disillusioned with the possibilities of the American dream and sinks deeper into debt; Bobby is sent to prison due to a misunderstanding and an overly harsh judge; Dallas begins cutting school; and Hush, a friend of Dallas and Bobby who is informally adopted into the family later in the novel, becomes pregnant after being

assaulted and dies in childbirth. As in *Soledad*, the Colón family takes a trip to the island at the end of the novel, in this case so that Don Chan can die in his homeland. However, whereas the return home for Soledad's family is regenerative, the Colón family's reactions are far more mixed. This mixed, complex reaction can be seen almost universally in the language(s) used by the characters. Below, I will study three of the main characters (Esperanza, Dallas, and Bobby) and how their individual relationships to English and Spanish, the Dominican Republic and the United States, are deeply intertwined.

The narrative situation

Let It Rain Coffee is narrated similarly to *Soledad*, in that it is composed of a series of short vignettes focusing on different characters. However, in contrast to *Soledad*, the entire book is written in subjective third person. While we as readers are granted access to an individual character's thoughts and motivations in a vignette devoted to him or her, none of the characters speak in first person. Nonetheless, the language that each character uses in conversations with others and in their thoughts, are sufficiently unique to allow analysis of their differences and how those differences affect their relationships to each country.

How accessible is the novel to a monolingual reader?

Cruz uses the same strategies to include Spanish in *Let It Rain Coffee* as she did in *Soledad*, namely direct or indirect translation, individual words, and short phrases that are surrounded by enough context that the monolingual English reader is never truly excluded, even if she is unable to understand every word.

However, *Let It Rain Coffee* does include longer passages of untranslated Spanish, once in the form of fictionalized newspaper clipping, once in quoting Martí's "Yo soy un hombre sincero" poem, and once in quoting a Dominican laborer's chant in Spanish. The most notable of these examples is the fictionalized *La Nación's* article relating Trujillo's death. The headline reads: "REVELAN DETALLES MUERTE DE TRUJILLO" and "Generalísimo Muere Como Un Valiente" (43). To a bilingual reader, these headlines are explained by the English paragraph that follows, which asserts that Trujillo "exchanged gunshots with the assailants who killed him two nights ago" (43). However, a monolingual reader who must rely only on English has no way of knowing for certain that they are not missing key information in those Spanish-language headlines or in the phrases of Spanish that are intertwined with the English in the second paragraph of the article. It is perhaps the most linguistically uncomfortable moment in the novel for an English monolingual. Although the reader does not miss any key information (while the English does not directly translate the Spanish, similar ideas are expressed in both languages), they have no way of knowing this. English readers are not truly excluded, but they might certainly feel as though they are not being granted full access.

This particular example also allows us to discuss another important aspect of the language in the novel: namely that there are times when the context and the language used do not match up. For example, this fictionalized news article is written as if it had appeared in *La Nación* and its very clearly pro-Trujillo rhetoric marks it as a Dominican newspaper. Therefore the inclusion of *any* English in this article, much less phrases that alternate between Spanish and English, would be highly unlikely. The author is using more English than is realistic precisely to make the novel more accessible to her English monolingual

readers. Because these readers might still feel uncomfortable with the extent of the Spanish use, it is not quite a case where Cruz has *catered* to English monolinguals, but she certainly has them in mind while she writes. Other instances of disconnect between the language on the page and the language it represents occur throughout the novel, such as Don Chan and other villagers speaking English in the Dominican Republic to Hush reading out loud such headlines as “DOMINICANS FIND BACK DOOR TO NEW YORK IN PUERTO RICO” and “ANOTHER NATIVE GOES HOME TO DOMINICAN REPUBLIC IN COFFIN” “in her elementary Spanish” (25). In this second example, the fact that Hush speaks in “elementary Spanish” indicates that, although we as readers are given the headlines in English, Hush and Don Chan have headlines in Spanish. Because there are clear instances where the author relates speech and thoughts in English when it is far more likely to have taken place in Spanish, this creates moments of ambiguity in New York, where it is less clear which language would be used. The reader is unable to know how much of the English that the family uses while in the United States is because of their linguistic assimilation and how much is because the narrator has translated their dialogue into English for the reader. The use of dashes instead of quotation marks to indicate dialogue does not help, as all speech, even that which we know to be in English, is marked with dashes. This ambiguity indicates a considerable amount of accessibility to the monolingual English reader, but also contributes to moments of uncertainty and doubt for our understanding of the characters and their relationships to the two languages, as we will see, particularly with Dallas.

Dallas

Readers are introduced to Dallas at the same time as Don Chan meets her. In this introduction, he considers her “his all-American granddaughter, born in Puerto Rico” (12). Dallas presents an interesting linguistic case, in that readers are not sure of the extent to which Dallas speaks and understands Spanish. For example, Don Chan assumes she will not understand him at all, but she surprises him by using a traditional Dominican greeting for elders: “Bendición, Abuelo” (12). However, upon giving him a kiss, she follows with “Hit me again,” an unmistakably American phrase that Don Chan is unlikely to understand. To further complicate matters, however, Don Chan *does* seem to understand her, despite the very casual, colloquial American phrasing, in that he responds by bending to receive the second kiss Dallas offers. Nothing later in the novel clearly resolves Dallas’s linguistic situation. She listens to and sings along with Spanish-language music, notably Celia Cruz’s version of “Guantanamera,” but, if the popularity of English monolingual Justin Bieber’s rendition of “Despacito” is any indication, one does not need to understand a language to enjoy music in that language (195). Furthermore, in vignettes that focus solely on Dallas, Spanish is used sparingly if at all. In one six-page long vignette, Spanish is only used twice: one use of *quinceañera*, and a second quoting a boy on the street who calls her “mami” (186-191). In the end, this linguistic ambiguity paints Dallas as the most ambivalent of her family, less marked by her Dominican heritage, all while leaving open the logical possibility that she does understand and speak some Spanish.

Despite this ambiguity, her linguistic and affective development make clear that she considers herself to be very much American. As previously mentioned, she relies almost exclusively on English except with her (Spanish-speaking) family. Her growth throughout

the years of the novel also shows further hints that she is growing up American, not Dominican. Although she sings along with Celia Cruz, her bedroom is decorated with Madonna and Back Street Boy posters (114). Even her family notes that her development has been American, not Dominican: Esperanza laments that “[i]n D.R., Dallas would’ve been ripe for training to have her own home, a husband, some children, but in Nueva York, Dallas was a child with breasts” (143). When confronted about helping out around the house, she objects to the freedom her parolee brother is given while she is being asked to do his laundry and cook for him. Esperanza counters, “He’s a man. You know a man can only use one burner at a time or else they burn the entire house down,” to which Dallas argues “It’s the nineties...feminism...have you heard of the concept?” thus showing her gender politics are far more American than her Dominican mother’s (213). From the beginning of the novel, when Don Chan sees his “All-American granddaughter,” little evidence from either Dallas or her family leads the readers to see her differently.

This becomes particularly evident in various scenes that pit Dallas and her mother against each other. With Santo dead, Bobby first imprisoned then paroled, and Don Chan’s health growing steadily poorer, the tensions between mother and daughter increase, largely because of Dallas’s skipping school and not helping out around the house. When confronted with her truancy, Dallas proposes an alternative her mother cannot understand.

--I’m gonna get myself a GED.

--El GED? Esperanza pronounced it ‘head,’ and said it as if Dallas had announced that she wanted to join a cult and shave her head.

--Sí Mami, a head.

--I did not sacrifice my life so you could get a GED. She wanted a real, certified diploma from her, one that she could frame in the hallway among all the other accomplishments she hoped they would achieve. (183-4)

This argument shows Esperanza's linguistic difficulties, as well as reiterates her one-dimensional view of American life and success. Esperanza's objection to the GED plan is not the very real fact that Dallas is unlikely to complete it (she consistently shows little interest in school or in furthering her education after graduation), but in that a GED is not the path she sees for her daughter. Dallas, despite how unlikely it is that she will follow through, understands the more complex and multifaceted paths towards success available in the United States.

In a later argument, Dallas and her mother actually use their languages as weapons against each other. Dallas notes the shrillness of her mother's Spanish:

Dallas wanted to put a plug in her mother's mouth. The pitch of her voice went up high when she went off in Spanish. At least in English, she stumbled over words and couldn't keep up with her thoughts. In Spanish, Esperanza's voice was a drill. (212).

Not to be outdone, Dallas uses her English in a similar way:

-- You want me to end up like you, working for some stupid jerk who makes you stay up all night cleaning his ass? For what? Dallas said under her breath, quick enough in English so that her mother couldn't decipher what she was saying. (212)

Esperanza's Spanish is a drill, but Dallas also weaponizes her English. She expresses her anger towards her mother, all while speaking quickly so her mother cannot know exactly

what she is saying. Dallas, knowing her mother's obsession with the United States, takes advantage of her own Americanness to get back at her mother.

Dallas's opinion of the island changes little upon her arrival for the first time in the Dominican Republic. While they drive to her aunt's house, she indifferently observes the town around her while listening to her American CD player, almost bored. Although she speaks to and is understood by her Dominican family, she is never directly portrayed as speaking Spanish – all of her dialogue is written in English, further cementing in the reader's mind her identity as American rather than Dominican. Indeed, Dallas seems consistently bored or uncomfortable in the Dominican Republic: "Dallas felt like a giant in the tiny room . . . Dallas watched the ceiling fan turn and her insides turned along with it" (271). She has no personal point of reference for the island, no connection other than the assumed, but not portrayed, ability to speak to her family, so the island seems completely foreign to her, leaving her feeling out of place and overly large. She cannot see herself in this space comfortably, cannot see herself as Dominican. At the end of the novel, Dallas's trip to the Dominican Republic has only cemented what we as readers already knew: Dallas is American far more than she will ever be Dominican-American.

Esperanza

Esperanza is one of the most completely developed characters of the novel, largely because it is she, after Santo's death, who becomes the sole breadwinner and head of household, having to serve as both mother and father to her two children and Hush, as well as care for and make decisions on behalf of Don Chan. She also represents, as her name suggests, the most initially hopeful of all the first-generation immigrants of the novel. It is

she who immigrated first, while pregnant, to the United States, traveling illegally from the Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico on a small raft, then from Puerto Rico to the United States, using Puerto-Rico-born Dallas, as her entry to the U.S. Esperanza epitomizes the most classic and ideal of American dreams: “To Esperanza, New York City had always been Nueva York – an oasis of opportunity” (9). Nevertheless, her vision of the United States comes from repeated viewings of American television shows, most notably *Dallas*, for which Esperanza names her daughter. While her obsession is not entirely unique among those in her small Dominican village, the intensity of Esperanza’s adoration, for both the television show and the rich, luxurious American life portrayed by the show, far exceeds the rest of her neighbors, and ultimately drives her to save money for an illegal and dangerous trip in a raft to Puerto Rico.

However, her love of the United States, particularly as portrayed by the affluent family in the *Dallas* show, and her disdain for her own poor living situation in the Dominican Republic completely blind her to the reality and complexities of both. She is unable to see that the lifestyle and living situation portrayed in *Dallas* is far from her reality, just as out of reach in the United States as it was in the Dominican Republic. Because of this blind adoration, Esperanza consistently sees New York City idealistically rather than realistically. She chooses not to “think twice about the threat of nuclear war, the stock market crashing, the lack of trees, or the fact that streets had the smell of an impossible dream,” choosing instead to view the city as a place of hope that had sidewalks that “had given her a bounce that lifted her up above everyone else’s head” (9). As Moreno points out in her article “Dominican Dreams: Diasporic Identity in Angie Cruz’s *Let It Rain Coffee*”, “she [Esperanza] fiercely defends her decision to migrate – even though it almost

destroyed her family – and overstates the comforts that they are now able to enjoy” (108). This overstatement is clear in her conversation with Don Chan when the latter first sees his new home in New York. Don Chan sees the entryway to the apartment as dark and asks whether they too experience blackouts, like he was used to in the Dominican Republic. Esperanza’s bright and happy response reinforces her stubborn desire to belong in New York: “—Never, Esperanza chirped with pride. –We always have lights” (11). She can speak with pride, even though she “hurrie[s] Don Chan along to escape the smell of pot and piss in the elevator” (11). She may be frustrated that she and the rest of her family have not improved their social station as much as she might have wanted (“they still couldn’t afford to move into a nicer building”), but she scoffs at any of Don Chan’s concerns at her home (“He went from pissing in the dirt, with a house with no roof and he’s complaining”) (11). Nevertheless, as Al Shalabi points out, Don Chan’s home in the Dominican Republic was described in the beginning of the novel as immaculately clean, worthy of pride: “While Don Chan finds pride in the home he inherited from his family, Esperanza feels ashamed of her flat and wants to move to the Jewish neighbourhood. When confronted by Don Chan’s criticism she becomes defensive and lies to herself” (4). Esperanza can only see her two homes – past and present – through the eyes that watched and devoured *Dallas*. For her, any home in the Dominican Republic is worthy of ridicule, whereas any home in the United States is an improvement.

Another part of Esperanza’s Americanness is tied to her need to acquire luxury items she can use to prove, at least to herself, that her life has improved upon arriving in the United States. This is directly tied to her disdain for the Dominican Republic, which she associated with a lack of material goods. Her father-in-law’s constant discussions about the

island only exacerbated her need for more: “[t]he more Don Chan preached, the more obsessed Esperanza became with acquiring things” (32). She quickly buys up things she cannot afford but feels will bestow status upon her: a knock-off Chanel blouse and Gucci handbag, pearls from a TV program, and a Walkman for her commute. Her ability to acquire these items is part of their appeal; when she is preapproved for various credit cards, she is thrilled, not only because of the money, but because “this she earned from her sweat” (33). She sees her preapproval for the credit cards as a reward for her hard work in the United States. Nevertheless, her materialism is the first indication of her disillusionment and inability to actually succeed in the United States, since she never pays the bills for the credit cards. Instead she files away first the bills, and later the cards when she reaches each card’s limit, in her underwear drawer, “expecting to pay it all one day, little by little” (34). Just as she closes her eyes to the realities of her living situation, she closes her eyes to the realities of her financial situation as well.

Late in the novel, Esperanza is given the opportunity to break the hold that the show *Dallas* has over her life and her dreams. While traveling on the train, she sees and approaches Patrick Duffy, the man who played the character of Bobby Ewing on the television show *Dallas*. She consistently calls him Bobby, even after being corrected, and seems both hurt and confused by the knowledge that he is neither extremely wealthy nor does he live in Dallas, Texas, but rather in California. She seems not to understand the fact that the television show was fictitious, to the extent that she does not even know what *fictional* means. When she begins to understand, she is angry, accusing the television and the actors of lying to her:

They should've shot you. They should've shot all of you for lying to people making it look so easy. And look at you, you're a nothing, like me, on a train, like me, you live like me, but on TV, you pretend that you're something else and I believed in you. (250)

The encounter does lead Esperanza to make small financial changes, namely in going to the bank, now scared that she will never work off her credit card debt or be able to retire. However, even though Esperanza claims that meeting the man “changed everything” and that “suddenly someone turned on the lights and she was awake,” she still refers to the actor as Bobby Ewing (253). She is unable to truly separate the man from the image that he represented on television. She is awakened, perhaps, but not fully separated from her illusion.

Esperanza's desire to be American is also undermined by her language use throughout the novel, which marks her as unable to fully integrate into American society. The first sign of this tension is with her name. In contrast to her children, Bobby and Dallas, who both have English names, Esperanza keeps her name throughout the novel, even though Hope is a perfectly acceptable English-language name. Indeed, later in the novel, she imagines that her name is Hope Saint or Saint Hope, but only sees this name as a possibility if she had been born in the United States. In moments of stress or extreme emotion, Esperanza reverts entirely back into Spanish, whether or not it is contextually appropriate; the night her husband died, while in the emergency room, “Esperanza only screamed in Spanish, because that night, she didn't have the energy to translate herself” (80). The use of the word translate here also implies that when Esperanza does use English, it is in translation, that her thoughts and communications come to her first in Spanish and must be

translated into English. Although she desires to be American, her inability to see the reality of American life combined with the fact that over the years she has not assimilated linguistically, show that she does not truly belong as American, especially not in the way that her daughter does.

Esperanza's feelings towards the island only become more concrete when they travel there at the end of the novel so that Don Chan can die in his homeland. Of all the family, Esperanza's disdain for her homeland is the most explicit:

And when she was accosted by a strange bug or flying leaf, debating if she should use the latrine, or piss in the wild shrubbery, thirsty but afraid of the water in the well, Esperanza was sure that Los Llanos was never a place she could call home. (286)

The house of her husband and her husband's family is entirely strange to her, too low to be considered as an adequate place to live, much less call home, with foul water and fouler toilets. Indeed, she considers the land, knowing Don Chan is close to death and thus she is close to inheriting it, and her only thought is to sell it "and pay all her debt so she could be free. Maybe even start saving for a house to retire in" (286). Her return to the Dominican Republic did nothing more than cement her love of the United States. She may never sufficiently integrate – linguistically or economically – into the United States or achieve the impossible dream of a *Dallas*-inspired luxurious house, but for her the United States will always be home far more than the Dominican Republic.

Bobby

Of the three characters I will present from *Let It Rain Coffee*, Bobby is by far the least developed. However, he is important in that of the three he undergoes the most profound change and is most impacted by their final trip to the island at the end of the novel, possibly because he found himself so out of place in the United States. After being imprisoned due to a series of unfortunate events and misunderstandings, in the detention center, he thinks: “My being here is a mistake . . . I don’t belong here” (140). Bobby only finds relief and comfort in the meditation classes offered once a week. In the breathwork that the class uses, the instructor encourages the students to find comfort in a place outside of the four walls, and Bobby consistently goes back to small, comforting moments with his father in their apartment before Santo died.

He gains no sense of belonging after being released from prison:

Everyone could see him: **EX-CON**. They assumed he was dangerous. That he had messed up his life in some irreparable way. There were no *backspace* or *insert* options to fix what had happened three years before. He needed an *escape* button to start over. (185, emphasis original)

Although he finds some comfort in computers, which he began to learn about in prison and continues to learn after his release, he never feels at home when he returns to his family. He wants escape from the life that he is living in Washington Heights. At one point, he sees this escape in Hush and her baby, imagining marrying her and moving out of the neighborhood into a small house somewhere. However, this escape does not happen: Hush dies during her C-section, leaving Bobby heartbroken, with a child that is not biologically his but that he has decided to care for, and feeling more lost than ever.

Perhaps because of this feeling of displacement in the United States, Bobby is particularly taken with the island when he travels back to it. While his mother and sister stay with the family, Bobby goes with his grandfather to his village, Los Llanos, where he meets and instantly falls in love with Miraluz, a woman who had known – and been loved by – both his father and grandfather. It is with her and in his conversations with her that Bobby starts to find purpose. Miraluz, unsatisfied with the working conditions in her previous job, had started an underwear company whose goal was to create better working conditions for its female employees. It is Bobby who encourages her not to settle on simply selling to Dominican Yorks and hoping that word of mouth will keep her company alive, but rather suggests that she moves to the Internet to sell her wares. He even offers to show her how and to help with setting up the online store. It is also while making love to Miraluz that Bobby finds himself at home for the first time since before his father died:

Bobby licked every inch of Miraluz. And his body was reawakened and reminded that he was still alive. He never did get to make love to Hush. He wanted to seal the agreement of his arrival, to enter home. And being careful not to break her, he entered Miraluz and made love to her. Made love to Hush. Made love to San Pedro de Macorís. Made love to Dominican Republic. And after he climaxed, he didn't want to leave that small room, or Miraluz, who looked so beautiful once her hair curled up from the sweat and the makeup was gone. He didn't want to stop making love to the soft-spoken –Ay, Santo, which inspired every lick and touch . . . He dug deep inside her as she screamed, --Ay, Santo, que (*sic*) maravilla Santo, ven conmigo, Santo.

--Yes, he crooned along with her. --Yes, he said as he collapsed into her and fell into a long-awaited sleep. (283)

The scene is beautiful, not least because it is the most genuinely happy that we see Bobby throughout the novel. The lovemaking reminds him that he is Dominican in a way that returning to the island alone could not accomplish. For Bobby, in this moment, the Dominican Republic becomes home to him, giving comfort and safety and allowing him to leave behind the hurt that was the United States. Even upon his release, his contentment remains and he has no desire to leave. Whereas for his sister, the small room she finds herself in leaves her feeling uncomfortable, out of place, the smallness of the room in which Bobby makes love to Miraluz is seen as desirable, as desirable as Miraluz herself, who, sweating and stripped of makeup, becomes even more beautiful.

Nonetheless, the moment is complicated in ways that Bobby does not seem to realize. Despite Miraluz's age and lack of virginity, he enters her gently, afraid to break not the sexually aroused woman, but the illusion she represents, the perfection Bobby sees in both woman and island. Furthermore, while Bobby happily makes love to Miraluz, Miraluz is making love to memories, to Santo, rather than to Bobby himself. She makes no attempt to hide this fact, encouraging – in Spanish – Bobby over and over again using his father's name. The encouragement, even the use of the name, only spurs Bobby on, as he must take on the image of his father in this moment to fully live it. His answer to Miraluz's Spanish is in English, despite the simplicity of his *yes*. The lovemaking allows Bobby to open himself up to the Dominican Republic, but his father, and Bobby's Americanness will always haunt him. Bobby is indeed content in this moment, but his English response, mixed with Miraluz's Spanish and reference to his father, indicates that Bobby's opening to and

acceptance of the Dominican Republic is not without its adversities. The Dominican Republic becomes his partner and fulfills him, but does not love him back equally, and does not replace his American identity; he will always be less than his father in the island's eyes.

Once in Los Llanos, Bobby alone seems to be able to appreciate his grandfather's love of the place. As the tiny Consuelo (Hush's child, who the Colón family has adopted) reaches up for an orange from a nearby tree, Bobby "clapped with joy" and asked "—Look at this. Where in New York City can you do this?" and is not deterred by his sister's curt reply of "The supermarket" (286). Consider as well, Bobby's imaginings, and the way he contemplates staying, first for a few days to let Miraluz get to know Consuelo, and later more permanently:

He feasted on the sun and imagined Sunday-afternoon barbecues with music blaring out of his surround-sound stereo system. He couldn't imagine a cloudy day in D.R. He could live in such a climate. As long as he could plug in, he would be happy to stay. (286).

As before, however, Bobby's vision of himself in the Dominican Republic is flawed. He imagines barbecues and surround-sound stereos – more descriptive of Washington Heights than what has been described of the Dominican Republic, particularly the rural Los Llanos. He loves the climate, but cannot imagine the most basic of inconveniences such as clouds, much less consider rain, drought, or hurricanes. Even he considers his love of the island to be conditional – earlier he describes his need to plug into the internet, not only to help Miraluz, but also to continue his job in the United States, but this need is never tempered by the very real fact of frequent blackouts on the island. He is not a farmer like his grandfather, and will continue to remain linked to the United States, his true home, because

he cannot help but idealize the island and ignore his unavoidable ties to the U.S. Perhaps most indicative of this inherent tie to the United States is his name: at no point, either in narration or in thought, does Bobby revert to his Dominican name, Roberto María. This suggests that, while he is happy in the Dominican Republic and with Miraluz, this happiness will be transient, and he will end up belonging no more on the island than he did in the States.

While in many ways the arc of *Let It Rain Coffee* mirrors that of *Soledad*, the final return to the Dominican Republic is far more ambivalent and problematic than in *Soledad*. There is no eye-opening epiphany on the part of any of the characters. Dallas and Esperanza remain neutral or negative towards the island, whereas Bobby's superficial hopes for a new life are shown to be no more likely than Esperanza's dreams of imitating the Ewing family from *Dallas*. Perhaps what is most interesting about this particular novel is that the opinions about the island are not split along generational lines, but rather lines of experience. Bobby and Esperanza, marked by disappointment with the place where they grew up, seek out and search for a new home, a better place to live, although neither can either affectively or linguistically leave behind their childhood perspectives and heritage. Dallas, however, is alone in not feeling out of place in the place where she grew up: she feels she belongs and is American, and feels the most able to take advantage of the various systems in place, a privilege granted her by her American citizenship. Throughout the novel, the language of each of these characters emphasizes these prejudices and hopes. Esperanza yearns to be American, but her thoughts and her speech consistently revert back to Spanish. Bobby, although born in the Dominican Republic, largely grew up in the United States, as marked by the language he himself uses: English. Even when making love to the

Dominican Republic, he is unable to leave behind this mentality, even for the most simple of responses: *yes*. However, outsiders such as other inmates consistently mark him as Dominican, or as his father, and as Miraluz do. Stuck between two worlds, he leans into the Dominican identity, but cannot embrace the linguistic and mental shift necessary for success. Dallas alone is comfortable with her identity, as she embraces her English and her American passport without conflict or internal strife.

Conclusion

Both of Cruz's novels, *Soledad* and *Let It Rain Coffee*, focus on the struggles of an immigrant family to find their own level of acceptance of their Dominican homeland. These characters' opinions of the island vary considerably, and their language largely reflects those ideas. While monolingual English readers may not be always comfortable in understanding the minimal Spanish presented in either novel, they are not excluded. Indeed, the English is so prevalent that at times, particularly in *Let It Rain Coffee*, the language actually being used is ambiguous because the situation portrayed makes the English of the novel doubtful. However, a careful examination – as well as an ability to read both languages – reveals that, far from being random or to merely used to heighten the Dominican flavor, the mix of Spanish and English serves a key role in developing the national identities and affiliations of various characters. This is seen largely in the fact that each character has his or her own unique blend of Spanish and English, which underlines those affiliations. For example, Flaca's use of AAVE and DOMINICANS GO ALL OUT t-shirt shows both her American side yet her pride in her background, while Dallas's use of rapid English to intentionally confuse and hurt her Spanish-speaking mother, combined with

consistent ambiguities as to Dallas's Spanish abilities, prove her to be the most American of all of the characters in the novels described in this chapter. Language also serves a pivotal role in showing the change in Soledad's feelings throughout the novel: at the beginning Soledad's Spanish allows her opportunities such as an apprenticeship in Spain, but she blatantly rejects any connection to the Dominican Republic itself, a perspective that softens and morphs into cautious acceptance, shown through Soledad's increasing use of conversational Spanish towards the end of the novel. Esperanza and Bobby's use of language too is key in that their explicit affiliations are undermined by their inherent and unavoidable affiliations: both explicitly state the desire to more wholly belong to a country and a community in which their language and their cultural perspectives prevent them from being accepted. However, even monolingual English readers are exposed to the complex identity tensions that immigrants face, regardless of generation. The result of both novels is therefore education rather than exclusion: readers are exposed to two immigrant families in all of their complexities. To varying degrees, each character lives, as Soledad's abuela, with their head in one country and heart in love with the other, thus showing the difficult, yet diverse, experiences of both first and second-generation Dominican immigrants, as well as their complex relationships both among themselves, and with their two cultures and countries.

Chapter 3: “Jiu ehpiqui, plis?”: Bilingualism in Roberto G. Fernández

Despite having published for decades in the United States, Cuba, and Spain, Roberto G. Fernández has not achieved the popular acclaim and attention as some of his Cuban-American writer peers. This is likely due, at least in part, to the complex mix of languages that Fernández uses in his works throughout his career. Indeed, in each of his books, Fernández combines Spanish and English in intricate ways that lend his works to bilingual rather than monolingual readers. This is most noticeable in *La vida es un special* (1981), *Raining Backwards* (1988), and *En la Ocho y la Doce* (2001), the three novels that form the basis of the analysis of this chapter. However, although each combines Spanish and English, each of these novels is unique in the ways it includes both languages, and each is tailored to challenge its readers in different ways.

In this study, I will show that Roberto G. Fernández’s changes the way he employs his two languages to suit and challenge his different audiences, regardless of the intended audience’s anticipated bilingual ability. The effect of this adaptation is to ensure that each text promotes moments of miscommunication between text and reader, due to unfamiliar vocabulary, phrases, spelling, accent, or references. The demanding nature of the text language also cements a complex, rather than wholly positive discourse on bilingualism. In each work, Fernández acknowledges the benefit of bilingualism, but also examines difficulties presented by incomplete bilingualism, generational differences in bilingualism, and societal prejudices against bilinguals.

In this chapter I will first review Cuban immigration to Miami and its impact on the city, then I will give a brief overview of the previous criticism on Fernández. Afterwards, I

enter into my own analysis, beginning with an examination of the varying audience to whom Fernández directs each work, and then onto the messages each work gives the readers about the benefits and difficulties of bilingualism in the United States.

Cuban Immigrants in the United States

Although Cubans have a long history of immigration to the United States, the immigrants most pertinent to Fernández's works are those that arrived in the United States after the Cuban Revolution in 1959. For the most part, these immigrants are considered political refugees, and indeed this can be seen in the consistent anti-communist, anti-Castro discourse from various characters of Fernández's works, most notably Mirta Vergara. In general, the first waves of immigration tended to be white Cubans from the upper and middle class, although the numbers of working class immigrants rose steadily after 1962. This means that Fernández's characters could come from a variety of economic backgrounds, from working to upper class. However, it also means that many of them see themselves as refugees rather than immigrants, with strong ties to, and love for, the island and, especially for the earliest immigrants, the intent to return to Cuba once the Castro government was no longer in power.

Fernández's characters, like the majority of Cuban immigrants, end up in Miami, which is the setting of each of the three novels studied in this chapter. In the years following the Cuban Revolution, immigration from Cuba to Miami was so extensive that by 1983, Cubans represented 42% of Miami's population, as compared to only 14% in 1964 (Levine 55). As Cubans arrived in Miami, they brought and maintained many of their traditions, and, over time, established communities that mirrored the ones they had left in

Cuba. This was done in part by introducing dozens of Cuban restaurants and grocery stores, which still exist today in the part of town referred to as Little Havana. Many of these stores sell Cuban brands that, ironically, are no longer available in Cuba, such as Hatuey, Ironbeer, Gilda, La Lechera, among others. This abundance of stores and products contributes to the intense Cuban nostalgia portrayed by Fernández's characters, who mention that sugar is not as sweet in the United States as in Cuba (*En la Ocho y la Doce* 3) and who resurrect Cuban beaches in their bathrooms using kitty litter and Alka-Seltzer (*Raining Backwards* 55-6).

This abundance of Cubans and Cuban businesses allowed new arrivals to delay assimilation as long as they desired. Immigrants could live in Cuban-American neighborhoods, attend Cuban-American churches, and work for and patronize Cuban-American businesses, with little interaction with Anglo-American sections of Miami. Even as immigrants began to assimilate, their collective economic prosperity steadily grew until, by the 1980s, the purchasing power of Miami Cubans exceeded that of those Cubans still on the island (Levine 101). Levine also points out that "Miami has emerged as the commercial gateway to Latin America, a circumstance aided in no small measure by the fact that visitors feel comfortable speaking Spanish in Miami and find there a sophisticated Hispanic urban culture" (101). While individual Cuban immigrants, like other immigrants, certainly have struggled to find jobs and make ends meet, Cuban-Americans as a community have contributed immensely to the strength of Miami's economy and to its classification as an international, touristic city and banking center. They also wield a considerable amount of political influence as a result; Miami's current mayor and several of its city officials have personal connections to the Cuban-American community of Miami.

Also important to consider when discussing the context of Fernández's works are English-Only laws in the United States in general and the English-Only law of Miami-Dade County in particular. Due at least in part to the abundance of Cuban-Americans and other Spanish speakers in Miami, and the frustration that English-speaking, non-Hispanic Americans felt with the Cubans' reluctance to assimilate into American culture, Dade County passed an English-Only law in 1980, shortly before the publication of *La vida es un special*. The law prohibited city officials from using any language but English, essentially banning all government departments from conducting business or printing documents in anything but English. According to Greenspan, the "ordinance was so restrictive that 'even zoo signs identifying an animal's name in Latin violated the law'" (896). Fortunately, in 1984, the commission voted to trim some of the most problematic restrictions by "allowing certain exceptions for promoting tourism, providing medical and emergency services, and serving the elderly and handicapped" (896). These exceptions did not extend to educational materials, since directional signs, fire-prevention and neo-natal pamphlets and bus schedules continued being printed exclusively in English. However, these exceptions were not universally approved; some citizens who attended the hearings "held signs calling for the commissioners to be hanged" (896).

The law lasted until May of 1993, when a new board, consisting of 6 Hispanic, 4 Black and 3 White (non-Hispanic) members, unanimously voted to repeal Miami's English-Only law. However, the Florida Constitution, in Article II, Section 9, still names English as the official language of the state, although this clause does not ban other language use as the Miami English-Only law did. This is important to remember in the context of Fernández's work, as it contributes to the political discourse and nature of his writing,

particularly in regards to the Tongue Brigade and Supreme Court decision portrayed in *Raining Backwards*.

Review of the Criticism¹⁰

Multiple scholars have looked at various aspects of Fernández's work, mostly in regards to *Raining Backwards*. Perhaps most relevant of this criticism is Stephanie Alvarez's article, "Subversive English in *Raining Backwards*: A Different Kind of Spanglish." In the article she makes a case that language itself serves as a protagonist and that "*Raining Backwards* uses subversive English to create a Spanglish novel that, through English, preserves the linguistic and cultural memory of Spanish and subverts the power relationship between English and Spanish such that monolingual English-speakers assume the position of a marginalized subject in their own language" (444). Also useful in Alvarez's article is her extensive documentation of calques, calqued idiomatic expressions, and

¹⁰ In this section, I focus on the review of the criticism that discusses the topic of Fernández's language. However, many scholars, most notably Humberto López Cruz, Jorge Febles, William O. Deaver, Jr. and Mary S. Vásquez, have also focused on different aspects of his work.

For more information on Cuban-American identity and (mis)representation of the island by Fernández's Cuban-American characters, refer to:

Binder, Wolfgang. "Is Memory the Amnesia You Like? Some Remarks on Self-Invention and the Presence of Caribbean Literature in North America."; Domínguez Miguela, Antonia. "Geographies of Identity in Cuban American Narrative."; López Cruz, Humberto. "Dos novelas cubanoamericanas: Dos inserciones del imaginario Cuba dentro de la realidad estadounidense"; López Cruz, Humberto. "Señales contradictorias en el enunciado de asimilación de Roberto G. Fernández: *Raining Backwards* vs. *En la Ocho y la Doce*"; and Vásquez, Mary. "The Fantastic and the Grotesque in the Fiction of Roberto Fernández: The Case of *Raining Backwards*".

For more information on Fernández's extensive use of intertextuality, refer to:

Febles, Jorge. "El pretexto de la parodia o la parodia del pre-texto: en torno a un capítulo de *Raining Backwards*"; Febles, Jorge. "Sobre intenciones e intuiciones: la desnaturalización de textos en *Raining Backwards*"; and Vásquez, Mary S. "Parody, Intertextuality and Cultural Values in Roberto G. Fernández's *Raining Backwards*."

“morphosyntactic Hispanisms,” as well as their origin in Spanish. This article is particularly helpful for monolingual English readers of *Raining Backwards* in that it offers English equivalents for the calques and calqued idiomatic expressions that Alvarez documents. However, since this is an academic article, its resources are far more likely to be accessible to an academic reader than the general population.

William O. Deaver Jr.’s article “From Polyglossia to Disglossia: Defining Chronotype, Authority, and Subversion in *Raining Backwards*” also asserts that language serves as a protagonist in the novel: “*Raining Backwards* abounds with broken English. Fernández causes the reader to question the idea of a mythical, standard English that allegedly unifies America by depicting a segment of America that speaks a pidgin that has evolved into a creole language” (452). Furthermore, he points out Fernández’s own extensive scholarly work in linguistics, thereby suggesting that the novel’s use of Cuban-American English is an intentional exploration of “the idiosyncracies of language rather than exile experience” (451).

Also of note is Rosanna Rivero Marín’s book, *Janus Identities and Forked Tongues: Two Caribbean Writers in the United States*. In it, she argues that Fernández intentionally subverts his English for political purposes, to exclude those outside of the community, which she identifies as U.S. Latino. She states that “there is political resistance through the use of language to create a sense of exclusivity and cultural identity; to create ‘lo propio’ as opposed to the mainstream” (1). However, she acknowledges that, “Latino literature is not meant to be read by a few. Quite the opposite, its reading public should be the majority. However, being able to read a text and understanding one are two different things” (25). Rivero Marín therefore suggests that *Raining Backwards* (the main focus of her study) is

politically motivated – English monolinguals misunderstand the book. It is also important to note that she prefers the terms *exclude* or *exclusionary* over *privilege* or *privileged*, implying that English readers are not merely at a disadvantage, as I will argue, but rather are left out of the discussion of the novel.

One of the few articles that comment extensively on the language of works other than *Raining Backwards* is Humberto López Cruz's "Confusiones ingeniadas por Roberto G. Fernández en *Raining Backwards* y *En la Ocho y la Doce*: antesala de *Entre dos aguas*." López Cruz's article focuses on the result of such language play, namely miscommunication and communication: "La imposibilidad de una comunicación fructífera es lo que sobresale" (36). He argues that Fernández is not playful in his language as Deaver suggests, but is rather pessimistic about where such language is heading: "Fernández vuelve a ser pesimista en sus augurios: la decepción por la incompreensión entre dos sectores de la identidad cubana" (37). However, while López Cruz does look at various works, his purpose is to identify a overarching trend across these works rather than identify how this trend manifests itself differently with different audiences, as I hope to do in this present study.

The running commentary throughout all of these articles is the notion that Fernández in some way privileges his bilingual readers over his monolingual readers. However, the criticism is not in agreement about the tone (playful satire or pessimistic miscommunication), or the purpose of this privileging (political exclusion of the non-Latino community or a linguistic analysis of the realities of Cuban-American conversation in Miami). While all of this scholarship has contributed greatly to the study of Fernández and his body of work, it is also important to consider its limitations. First of all, as previously

noted, most of this scholarship focuses on *Raining Backwards*. Only López Cruz gives more than a brief consideration to *En la Ocho y la Doce*, and none of these articles discuss the highly complex language of *La vida es un special*. Furthermore, none of the articles examine how Fernández provides many opportunities for even his privileged audience (Spanish-English bilinguals) to misunderstand. For example, readers who are not familiar with the Hispanic canon of literary works will likely miss references to El Cid, Cecilia Valdés and José Martí (who appears as Joe Marty in *Raining Backwards*). As Deaver describes in “*Raining Backwards: Stylization and Mimicry*,” Fernández also mimics and stylizes the words of Columbus, George Washington and John F. Kennedy. He subverts references to linguistics terms (“disglossia”) and inserts the names of colleagues in *En la Ocho y la Doce*¹¹. All of these examples serve to show that, Fernández’s bilingualism is just one source of possible misunderstanding and privileging in his works. This is particularly important since “Fernández’s work has always been published by not-for-profit venues such as Miami’s Universal and Houston’s Arte Público, many of his stories circulated in literary magazines in the United States and abroad, and his readership is predominantly academic and on the fringe of mainstream culture” (Irizarry 114). My goal in this chapter is to expand upon this scholarship by studying three of Fernández’s works and considering how his use of language changes over the trajectory of his career and how each novel is tailored to a different audience, as well as the linguistic and literary methods by which Fernández achieves this differentiation. Furthermore, I hope to examine not only the language of the

¹¹ On page 67 of *En la Ocho y la Doce*, Fernández makes reference to Jorge Febles and Humberto López-Cruz, two critics who have written extensively about Fernández. He also mentions Cardinal Firmat, likely a reference to Gustavo Pérez Firmat, a well-known Cuban-American scholar and writer.

novels, but also the discourse on bilingualism, which is consistently complex and nuanced throughout his works.

A Note on the Terms I Will Use

The complexity of Fernández's language(s) makes writing concisely and precisely about his work equally complex. In order to be as clear as possible in my analysis, I will provide below some of the terms that I will use throughout this chapter to study Fernández's books. None of these terms are particular to my work, nor are they intended to differ from their uses in linguistics. However, because some of these phrases do not have standardly accepted linguistic definitions (take, for example, Spanglish), and others could overlap, I wish to differentiate my own uses for clarity.

- Spanish: This will be used when standard Spanish spelling, grammar, and lexical choices are observed.
- English: This will be used when standard English spelling, grammar, and lexical choices are observed.
- Spanglish: This will be used to describe calques, Hispanisms, or other places in which the language of a word or phrase does not match the language of origin of the phrase or word. For example, the use of "I threw the house out of the window," a direct translation of a Spanish idiomatic phrase (*Raining Backwards* 74).
- Code-switching: This will be used to describe instances in which a passage which is predominantly in either English or Spanish contains words or phrases in the other language. For the purposes of this study, loanwords will be classified as code-

switching. For example, “Bunch of good for nothing basura!” (*Raining Backwards* 59).

- Eye Dialect: This term in linguistics studies refers to language that is deliberately misspelled to suggest a particular pronunciation or dialect. An example of this would be, “*Ji ju sins esquecer di ibil agüey*” (*En la Ocho y la Doce* 131). Fernández uses eye dialect in both Spanish and English, and I therefore will include in parentheses the language for which Fernández is using eye dialect if it is unclear.
- Cubanism/Caribbeanism/Cuban-Americanism: This term will be used to describe a word, phrase, or idiom that is particular to Cuba, the Caribbean, or Cuban-Americans, respectively.

These phrases are not meant to be exclusive, and can indeed overlap, particularly in the case of the last three terms provided (see *La vida es un special* below).

Different Audiences

In this section, I intend to highlight the differences between the ideal or most privileged audience for three of Fernández’s texts: *La vida es un special*, *Raining Backwards*, and *En la Ocho y la Doce*. I have chosen these three because they represent three very different audiences and periods of Fernández’s career, as I will detail below. In each, the level of anticipated bilingualism of the audience differs vastly, and each novel is tailored to ensure that all readers experience moments of difficulty and possible misunderstanding.

La vida es un special

La vida es un special, Fernández’s second book, was published in 1981 by Ediciones universal (*sic*), located in Miami, Florida. Rather than a centralized, cohesive narrative, the

book consists of a series of vignettes, many of them presenting only dialogue without any descriptions of those speaking. The focus is on Cuban-American Miami, and satirizes various aspects of the community, including (but not limited to) commercials and other components of materialism, incomplete assimilation, and, of course, language.

One of the most salient features of the language in *La vida es un special* is the almost complete lack of monolingual language throughout. The novel consists of a combination of Standard English and Standard Spanish, as well as countless incidents of eye dialect of both Spanish and English words. Despite the fact that eye dialect is almost universally difficult to read¹², Fernández uses it extensively, sometimes for whole conversations (see below). The result is a novel that, in contrast to *Raining Backwards* and *En la Ocho y la Doce*, is pragmatically indecipherable to readers unfamiliar with Spanish, English, and Cuban-American dialects of each.

Consider, for example, the following quote, presented in the second vignette of the work: “--¿Ud. me está diciendo que el mangle es más eficiente que el uranio enriquecido? You must be kidding!” (10). Although in this case both the Spanish and the English are presented with standard spelling, the switch between the two occurs without transition, and without any form of translation. Furthermore, the lack of italics indicates that the English produced here is not meant to be considered a foreign interjection, but rather a natural part of the dialogue. Although this particular instance is just a short exclamation, and could be ignored by a monolingual Spanish reader, this is not the extent of English found in the novel. In addition to short interjections of English, there is also an unnamed

¹² The definition for eye dialect as it appears in *The Columbia Guide to Standard American English* provides the following caution: “Use it sparingly: such renderings can be very hard to read, and they can therefore cause some readers to give up” (186).

female character whose one-sided conversations with a character named Charlie (who does not speak) are presented entirely in English (25, 71, 81). Although in Standard English, the conversations are still long enough to require considerable comfort with English on the part of the reader. The conversations detail different stages of a trip to South Florida by a presumably white couple, and their naively racist assessment of Hispanics in the area (the way they describe the local people is more reminiscent of a couple observing monkeys than people) provide an important other viewpoint in the novel's satire, and thus cannot be overlooked. Unlike *En la Ocho y la Doce* (see below), a considerable knowledge of English is needed to even access a considerable amount of the novel.

However, an understanding of both English and Spanish are still insufficient to read the work. While both languages sometimes appear in standard spelling, in other instances, one or both appear in eye dialect intended to mimic Cuban-American pronunciation. Take, for example, the following sentence: “—Bueno mai laif, te miro y sey jalou to everibodi in di jau” (15). In standard spelling, this sentence would be written: “Bueno, my life, te miro y say hello to everyone in the house¹³.” This single sentence combines three different aspects of Fernández's bilingualism. First and foremost, the sentence code-switches between Spanish (*Bueno*) and English (*say hello*). Furthermore, the sentence contains calques in both Spanish and English. *My life* is a calque of the Spanish *mi vida*, while *te miro* is a calque of the English *I'll see you*. Even in its standardly-spelled form, the sentence requires enough knowledge of both Spanish and English to be able to recognize the calques and switch mid-sentence between the two. However, the English of the sentence is not presented in standard spelling, but rather eye dialect. Readers must be able to sound out the English to

¹³ If it were to be translated into completely Standard English, it would be: “Very well, my love, I'll see you and say hello to everyone in the house.”

“translate” *jalou* to *hello* and *mai laif* to *my life*. Knowledge of Standard English and Standard Spanish is insufficient, the reader must be familiar with the way in which Cuban-accented English would sound to access the content of the sentence.

If such a text were an isolated incident, it might be possible to minimize its impact by stating that it privileges certain readers rather than excludes those who cannot access this text. While I argue that this is the case in *Raining Backwards* and *En la Ocho y la Doce* (see below), *La vida es un special* does indeed exclude monolingual readers. The sections of Spanglish, code-switching, and eye-dialect are not individual sentences that appear periodically throughout the text, but rather, there are whole conversations that incorporate all of these phenomena. Take for instance, the following beginning of a conversation, which continues beyond the quotation cited below for about a page of text:

—Hello, Nivaria ehpiqui. ¿Qué e lo que ay?

--En la mihma, ¿no? Igual que yo mierma.

--No vieja, no, amí ni un mitín má.

--Que ehta ve sí. Let mi tel yu que ace dose año ehtoy yendo? alo mitíne y ná.

Y me tumban mi pesito semanal ace doce año, tuelv year jony, y total paqué si yo vine pacá mucho ante polque el cable que me comía ayá se ehtaba

bolviendo el electric company¹⁴. (53)

¹⁴ --Hello, Nivaria speaking. ¿Qué es lo que hay?”

--En la misma, ¿no? Igual que yo mi hermana.

--No, vieja, no, a mí ni un mitin más.”

--Que esta vez sí. Let me tell you que hace doce años estoy yendo a los mintines y nada. Y me tumban mi pesito semanal hace doce años, twelve year(s) honey, y total para que si yo vine para acá mucho ante(s) porque el cable que yo comía allá se estaba volviendo el electric company.”

Like the previous paragraph's sample sentence, this conversation consists of multiple instances of code-switching (*Let me tell you que hace doce años*) and is written entirely in eye dialect. However, while the previous paragraph's example only included eye dialect for English words, this conversation includes eye dialect for both English words (*jony* for *honey*) and Spanish words (*ace dose año* for *hace doce años*). Furthermore, the conversation takes advantage of multiple Cubanisms, such as *total para que*¹⁵ and *comerse un cable*¹⁶. Such phrases would cause difficulty even for a monolingual Spanish reader not from the Caribbean, and thus once again only grant complete access to Caribbean bilingual speakers. Furthermore, such extended conversations, consisting of eye dialect and Cubanisms appear consistently throughout the novel (10-11, 15, 19, 28-9, 35-6, 53, 56-7, 68-9, 77-8), in addition to shorter phrases that appear more periodically. The prevalence of such language moves the text away from merely privileging Spanglish readers into truly excluding those readers unfamiliar with this very particular speech.

La vida es un special thus requires an understanding how Cuban-Americans might speak in Miami, but it also privileges those readers who understand various dialectical differences on the island itself. One of the characters, Sylvia, calls on Señora Kika, in a conversation that plays with various Cuban dialects. The maid opens the door, asking “¿De palte?,” using the *l* sound instead of the *r*, a characteristic of the lower classes in Cuba¹⁷

¹⁵ A phrase that translates roughly to *All for what?*

¹⁶ An idiomatic expression meaning *doing badly*

¹⁷ Lipski states, “Loss of phrase-final /r/ is rather common in colloquial speech (e.g. *voy a trabajá* [I’m going to work]), but among lower classes, particularly from the central and eastern regions, pronunciation as [l] is the more common alternative (e.g. *pol favol* for *por favor* [please]). Among Cuban communities in the United States, the pronunciation of phrase-final /r/ is a major sociolinguistic differentiator between the first groups of immigrants, representing the professional classes of Havana, and those arriving during and after the Mariel boatlift of 1980” (*Varieties of Spanish*, 111)

(19). Sylvia obviously takes issue with such a pronunciation, as she mentions it to her host as a sign of a lack of *educación*, which in Spanish can either refer to education as it does in English, or one's upbringing. Sylvia in particular seems overly concerned with the way in which she speaks, and over-enunciates to mimic her hostess's more standard-Spanish pronunciation:

--Te llamo para darte lass gracias por el servvicio de té que me presstasste.

Le dio mucha vida a la mesa.

--No hay de que es una tetera antiquísima. Ha estado en la familia por más de ocho generaciones.

--También quería señalarte que tu criadita nuevva ess algo dessscaradita y falta de educación. (19).

Whereas Señora Kika's words are written in standard speech, indicating a natural lack of Cuban accent, the doubling of the letters *v*¹⁸ and *s*¹⁹ in Sylvia's speech show that she is focusing on making sure that she "correctly" pronounces them. The fact that these dialectical pronunciations are, as with the shift from *r* to *l*, more common in the rural, lower classes of the eastern regions of Cuba only further emphasizes Sylvia's classist prejudice against these pronunciations, as well as indicates where Sylvia might be from, and what she is trying to hide about her family's social status in Cuba. However, to make sense of these additional letters and Sylvia's social status, readers must have at least some understanding of Cuban dialectical differences on the island.

¹⁸ Varela acknowledges that in various Spanish-speaking regions, "los sonidos fricativas de /b, d, g/ desaparecen," meaning that *abuelo* would be pronounced *a-ue-lo* (50). It would appear that Sylvia is over-pronouncing this fricative to ensure that it is not lost.

¹⁹ "Syllable and word-final /s/ weakens to an aspiration [h], whereas prepausally complete elision is more common. In the eastern provinces, the rate of total elision in all positions rise proportionately" (Lipski, *Varieties of Spanish* 112).

In addition to knowledge the variety of Cuban dialects, some understanding of American (read: United States) customs is necessary as well. Several of the vignettes provide the dialogue of either a telenovela or a radionovela²⁰ that focuses on the figure of San Guiven. San Guiven is associated with pavos/turkeys (17), and his saint day is celebrated on “elúltimo (*sic*) jueve de noviembre, di las sersdei in nobember²¹” (77). Readers must be sufficiently aware of Catholic saints to know that San Guiven is not a traditionally recognized saint, be familiar enough with Thanksgiving to recognize the references, *and* be able to read the eye dialect *San Guiven* to translate it into the English *Thanksgiving*. The readers must therefore be not only bilingual but also bicultural to recognize the playful use of this fictional saint in the work.

The result of both references and language within the work is a book that is truly written in a form of Spanglish, written by a Cuban-American specifically for the Cuban-American community. The place and date of the publication (Miami, Florida in 1981) only serve to further emphasize that this particular book is written with a very specific audience in mind. This niche audience has limited considerably both the novel’s popularity as well as the criticism available about the work. It is therefore not unsurprising that Fernández’s later works appeal to a far wider audience, as is the case with *Raining Backwards*.

Raining Backwards

Raining Backwards was published by Arte Público Press in 1988, and rereleased in 1997. As previously mentioned, it is by the far the most studied of Fernández’s works, perhaps because it was written for English speakers and was his first novel published in

²⁰ Unlike in *En la Ocho y la Doce*, which describes the color of the episodes, *La vida es un special* only discusses the aural aspects, such as dialogue and music.

²¹ The last Thursday in November

English. The book continues the satire of Cuban-Americans in Miami as presented in *La vida es un special*, including their struggles to assimilate and their hyperbolic nostalgia of Cuba. However, it also expands on the younger generation of Cuban-Americans, particularly through the character of Eloy and the siblings, Keith, Connie, and Quinn. While also told in vignettes, Keith's illegal exploits and Connie's relationship with Bill, which leads to her death, provide a more solid and traditional plot line than exists in either *La vida es un special* or *Raining Backwards*.

Many of the critics, even in articles not specifically devoted to talking about Fernández's language, do touch on the difficulty of the language in *Raining Backwards* for monolingual English readers. Some, like Rivero Marín explicitly state that the language is exclusionary, while others (Alvarez, Deaver) imply that the text privileges bilingual readers rather than excludes monolingual ones. I take the latter stance, especially when this text is read in conjunction with other major books by Fernández over his career.

Take, for example, the most common sample sentence provided in criticism: "she will undergo surgery to correct a waterfall in her left eye which is causing her difficulty with her vision" (*Raining Backwards* 31). By providing this example, critics intend to show that monolingual English readers will miss the calque provided by the word "waterfall," which in this instance is meant to be read as *catarata*, the Spanish word for both waterfall and cataracts. This statement is true: monolingual English readers would likely miss this reference. However, it should also be noted that, if a reader were unaware of this reference, the sentence, although at first glance odd, is not meaningless. A waterfall in one's eye, although not a known idiom, *could* be a metaphor for severely watery eyes, which would indeed impact vision. While this is not the same as cataracts, the underlying message of a

diseased eye is still accessible to monolingual English readers. This sentence appears in an example of Cuban-American society newsletter, the same newsletter that detail Connie's Sweet Fifteen party. As Rivero Marín notes, the "extremely flowery, even kitschy, resonant description of Connie's Sweet Fifteen could be encountered by any Cuban Spanish reader of society pages," but that same flowery language would sound odd to most English readers (33). However, to English readers, the oddly flowery language makes the phrase of "a waterfall in her left eye" blend into the rest of the vignette, rather than stand out as an isolated moment of confusion. English readers are not able to access Fernández's exact meaning, to be sure, but they are not prevented from accessing the text itself.

Perhaps a better example of when the Spanish calques become incomprehensible to English readers is the following, also in the same vignette about Connie's Sweet Fifteen:

"SHRIMP at the little garlic.

SAW at the oven.

CHERN at the iron.

FLOUR with Moorish crabs.

SEAFOOD sprinkle.

PULP in its own ink. (32)

This example truly is incomprehensible without a translation back into Spanish. "SHRIMP at the little garlic," while incorrect in English, might be understood, especially by those with enough French to recognize "à la" on menus. However, references to SAW and PULP make little sense to an English reader, and the limited context of the individual phrases does little to help understanding. Nevertheless, the text still tells the reader that they are reading a menu. The exact items make no sense, but the reader is able to continue reading without a

significant loss of understanding of the text as a whole. Indeed, even the effect of the language (that of confusing monolingual English readers and presenting language influenced by both English and Spanish) can still be felt by monolingual English readers, who will recognize this menu and its language as odd. They may be unable to understand exactly what is being served, but they understand the overall context while still benefiting from the jarring effect of the language calques.

There are also other instances in which the book specifically marks Spanish as foreign, or in other ways recognizes that the readers are likely monolingual English readers. Whereas *La vida es un special* italicizes nothing, even the most non-standard of spellings, *Raining Backwards* does italicize some of its Spanish words. Take for example, the following sentence: “Barbarita wipe it, wipe it, *limpia, limpia,*” while raising his *culito* in the air” (60). *Culito* is marked as foreign with the italics, but is also easily searchable if the reader so chooses. *Limpia* is also easy to search and translate, but the context, including previous *wipe it* repetition make such searching unnecessary; a careful reader will understand even without having to reach for a Spanish dictionary. This technique of subtle self-translation occurs elsewhere in the novel. For example, Alvarez in “Subversive English in *Raining Backwards*” includes multiple charts of longer phrase-length calques that, in theory, would make no sense to a monolingual English reader, since they are direct translations of Spanish idioms. However, in at least some of these cases, the text translates these idioms for the reader: “How you say in English: ‘I threw the house out of the window.’ You know, I had a big party” (74). In cases such as these, the text, far from excluding monolingual English readers, actually caters to them by offering a translation for what would otherwise be an essentially impossible to understand calque.

Each of these examples defines the relationship between the text and a bilingual or monolingual reader. The bilingual reader is undoubtedly privileged in that he or she is more likely to understand these references and instances of confusion. However, the monolingual reader is not excluded from the text. Limited instances of Spanish inclusion, a strong discourse on bilingualism (see below), and plenty of context clues open the text sufficiently to allow a monolingual reader not only to read the text, but also to understand its implicit message in praise of bilingualism, a message that is at the same time critical of the particularly anti-Spanish policies of both his fictional and real-life Miami.

En la Ocho y la Doce

En la Ocho y la Doce was published by Houghton Mifflin in 2001, and is told in a similar way to *Raining Backwards* and *La vida es un special*. The book, written in Spanish, consists of a series of vignettes, some of which appeared in English in *Raining Backwards*. Like *Raining Backwards*, it explores multiple generations of Cuban-Americans, however, like *La vida es un special*, there is not a single narrative plot line that unites the vignettes. Rather, they are united by themes and characters.

The book was published as part of a short-lived “Nuestra visión” series²². The series was intended to highlight U.S. Latino authors writing in Spanish, and was intended to be used in upper-level Spanish college classes as “[l]a elección de obras reflejará las necesidades pedagógicas e intereses de lectores tanto hispanohablantes como no hispanohablantes” (vii). The series, and therefore *En la Ocho y la Doce*, is thus tailored to a very specific and niche audience: the type of reader that would be found in an upper-level

²² The only other book that could be located as part of this series is *Cajas de cartón* by Francisco Jiménez, published in 1999. Online links to the series on Houghton Mifflin’s website no longer work, suggesting the series has since been discontinued.

university Spanish classroom, most likely in the United States. Many of these readers are English natives who have been studying Spanish for several years, while others are Spanish native or heritage speakers, U.S. Latinos themselves. Few, if any, would be native Spanish speakers who did not grow up in the United States. The examples of bilingualism within the novel thus cater to the Spanish abilities of these readers and their U.S. backgrounds. Unlike *La vida es un special*, the book most fully opens itself to the careful bilingual reader and there are moments in which speaking or being familiar with eye dialect or code-switching is helpful, but, as in *Raining Backwards*, these moments are not so often nor so profound as to prevent monolingual Spanish readers from enjoying the work.

For example, one of the first instances of language confusion is in the third vignette, “Wrong Channel.” In it, Barbarita accompanies Mima to the doctor to serve as an interpreter, and the doctor expresses concern about tuberculosis:

--*No good* – dijo el médico hacienda un gesto de preocupación
mientras entraba con los rayos X de Mima. Luego el doctor le dijo a Barbarita:
--Pregúntele si ha tenido TB.

Barbarita se volvió hacia Mima: --Pregunta que si alguna vez has
tenido un televisor.

--Dile que sí, pero en La Habana. No en Miami. Pero mi hija sí tiene un
televisor aquí.

Barbarita miró al doctor y tradujo: --Ella dice que tuvo TV en Cuba, no
en Miami, pero que su hija tiene TV aquí.

--En este caso tendremos que examinar a su hija para ver si también
tiene TB.

Barbarita le tradujo a Mima otra vez: --El doctor dice que necesita examinar el televisor de tu hija para ver si funciona, de lo contrario no te van a dar tu tarjeta de inmigrante. (13).

In this episode, Barbarita confuses TB (tuberculosis) with TV (television) because of a common Spanish pronunciation overlap with the letters *v* and *b*. The result is in this case humorous, although it would not be difficult to imagine a situation in which the miscommunication of medical information could quickly become more serious. However, in terms simply of the language, the monolingual reader here is certainly not excluded; TB is an acronym for tuberculosis in both languages, and the play on the similar pronunciation of *b* and *v* should be well known to readers. The different spellings of the two words even show the reader the exact moment of miscommunication: the doctor uses TB while Barbarita uses TV. This sort of hint is missing, for example, in *La vida es un special*, in which many whole conversations are presented in eye dialect, and where such a subtle difference between the two words would be missing. Here, however, the spelling for both speakers is completely standard, allowing the joke to be completely clear.

Nevertheless, there are other instances in which English especially is presented in eye dialect. However, many of these times, in contrast to *La vida es un special*, the difficult phrase is either translated, or the reader is told that the phrase is meant to be English. Consider, for example, Barbarita describing her conversation during which she attempts to obtain a teaching job: “le dije <<Ai brigui tummoro²³>>. Eso quiere decir que se lo traía al otro día” (33). The English eye dialect is presented, but Barbarita translates herself for her friend Mima, who acts as a monolingual reader stand-in in that she understands little of

²³ I('ll) bring it tomorrow.

Barbarita's English. As in *Raining Backwards*, even if the monolingual Spanish reader does not understand English, she is aware Barbarita is speaking English to her friend, and even has a translation of what is said. Indeed, this might be more useful to the bilingual reader than the eye dialect, which is, as previously mentioned, almost universally difficult to read.

Translated eye dialect also appears later in the novel when a guest on Titina's show describes a situation in which one passes "por toda su casa con el cubo [de agua] y luego tire el agua por la puerta de atrás y vaya repitiendo: <<Quien canta sus males espanta.>>. Por si acaso, puede decirlo una vez en inglés: *Ji ju sins esquear di ibil agüey*²⁴" (131). Again, the speaker provides the translation for the English eye dialect, aiding both bilingual and monolingual audiences to understand the phrase. Even in the even rarer case that the phrase is not translated, *En la Ocho y la Doce* separates out the Spanish and the English, and flags the unknown phrase as English: "*E niu laife niu beryin*²⁵. ¿Me entendiste? Eso fue inglés" (148). Not only does the character explicitly state that the phrase is in English, but it appears in italics, marking it as foreign. In all of these cases, the reader who understands accented English has an advantage in reading the text, but in each case, the monolingual Spanish reader, or the reader unfamiliar with hearing Cuban voices speaking English is given sufficient context to understand what is said.

There are also instances more reminiscent of a monolingual Cuban novel than of a bilingual Spanglish novel. Although it is not consistent, there are instances in which an English word or phrase are italicized, thus marking it, and its speaker, as foreign to the

²⁴ He who sings scares the evil away.

²⁵ A new life, a new beginning

novel's language and context²⁶. Again, although it is not consistent, there are also instances of Cuban or Caribbean dialectical speech: *pa'* in place of the more standard *para* occurs multiple times throughout the text. A speaker uses the Caribbean "momentico"²⁷ in one instance (146), whereas in another, a Puerto Rican speaker exchanges her *r* sounds for *l* sounds²⁸ (122). However, even in these cases the reader unfamiliar with Caribbean dialectical nuances is not excluded. The word *pa'* is given an apostrophe to clarify that it is a contraction, *momentico* is searchable through the RAE, although it redirects to *momento*, and the Puerto Rican speaker identifies herself as from Jayuya, a municipality of Puerto Rico. *En la Ocho y la Doce* is thus closer to *Raining Backwards* in terms of Fernández's approach to his audience: both of these latter novels certainly privilege a bilingual, bicultural Cuban or Caribbean American reader. However, monolingual English or Spanish readers respectively are not excluded; both works, in contrast to *La vida es un special*, provide sufficient context to ensure that their minority readers can still enjoy the books.

A Nuanced Discourse on Bilingualism

In the previous section, I detailed the ways in which each of the three texts privileges the bilingual reader, although the extent of this privilege varies with each work. In this section, I hope to examine the implicit discourse of bilingualism within the three novels, i.e. the message each novel imparts regarding the benefits or pitfalls of bilingualism.

²⁶ Take, for example the following two quotes:

"<<Lady, put that sap where it belongs...you...you... you tropical scum or I'll blow your head off>>. No lo entendí mucho." (5)

"Además te dan una hora para el lunch" (68).

²⁷ For more on the *-ico* diminutive in Cuban and Cuban-American Spanish, refer to Lipski, page 112.

²⁸ "—Ay señora, pa' decirle la veldá, veldá usté me ha hecho lloral. Me ha recoldao a mi pueblo, a Jayuya, allá en mi isla" (*En la Ocho y la Doce*, 122)

Throughout the three works, bilingualism is not seen as wholly positive, but rather as a complex production that varies based on different environmental and social cues.

La vida es un special

As I mentioned previously, this book is written in such a way that it functionally excludes any readers not fluent in Spanish, English, and some form of Cuban-American Spanglish. However, while the presence of bilingualism within the language of the text itself is far more salient in this novel than the others, *La vida es un special* contains a less prevalent discourse on bilingualism compared to *Raining Backwards* and *En la Ocho y la Doce*. This can be attributed to the strength of the language itself, and to its mimetic purpose, as Jorge Febles discusses in his article, “Polifonía y Heterogeneidad Lingüística en *La vida es un “Special.”*²⁹” This first book dismisses the definition of bilingualism as a simple combination of Spanish and English, and chooses instead to show the intricacies of Cuban Spanish, English and Cuban-American Spanglish, as a means to reflect the intricacies and varieties of the people who speak these languages.

Nevertheless, there are moments that foreshadow the discourse on bilingualism that will be more developed in Fernández’s future works. One example is the linguistic discomfort felt by some younger generation Cuban-Americans who have chosen to move away from their Spanish language heritage in order to more fully assimilate into their American home. This can be seen in the character of Micky, who denies understanding Spanish, regardless of evidence to the contrary. In two separate vignettes, a Spanish-speaker approaches Micky, asking if he is Miguelito Hernández, son of Serafina. Micky repeatedly denies that he understands Spanish, even though his interlocutors have heard

²⁹ “Este autor implícito tiene como ejercicio primordial reproducir enunciados de acuerdo con una norma mimética” (51)

his mother calling him in Spanish. This confirms to the reader that Micky's inability to speak Spanish, along with his Americanized name, is little more than a mask he wears to distance himself from other Cuban-Americans. He is unsuccessful, however; his second interlocutor closes their conversation with a simple "No jodas;" Micky can insist he knows no Spanish, but, as with Connie in *Raining Backwards*, his assimilation is incomplete and unconvincing to other Cuban-Americans (63).

Also introduced, but not extensively developed, is the association of bilingualism with some sort of mental or physical malady, an idea also presented in *Raining Backwards*. Within *La vida es un special*, Dra. Alicia Real Valdés presents a short lecture on alcoholism, bilingualism and triculturalism. She opens by clarifying the order of the words, indicating a cause and effect relationship therein: "Ahora bien, el alcoholismo produce una dicotomía en el cerebro que engendra el bilingüismo, y éste a su vez, si es bombardeando por átomos de platino se divide asexualmente ocasionando el triculturalismo" (62). Nevertheless, alcoholism and its supposed consequences are still presented in such a way as to be either neutral or positive. For example, the doctor claims that alcoholism "conlleva a mundos infinitos por explorar dentro de si (*sic*) mismo," implying not harm, but rather a chance of better (self)-understanding (61). The talk ends with the thought, "La doble circunstancia vital que vivo como habitante de la tierra" (62). In contrast to *Raining Backwards*, while *La vida es un Special* links bilingualism to mental illness (alcoholism), the intent is not necessarily a negative one, but rather subverts the association of alcoholism with negative blurred thoughts and instead claims that the lack of inhibition that alcohol can produce instead opens up possibilities of understanding and growth as a person and as a global citizen. However, the single vignette devoted to this talk and other brief examples

throughout the novel allow little opportunity for development and further exploration of the positive and negative connotations of bilingualism, although it does allow the discourse to move beyond solely the innovations of the language Fernández uses throughout the novel. *Raining Backwards*, however, explores these connotations far more extensively.

Raining Backwards

Raining Backwards is written partially in response to Dade County's English-Only laws (see above), and its fictional environment is therefore plagued by the Tongue Brigade, who allegedly polices the use of any language other than English. For this reason, Spanish is, in many cases, actively hidden. Many of the calques that Alvarez refers to in "Subversive English" contribute to this hiding of Spanish within English, but even place names are considered too controversial to be mentioned: the city of Cienfuegos is translated as One Hundred Fires more than once within the work, for example. Deaver, in "Structure, Theme, Motif, and Dialogue in *Raining Backwards*," argues that "The Tongue Brigade not only persecutes speakers of other languages, it also lobbies to have any other language labeled as a form of diglossia: i.e., a non-tongue" (103). However, I would argue that the Tongue Brigade, rather than fearing all languages other than English, disproportionately persecutes Spanish, and especially Spanish spoken by Hispanics.

There is no doubt that the Tongue Brigade is an active and menacing force throughout the novel. Even the smallest hints of Spanish are called out as dangerous:

"I'll be waiting for you, Bill. Hasta la vista, mi amigo.'

'Hey, hey miss. Were you speaking S-p-a-n-i-s-h?'

'Just a tiny bit, officer.'

‘Don’t you know it’s prohibited by law? I could turn you in to the Tongue Brigade and your lingua will be fed to the barracudas.’” (114)

In the above quote, Connie has only to say “Hasta la vista,” a phrase so pervasive in American Anglo society it appears as a phrase in the Oxford English Dictionary³⁰. However, in this context, the Tongue Brigade confronts Connie, essentially giving her a warning against even such an innocent phrase. Indeed, Spanish is seen as so dangerous in this exchange that the officer does not even dare say the name of the language, but instead spells it³¹. The exchange continues with the threat that Deaver mentions – the Tongue Brigade officer literally threatens to cut out Connie’s tongue. However, in doing so, he uses a Latin word, *lingua*. The word indicates first, that all languages are not equally prohibited. Even the language police are allowed to use other languages, just not Spanish. Furthermore, the use of *lingua* is reminiscent of *lingua franca*. In threatening to cut out Connie’s *lingua*, the officer is not only threatening her physical tongue, but also her language.

However, Deaver does not draw attention to the fact that the Tongue Brigade disproportionately focuses on Spanish, despite the fact that the English-Only law applies to all languages besides English. For example, the society pages earlier cited actively hide Spanish through calques (*waterfall* for *cataracts*) and translations of place names (*Cienfuegos* becomes *One Hundred Fires* and *La perla del sur* becomes *The Southern Pearl*). However, the pages simultaneously make use of both French and Italian without fear.

³⁰ The OED’s usage quotations also date the phrase in English at least back to 1935 with Morley’s book, *Hasta la Vista, or, A Postcard from Peru*, so the phrase is far from a new addition to the dictionary.

³¹ This could be a satirization of the extent of that particular English-Only law, which was so pervasive that, technically speaking, zoos were not allowed to give the Latin names for their animals. See above for more details.

Connie is a “*jeune fille*” and a “frutto di mare” who celebrates her fifteenth “anniversarie³².” All three of these phrases are highlighted – *jeune fille* appears in italics, whereas frutto di mare and anniversarie are both in quotation marks. Spanish is hidden, but the other languages are acceptable, even elevated and highlighted.

Indeed, the text not only *implicitly* marks Spanish as more dangerous than other languages, but *explicitly* does so as well. In the latter half of the novel, the news accounts that the United States Supreme Court has declared English-Only laws unconstitutional “and that the persecution of Spanish-speakers by the Tongue Brigade is equivalent to a violation of the civil rights of the handicapped” (142). The majority opinion is quoted: “Speaking in any other tongue, and *especially in Spanish*, is a form of disglossia, a degenerative disease of speech centered in the brain” (142, my emphasis). While the English-Only law might argue it is not discriminatory because it applies to all non-English speakers, the Supreme Court is more realistic in its description: it is meant to suppress Spanish more so than any other language. Indeed, the use of the term *disglossia* only cements this fact. Disglossia reminds the reader of the word *diglossia*, a linguistics term for the use of two languages or varieties of language within a community, particularly in cases where one language or dialect is privileged over the other (see chapter 1). However, diglossia is not the problem here, but rather *disglossia*, which Deaver describes as “den[ying] other languages and relegat[ing] them to the status of non-tongues” (“From Polyglossia...” 448). Spanish is not considered here to be a viable source of communication; it is not considered a tongue at all. No other

³² The most likely possibility of the origin of this word is as a reference to a John Donne poem titled “The Anniversarie,” sometimes canonized with the modern spelling. This particular love poem, which details a constant, not increasing, love, as well as foreshadows the death of the lovers, relates to Connie’s constant, if unrequired love for bill, as well as her death later in the novel.

language is given such treatment in *Raining Backwards*, which is why Connie can pretend to be Italian rather than Hispanic, and even can safely speak Italian to divert attention (*Raining Backwards* 103).

Deaver describes this Supreme Court ruling by saying that the “reality of societal bias clashes here with the idealism of governmental interdiction prohibiting discrimination because of race, gender, age, or ethnic group” (“From Polyglossia...” 103). However, it is important to note that none of these groups are mentioned in the Supreme Court decision, the law is seen not as discriminatory against Hispanics or Cubans, but against the handicapped. As is briefly alluded to in *La vida es un special*, bilingualism is here even more clearly marked as a disability, in this case “a degenerative disease of speech centered in the brain” (142). The brains of Spanish speakers are marked as inferior, and thus require treatment. However, unsurprisingly given the inherent racism of such a comparison, even the treatment centers available to Spanish speakers are out of their reach: “victim[s] of this disease . . . may write or call” the Health and Rehabilitation Department of the Division of Communicable Diseases in DC (142-3). Help in learning English must be sought after in English. Furthermore, the department assigned to work with said disease is the Division of Communicable Diseases: Spanish is seen as dangerous not merely because it is a disease with severe consequences for the speaker, but because it is communicable. Spanish can spread, and thus the disease must be cured, not just for the health of the speaker, but for the health of the community as well.

However, Spanish is only marked as dangerous when Spanish-speaking natives or visibly Hispanic characters speak it. Marylou speaks Spanish and insists that others do so as well:

“Did everyone learn it [the pledge of allegiance] in Spanish like I told you last week?”

“But Marylou, why in Spanish?” . . .

“To confuse them, of course. Now let’s hear it.”

*Juro fidelidad a la bandera
de los EEUU y a la republica
que representa una nacion
bajo Dios con libertad y justicia
para todos*

Amen.

“Eisa cabrouna mi las va pagar.”

“What did you say?”

“Nothing. I just got carried away with the *español*.” (92-3)

There are a couple of points of note. First, all of the instances of Marylou’s Spanish are marked with italics. There is no doubt or ambiguity: Marylou is a native English speaker whose Spanish use is considered to be foreign. Even her use of eye dialect (Spanish) in “*Eisa cabrouna mi las va pagar*” indicates a strong English accent, particularly on the vowels. Whereas Connie is persecuted for “Hasta la vista, mi amigo” (which is not in italics and thus considered not foreign to her), Marylou is allowed to require Spanish from her group to “confuse” the Hispanics, and she alone is allowed to get “carried away with the *español*” (92). The book provides a possible explanation for why it is acceptable for American Marylou to use comparatively extensive Spanish when compared to her Hispanic peer, Connie. Four vignettes after Marylou’s pledge, the text provides a conversation

between an irate English-speaking American and a naive, but well-intentioned Cuban-American with limited English skills. The American speaker describes how Americans are finding themselves out of work because they cannot assimilate with Cubans: “Do you realize my brother lost his job because he doesn’t spica the spanol? In our own country and we’re fired for not speaking spic” (100). Despite the racism of the statement, the sentiment in the background is reasonable. English-speaking Americans find themselves having to evolve and cater to Cuban-Americans, while Cuban-Americans, because of their economic power and community insularism, can either postpone or avoid American assimilation. For business owners, Spanish-speakers have become a more highly valued commodity than an American. It is possible that for this reason, Marylou’s Spanish is not only accepted, but could be part of the reason why she is accepted as the leader of their group.

En la Ocho y la Doce

As in all of the previously discussed books, the use of both Spanish and English within the text does signal a positive discourse in regards to bilingualism. This is further emphasized by explicit moments within the text in which the characters work towards a greater knowledge of both languages. For example, the novel opens with Barbarita explaining that she bought the English-language course *Follow Me to South Miami* after being unable to speak with her nephew (1). Later, San Guiven himself repeats the dates of his “fiesta” in both Spanish and English “para asegurarse que su fiesta fuera bilingüe” (65). However, as in *Raining Backwards*, the presented connotation of bilingualism is multifaceted rather than wholly positive. For example, there is a realization that second-generation immigrants are further and further removed from Spanish, a circumstance that is both acknowledged and criticized. The critique is not entirely because the younger

generation does not know Spanish, but rather because this language gap affects their ability to relate to their family. When Barbarita wants to learn English, it is so that she can speak with her nephew: bilingualism is seen as a continuation of positive familial relations. However, at the end of the novel, we are introduced to Jimena, Barbarita y Manolo's daughter, who, like the younger generation in *Raining Backwards*, has changed her name and now goes by Jean. In addition to her change of name, the letter she sends with her Christmas cards indicates that she has taken active steps to separate herself from her Cuban heritage. Not only has she married an American (Mike) and changed her name, but she is raising her children monolingually and monoculturally: her daughter takes Spanish classes instead of learning it at home, and her son will not learn to play the bongos because he considers them too loud (175). Even Jean's Spanish comes less from her own family and more from her surroundings: "*Mamá está muy achacosa y en el verano iremos a Miami para buscarle un geriátrico (esa palabra la aprendía ayer con Rafael, un uruguayo que vive en la esquina). Yo antes le decía un nursing home*" (176). Despite her parents' Cuban background, she, like her daughter, is furthering her Spanish through non-Cubans around them, not from her family.

The novel continues its critique of Jean when she visits the aforementioned nursing home. She visits the city without telling her mother because "*Éste era un viaje de negocios y no de placer*" (178). The home she interviews is special in that it provides holograms so that the residents don't feel lonely or homesick: they can project the resident's home or home city so that they feel they are still in a familiar place. The idea appeals to Jean for more selfish reasons: "*--¿Y puede hacer hologramas de mi esposo y mis hijos? Y así no tenemos que venir a visitarla tan a menudo*" (181). The holograms would allow Barbarita

to virtually return to Matanzas City, but would also mean that Jean no longer has any obligations to visit her mother. Her separation from her Cuban language background mirrors her separation from her Cuban heritage and family.

Despite the criticism of Jean, I would argue that the stronger satire of the novel arises not out of her character, but rather the case of her mother, Barbarita, the bilingual who is so proud of her ability to speak both languages that she finds herself incapable of admitting that she is not equally fluent in both languages. This is introduced in “Wrong Channel,” the vignette quoted above in which Barbarita confuses TV and TB. Despite the fact that it is odd that the doctor would ask whether his patient has a television set or not, Barbarita focuses on the bit that she understands, regardless of context. Indeed, she inserts false information into the conversation in order to justify her mistranslation: “El doctor dice que necesita examinar el televisor de tu hija para ver si funciona, de lo contrario no te van a dar tu tarjeta de inmigrante” (13). Mima, whose language abilities are not at stake during this conversation, finds this request odd from a doctor, but Barbarita does not change her translation because of her friend’s skepticism: “¿Cuántas veces no te he dicho Mima, que aquí necesitas comprar un buen TV? . . . ¿O es que no te has dado cuenta que ahora vivimos en los Estados Unidos?” (13). Barbarita must distort the doctor, in her own mind, into a figure of authority whose job it is not to judge Mima’s physical health, but rather her cultural health. Nevertheless we, as readers, understand that Barbarita’s interpretation is absurd and rooted in Barbarita’s language gaps and fervent desire to be as American as possible.

Unfortunately for Barbarita, this is not the only instance in which she overestimates her language abilities. She takes intense pride in her ability to speak more English than her peers, as can be seen in her talks with Tita:

Pues entregué mi solicitud, aquí se dice *application*, y le dije a la Americana que yo estaba capacitada y que había sido maestra en *my country*. *Country* es país en inglés. (32)

In this quote, her use of English serves no linguistic function other than to show off to her friend. She is not quoting herself in English in the first instance, as she does later, nor is she quoting the American with whom she was speaking. Furthermore, the fact that Tita speaks no English³³ means that Barbarita must translate herself back into Spanish, and in so doing, show her friend that she can switch between languages. The connotation of Barbarita's bilingualism here becomes one of pride and boasting rather than the mimetic code-switching of *La vida es un special* or even *Raining Backwards*.

Barbarita becomes the de facto interpreter for her group, and later in the work, it becomes clear that she is aware of her language gaps, although she is also unwilling to admit that they exist. In "La gira," a group of Cuban Americans visits a satirized version of a wildlife resort in which the attraction is the ability to view Americans in their natural habitat. The group hears a short snippet of a song: "*Sometimes I feel like a motherless child / a long way from home and thirsty*," and ask that Barbarita translate the song (91). She answers succinctly, but insufficiently: "—Dicen que tienen sed" (92). Later, she is confronted with the word "imanero"³⁴ While it is unsurprising that Barbarita is unfamiliar

³³ "¡Ay Tita! ¿Cuándo vas a aprender inglés?" (65)

³⁴ "Se dedican a pescar con sus imanes las latas que traen las mareas. Las latas que ustedes tiran al mar al otro lado de la bahía" (99)

with this word, which is not standard in either Spanish or English, what is most noteworthy about her ignorance is her own reaction to it: “Barbarita no reconoció esta última palabra, pero prefirió callarse antes de hacer una pregunta que descubriera su ignorancia” (94). Her pride in knowing another language quickly becomes hubris; such hubris prevents her from acknowledging her language gaps, which, in this case would be completely understandable. Because she refuses to acknowledge that she doesn’t know everything, she has no chance of improving by learning a new word or improving her own comprehension. Furthermore, she cannot serve as an appropriate interpreter between communities. If she does not understand, she cannot lead others to better understand.

The work also warns the reader from assuming the same hubristic relationship with his or her bilingualism. In the section titled “Los quince,” the narrator describes Caridad’s Quince, the Cuban (American) form of a coming of age party that, for a time, was popular as both a status symbol for the family as well as a popular social gathering. However, the vignette’s title is followed by the following short description, which does appear in English: “A *quince* is a globose strong scented fruit of the rose family that resembles a hard-fleshed pear and is used for jelly and preserves. Its large whitish flowers are solitary at the end of young branches” (19). Assuming that most of the readers are American college students, it is not improbable that the majority are English dominant, and therefore could focus too much of their attention on the definition of the fruit, using it as the basis of their understanding of the story that follows. Focusing on the fruit not only makes little sense with the rest of the vignette, but even with the title, “Los quince,” and not “Los quinces” (plural). Indeed, the author offers the reader the same trap that Barbarita often finds herself in. Without a careful reading, the reader, just as Barbarita, grasps only part of the

meaning, or incorrectly assigns meaning, and thus raises the possibility of miscommunication or misinterpretation. The readers, particularly readers not native in Spanish, must be careful to not follow Barbarita's example, and must pay close attention to the details provided, and without assigning too much importance to less significant but more easily understood phrases. Fernández's requirement for active readers is unsurprising, given what has been earlier cited about his tendency to write with an academic audience in mind, but it is even more salient given the fact that the readers of *En la Ocho y la Doce* are less likely to have a native or near-native grasp of Spanish. They, like Barbarita, are more likely to be led astray by misattributions such as a definition for the fruit. Just as Barbarita's inability to ask questions when she did not understand, the book pokes fun at the readers who would attempt the same. *En la Ocho y la Doce's* discourse on bilingualism is thus more playful than *Raining Backwards's* Tongue Brigade, but nevertheless challenges the reader to think critically not only about bilingualism in general, but his or her own relationship to language.

Conclusion

By reading Fernández across his career, it is possible to study how he changes his writing not only in accordance with different anticipated or intended audiences, but also with the changing situation of those audiences. In each case, however, Fernández presents a complex and nuanced view of bilingualism, in which speaking both Spanish and English is certainly privileged, but not without its own complications. Fernández accomplishes this in two ways. First, as much of the previous criticism has noted, he privileges bilingual readers of both Spanish and English over monolingual readers of either language. Both *Raining*

Backwards and *En la Ocho y la Doce* present language that is most accessible to bilingual readers, particularly those familiar with Cuban-American dialectical English or Spanish and code-switching. However, they do not completely exclude monolingual readers, which is the case of *La vida es un special*. Without knowledge of Cuban-American speech patterns in both Spanish and English, *La vida es un special* becomes essentially illegible. It is in this way that Fernández satirizes bilingualism within this first book studied: it is not that Cuban-Americans are unable or unwilling to learn English, but rather that they have developed their own version of English. However, the very unique, limited audience of the book also satirizes Cuban-Americans as an insular and closed community with its own problems assimilating into their new home. Such satire encourages the readers to not only laugh at themselves and their peers, but to critically examine what is needed for the continued success of their community in Miami.

Raining Backwards, on the other hand, turns the criticism on bilingualism almost entirely towards the prejudices of the English-speaking community, which is unsurprising given the language of the book (English) and the political climate against bilingualism in Miami at the time. The Tongue Brigade persecutes Spanish above all others, marking that language as inherently dangerous, but the White American Marylou speaks it without fear of retribution. Even the Supreme Court decision on the case perverts bilingualism into a disability (again, only on the side of Spanish-native bilinguals), and offers a guise of help that becomes functionally unavailable to those that don't already speak English. All of this contributes to the younger generation's move away from Cuban traditions and Spanish in general. The linguistic situation pokes fun at the extremes taken by English speakers to ban Spanish, who are so scared of the language they spell it out and ban colloquial phrases such

as *Hasta la vista*. Although Cuban-Americans, with their blind and tremendous love for a Cuba that no longer exists, are not wholly innocent, it is the Americans, with their extreme fear of Spanish and Spanish-speakers, who are blamed for the continued tensions between the two communities.

While *En la Ocho y la Doce* also comments on different generational relationships with bilingualism, the work's most prominent discourse on bilingualism becomes one of caution and knowing the limits of one's own bilingualism. At no point is a character or the reader satirized for merely having a gap in his or her second language; all characters have varying degrees of comfort with Spanish or English and many translate difficult words from one language to the other. However, Barbarita's hubris over misevaluating and overestimating their language, and the fear of not being seen as "fully" fluent in both languages leads to consistent and humorous miscommunication and misunderstanding. Here the book pokes fun at partial bilinguals, not because of their language gaps, but because of the inability to admit imperfect knowledge or understanding.

Fernández's discourse on bilingualism in all three works directly correlates with his attitude toward the Cuban-American culture and experience he depicts. The first-generation Cuban-Americans are too insular, too obsessed with the way things used to be in Cuba. Most hold onto their Spanish language to the exclusion of English, and are unwilling to assimilate either culturally or linguistically. Even when a first-generation immigrant *does* learn English, such as the case with Barbarita in *En la Ocho y la Doce*, her knowledge is incomplete. For the second-generation, however, the criticism is the opposite; they reject their heritage and mother tongue to the extent that it affects their relationships with family. Most of the second-generation immigrants of the books speak no Spanish, and

many actively avoid using it, appearing ashamed to be identified as Hispanic or Cuban. The satire arises out of the inability for either generation to find a middle ground of both pride and assimilation.

Fernández doesn't ignore English-speaking Americans. English-speaking characters are consistently marked by their naivety about their Cuban-American neighbors, their casual and ever-present racism, particularly in *Raining Backwards*, and their overarching fear of Spanish. Anglo-Americans in Miami are not portrayed as thoughtful citizens with real concerns about mass immigration and insular communities, but rather as rash, ignorant and angry. While their unsuccessful attempts to use Spanish against the Cubans around them (take, for instance, the case of Marylou) are humorous, the underlying prejudice is not.

Across his career, Fernández thus presents himself as an author fully aware of the complex nature of bilingualism. Despite the prefix, a Cuban-American bilingual inescapably speaks far more than two languages or varieties of languages. Furthermore, Fernández refuses to reduce bilingualism into a single positive notion: he plays not only with linguistic variety, but also with multifaceted views on bilingualism. The result is a body of work that acknowledges and satirizes, represents and misrepresents, and in the end opens rather than closes further discussion.

Chapter 4: A *Beso* Is Not a Kiss: Bilingualism in Rosario Ferré's *Language Duel / Duelo del lenguaje*

The opening lines of Rosario Ferré's titular poem "Language Duel" pose the following question:

Why is it that
 in the year of our Lord 2,001
 Americans have such a difficult time
 learning Spanish? ("Language Duel" 1-4)

The question introduces what becomes the prominent discourse of the book *Language Duel / Duelo del Lenguaje* (2002, Vintage Books): the neglect of, and disdain for, the Spanish language and heritage within the prominent contemporary narrative of American³⁵ history and culture. The poems in the book consistently challenge American-perceived monolingual superiority by highlighting the Spanish language and history as well as Hispanic people important to American culture. To deepen the discourse and add value to the notion of American bilingualism, the entire work is presented in translation: the English translation of each poem is shown on the left page, while the Spanish original mirrors it on the right. However, while the presence of both English and Spanish might appear to open the book to monolingual readers, Ferré still privileges her bilingual reader. Although monolingual English or Spanish readers gain access to part of her message, only

³⁵ As with previous chapters, there is some concern with the use of the term "American," as Puerto Rico is, to differing extents, geographically, politically, and culturally "American." For the purpose of clarity, my use of the English term "American" in this chapter refers to the United States of America, excluding Puerto Rico and its citizens, and the American government to the one in the Washington, D.C.

bilingual readers who actively take advantage of both languages have access to the full depth of her poems. Her inclusively bicultural message furthers this privileging of the bilingual reader. By positioning the poem and its translation side-by-side, and encouraging readers to enjoy both, the question then arises as to whether or not, or to what extent, these two languages are actually dueling. In this chapter, I study not only the means in which Ferré privileges bilingualism and biculturalism, but also examine the *poemario*³⁶'s perspective on and solutions for the titular language duel. In so doing, I conclude that the homophone *dual* as opposed to *duel* better describes her use of both poems, although the work also acknowledges, challenges and attempts to remedy cultural and societal duels between Spanish and English.

Linguistic Tensions Between the United States and Puerto Rico

In order to fully understand the context of Ferré's *poemario*, it is first necessary to examine the current and historical relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico has been under some form of U.S. control since the defeat of the Spanish in the Spanish-American War of 1898. Since that time, Puerto Rico and the United States have been in continuous struggle between the island's desire for cultural (and, for some, political) autonomy and the United States' desire for the island to assimilate or Americanize so that Puerto Rican culture more closely resembled the majority (American) culture. Most relevant to this chapter are the linguistic tensions, which began with the Official Languages Act of 1902. The law declared both Spanish and English as theoretically

³⁶ A *poemario* is a book of assembled poems by a single poet that all collectively contribute to one or more themes. It differs from an *antología* or anthology in that the latter does not necessarily include similarly themed poems.

equal official languages of Puerto Rico. This was intended as an auspicious compromise, which would allow Puerto Ricans to maintain their native language while also providing the English-speaking, United States-imposed governor equal access to the government and official documents. However, as Barreto points out, while the two languages were equal on paper, the law “did not make any provisions for inconsistencies in the translation of a statute from one language to the other” (117). The implications of such a lack of provisions became clear in a civil divorce case (*Cruz v Domínguez*), in which there was a discrepancy in the writing of the Spanish and English translations of the legal code. This inconsistency sparked confusion as to which version should be followed. The judge in the case ruled that, since the governor had signed the English version of the law, that version overrode the Spanish. This case and the judge’s ruling thus set legal precedent of the hierarchy of English-language laws over their Spanish “equivalents.” The fact that no subsequent legislation was proposed to eradicate such confusions in the dual language laws only served to perpetuate and exacerbate the precedence of English language laws. In practice, this led to English-speaking bureaucrats being seen as favorable and prestigious, and meant that Spanish-speaking government officials, particularly teachers, were less likely to secure and maintain their jobs than their English-speaking American counterparts, no matter their level of education (Barreto 87).

Also problematic was the Americanization policy of the first half of the twentieth century, which was intended to make the island more like the United States, culturally and linguistically. The most significant aspect of this program was that English became the official language of instruction throughout the island. Since Puerto Rican teachers were generally unable to fulfill the English language requirements, American teachers were

imported to teach Puerto Rican students. The effect of instruction in English was twofold. First and foremost, despite a general expansion of the school system in the early 1900s, students and their overall education suffered. Students with less contact with Americans, and therefore less access to English, sometimes struggled to complete college degree requirements, which required they be competent in English (Picó 263). Textbooks were in English, adding additional barriers to understanding. At times, these textbook language requirements were even pedagogically counter-intuitive: English-language Latin textbooks were used, despite the fact that, linguistically speaking, Spanish is closer to Latin than English (Picó 263). Furthermore, Puerto Rican teachers, incensed by the priority and higher salaries given to American teachers, “were at the forefront of abolishing the Americanization policy and promoting their language – Spanish – as the medium of instruction in public schools” (Barreto 118). Their efforts were eventually successful; in 1939, Spanish became the language of instruction for Puerto Rican schools (Quintero). This policy of Spanish-language instruction continues today at all pre-collegiate levels, although English continues to be a required subject for high school graduation.

These linguistic tensions are no less felt today than they were at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1991, the Puerto Rican government passed a law establishing Spanish as the sole official language of the island, for the first time replacing the 1902 Official Languages Act. The bill did little to change the realities of language use on the island; indeed it “merely codified the linguistic *status quo* and nothing more” (Barreto 119). Nevertheless, it was repealed two years later and both Spanish and English were reinstated as the island’s dual official languages. The controversy of the bill and its repeal came from disagreements between different political parties on the island. Politicians in

favor of independence from the United States have been more likely to favor a Spanish-only approach, which separates the island culturally from the United States and connects it more to Latin America. However, politicians in favor of Puerto Rican statehood are more likely to favor a dual linguistic approach, or might even favor English as a sole official language, seeing English use as a vital step to achieving statehood, as hinted by multiple (conservative) American politicians. It should be noted, however, that Luis Ferré, Rosario Ferré's father and governor of Puerto Rico between 1969 and 1973 as well as founding member of the pro-statehood New Progressive Party, did not see Puerto Rico's Spanish language as necessarily an impediment to statehood (Barreto 127). Rosario, while early in her career had been more sympathetic towards independist movements, came down on the side of statehood in the mid-1990s, with some critics arguing that *The House on the Lagoon* was a pro-statehood novel (Obejas). Ferré, in that same article states that, just like Alaska and Hawaii, Puerto Rico would eventually and inevitably be granted statehood since Puerto Ricans are already an important part of the United States. Furthermore, due to the larger number and influence of Puerto Ricans to American culture, the island would be integrated without the loss of culture and language the indigenous Alaskans and Hawaiians suffered upon integration into the United States (Obejas). These continued tensions between Puerto Rican and American culture, combined with Ferré's personal bilingualism and beliefs that Puerto Rico is already important and integral to American culture and history, help to contextualize *Language Duel/Duelo del lenguaje* and situate Ferré's discourse on bilingualism in the work.

Review of the Literature on Rosario Ferré

While Ferré's work has provoked a considerable amount of scholarship, *Language Duel/Duelo de lenguaje* has received significantly less attention. Indeed, the only notable article published on the book is Montilla's "Bilingualism, Biculturalism and Pan-Hispanic Unity in the United States: Rosario Ferré's *Language Duel*." In the article, Montilla begins an examination of the two languages within the work: "Throughout the book, Ferré explores linguistic and cultural differences between English and Spanish and the emergence of a more inclusive Pan-Hispanic identity in which national boundaries and countries of origin are blurred to create a more encompassing Latina/o consciousness in the United States" (1). While her analysis is useful and provides a close reading of some of the key poems in the work, the biggest limitation to her article is that Montilla does not consider the most important bilingual factor of the book: the presentation of the two languages side-by-side. In particular, she does not address why it is so crucial that *both* Spanish and English poems are presented, and the gaps that arise when only one of the two languages is read, as I will discuss below. While I will cite some of her arguments throughout this chapter, it is this limitation that I hope to address in this chapter.

Despite the gap in scholarly attention to *Language Duel / Duelo del lenguaje*, Ferré's other English-language works have received more attention, although not necessarily to Ferré's benefit. As Sandín points out, the choice to switch to English for her later works *House on the Lagoon* and *Eccentric Neighborhoods* was relatively controversial, as "Ferré has been hounded by critics and a public composed mostly of Puerto Ricans with *independista* leanings who have accused her of betraying her roots in Spanish and on the island because of the temptations of reaching a wider English-speaking market" (34).

Sandín acknowledges that this criticism is not entirely unfair, stating that, in her opinion, “Ferré is simply a better writer in Spanish than she is in English” (44). Ferré herself recognizes the criticism, stating that “English makes [her] slow down . . . [she] can’t be trigger-happy in English, because shaping the words takes so much effort” (qtd. in Sandín 44). However, she does not say that her choice to move into English is to reach a wider audience. Instead, she writes in English because she likes it, despite its struggles, because she is, both literally and metaphorically, ambidextrous, and because “learning to speak a second language in America has a lot to do with learning how to live with *el otro*, “the other” that lurks inside us: our neighbor to the north if we come from Latin America, our neighbor to the south if we come from North America” (qtd. in Sandín 44). The ambidextrous metaphor arises out of Ferré’s own experience; when she was young, she was forced to suppress her left-handedness for the more conventional right-handedness. It is this aspect of Ferré’s defense of English that Sandín calls “both compelling and problematic,” since the hand metaphor advocates both “a kind of assimilationism” and a power difference between the suppressed, minority “incorrect” left-hand and the accepted, majority right-hand (45). Nonetheless, Sandín recognizes that, ultimately, the metaphor is meant to advocate for “a hybridized Puerto Rican identity, one that can perform Puerto Rican and (North and Latin) American identity³⁷” (45). This hybridized identity is further cemented in remembering that, for Ferré, bilingualism is a means of approaching *el otro*. The fact that she identifies as the Other regardless of the space she occupies – she is alternatively a Spanish-speaking Puerto Rican or an English-speaking American – provides

³⁷ Although it is not directly pertinent to this chapter, as Sandín studies works other than *Language Duel/Duelo del lenguaje*, it is worth noting that Sandín “feel[s] that Ferré’s first two novels in English fall short of the theory [of hybridity] adumbrated [above]” (45).

some insight into possible thought processes that went into publishing *House on the Lagoon* and *Eccentric Neighborhoods* in translation. *Language Duel/Duelo del lenguaje*, when viewed in this context, becomes an ambidextrous text that encourages all readers to approach and, to some extent at least, accept *el otro*.

It is impossible to discuss *Language Duel/Duelo del lenguaje* without considering Ferré's own essay, "On Destiny, Language, and Translation, or, Ophelia Adrift in the C. & O. Canal" (1991), as the work not only focuses on Ferré's English, but her self-translation. For Ferré, translating and writing in English was a natural progression of her work: "The water of words, the water in the C. & O. Canal . . . was my true habitat as a writer; neither Washington nor San Juan, neither past nor present, but the crevice in between" (33). Furthermore, she considers translation as "not only a literary but also a historical task" (34) and translators as authors "dedicated to the pursuit of communication, of that universal understanding of original meaning which may one day perhaps make possible the harmony of the world" (33). Nevertheless, she recognizes the difficulty of the task, as "[t]ranslating literature from Spanish into English (and vice versa) in the twentieth century cannot but take into account very different views of the world" (34), including but not limited to, the fact that, in Ferré's perspective, Spanish allows metaphor and wordplay in ways that English does not (35). Nonetheless, Ferré sees it as her literary obligation to translate: "I believe it is the duty of the Puerto Rican writer, who has been privileged enough to learn both languages, to try to alleviate this situation [the loss of language, heritage, and roots upon immigration], making an effort either to translate some of her own work or to contribute to the translation of the work of other Puerto Rican writers" (39-40). "On Destiny, Language, and Translation" provides insight into Ferré's intention

and thoughts in translating the poems that appear in *Language Duel / Duelo de lenguaje*, as well as provide further evidence of her dedication to and value of her own bilingualism. It is with this in mind that we can begin to examine *Language Duel / Duelo del lenguaje* in more depth.

Language Duel / Duelo del Lenguaje

In analyzing the *poemario*, I will focus on the importance of the work's two languages, both in their use within the selected poems and what those poems and the work's message on bilingualism. I have divided the pertinent poems and my analysis into three categories. First, I will examine the connotational differences between (the) Spanish and English (poems), both in terms of how the poetic voice sees her two languages, and how they are viewed by the society around them. Then, I will consider the ways in which different parts of the body are used as metaphors for language or bilingualism, and the implications of that juxtaposition. Finally, I explore how different poems critically examine the way that the typical American historical narrative unfairly erases or ignores Spanish (read: originating from the country, Spain) and indigenous contributions to American language, history, and culture.

Connotational Differences Between Spanish and English

The book opens with the titular dual "Language Duel" / "Duelo del lenguaje" poems (Ferré, *LD/DL* 2-5³⁸). The poetic voices³⁹ within the two poems consider the long history of

³⁸ Citation within this work was something of a challenge, not least because I wanted to make clear which poem/language was being referenced at all times. For this reason, I have implemented, the following pattern. For citation of the entire poem within the book, I will cite as follows: (Ferré, *LD/DL* page number). For line numbers within a single poem, I will cite as follows: ("Title of poem" line number).

conflict between (the) Spanish and (the) English in order to answer the question that opens both the *poemario* and the poem itself:

Why is it that
 in the year of our Lord 2,001
 Americans have such a difficult time
 learning Spanish?" ("Language Duel" 1-4) ^{40 41}

This opening question is followed by possible answers:

Because of *E Pluribus Unum*.

Because of the Civil War.

Because Catholicism and Protestantism.

Because Papists and anti-Papists. ("Language Duel" 5-8) ^{42 43}

The reference to historical feuds - Catholicism and Papists (Spain) versus Protestantism and anti-Papists (England) – are obvious sources of tensions between the Spanish and the

³⁹ To make clear when I am referencing both poems, I will consider the poetic voice of each poem as distinct entities, and thus use the plural.

⁴⁰ When quoting only one of the two poems within the body of the chapter, I will include the parallel lines from the opposing poem in a footnote.

⁴¹ ¿Por qué será
 que en el año 2001
 a los americanos se les hace tan difícil
 aprender a hablar el español? ("Duelo del lenguaje" 1-4)

⁴² Por culpa del *E Pluribus Unum*.

Por culpa de la Guerra Civil.

Por culpa del catolicismo y
 del protestantismo.

Por culpa de los papistas
 y de los anti-papistas. ("Duelo del lenguaje" 5-10)

⁴³ As evident in this quote and its translation, Ferré does not limit her translation to perfectly mirrored line breaks or phrasing. As can be expected with any translation, some quotes throughout might convey the same information in more or less lines, or use different phrasing to convey a similar idea. Quotations of translations are to be considered complete transcriptions of equivalent portions of the poem unless otherwise noted.

English, which result in tensions between their languages. Ironically, however, these dichotomies are preceded by two events that at first glance unify rather than divide: *E Pluribus Unum* and the Civil War/ la Guerra Civil. The fact that the Civil Wars and *E Pluribus Unum* precede the references to Catholics and Protestants actually tells us how to read the latter dichotomies. In both the Civil War and in the phrase *E Pluribus Unum*, that which was once disparate (re)unifies. Even in the cases of the Civil War, in which the reunification process was difficult and long-lasting, the end result, as can be seen today, is a politically and in some ways socially unified United States. By starting with these, the reader is primed to interpret the religious divisions not as permanent and opposite, but rather as two subsets of a single larger whole, in this case Christianity. Despite the initially apparent listing of opposites, what is in fact presented are subgroups within an eventually unified whole, and the opportunity for that which was previously disparate to come together.

However, while the poems outline the conflict between languages, the opening question *in both poems* points to American distrust and resistance of Spanish, not a mutual disinterest in bilingualism. Both the Spanish and English versions are critical of Americans for not learning Spanish. Furthermore, in the references to the historical feud between Spain and England, it is Queen Elizabeth I who is almost exclusively blamed for the feud by sinking the Spanish Armada in 1588, despite the fact that Spain was the aggressor; the Armada was seeking to invade England. The accusation against the English is further emphasized by a reference to the *Leyenda Negra*, which appears in Spanish in both poems⁴⁴. The *Leyenda Negra* refers to the phenomenon in which non-Spanish, especially

⁴⁴ The use of the Spanish here in both the English and Spanish poems might be a way to distinguish between a black legend (a phenomenon that can be applied to multiple periods

non-Spanish Protestants like the British, spread hyperbolic stories of Spanish cruelty and intolerance, using distorted versions of real events such as the Spanish Inquisition, with the goal of casting Spain and Spaniards as being notably evil or inhuman(e). By making reference to both the sinking of the Spanish Armada by Queen Elizabeth I and the *Leyenda Negra* casting (the) Spanish as the (admittedly not wholly innocent) victim of the feud, and (the) English as the victor.

Despite the duel, the two poetic voices still demand their right not just to speak Spanish, but to speak bilingually. The English poetic voice (EPV)⁴⁵ demands “in English / . . . my right to speak / in Spanish,” which corresponds with the previously detailed American disdain for Spanish; because Americans do not value Spanish, the EPV must fight for her⁴⁶ right to use it (“Language Duel” 25-27). However, only by also reading the Spanish version does it become clear that the SPV also wants to be able to use her English: “... discuto en español / sobre mi derecho a hablar inglés” (“Duelo del lenguaje” 26-7). Only by reading bilingually can the reader understand that the poetic voices want the right to both languages, to never be in a context that forbids one of the two.

The two poems lament that both languages are “male crabs” that “can’t root in the same lair⁴⁷,” (“Language Duel” 37-38) and that “there’s nothing to be done⁴⁸” (“Language

of time in history) to The Black Legend or The Spanish Black Legend, which particularly references Spain.

⁴⁵ To make clear the poem being referenced, I will use EPV (English poetic voice) to describe when the English voice is being used, and SPV (Spanish poetic voice) to describe when the Spanish poetic voice is in use. It is important to note that, on occasion, the EPV will use short Spanish words or phrases and the SPV will do the same with English phrases or words. I will make clear those instances as they arise in the chapter.

⁴⁶ There are no clear references to the gender of the poetic voice(s) within the work. I have chosen to use she/her pronouns as needed throughout.

⁴⁷ “Dos jueyes machos no caben / dentro de una misma cueva” (“Duelo del lenguaje” 36-37)

⁴⁸ “...no hay nada que hacer” (“Duelo del lenguaje” 35)

Duel” 36). However, despite this explicitly pessimistic statement, the poetic voices are implicitly hopeful. For example, immediately before the EPV describes the languages as crabs, she refers to them as parallel rails:

Not to take advantage
of the double perspective
and run full speed ahead
down parallel rails
seems a pity. (“Language Duel” 31-35)⁴⁹

These lines appear at the end of a poem that details multiple conflicts, and prior to several poems that will examine ways in which Spanish and English either clash or enhance each other. In this context, describing them as parallel seems counterintuitive; after all, parallel lines by definition will neither influence nor clash with each other. However, in this line, the poetic voices do something equally important: they instruct their audience on how to read the rest of the book. The parallel here refers not exclusively to the languages, but rather to the poems, presented side by side as parallels. They tell their audience that the book at hand presents a double perspective, presented side by side throughout the work, and encourages them to take advantage of both rails.

The next poem, “Language Current⁵⁰” provides another interpretation of how these two languages can indeed co-reside (Ferré, *LD/DL* 6). “Language Current” and “Corriente alterna” provide descriptions of both the Spanish and the English language from the

⁴⁹ No aprovechar la doble perspectiva,
correr a toda marcha por los rieles
paralelos de ambos mundos
me parece una verdadera lástima. (“Duelo del lenguaje” 31-34)

⁵⁰ The Spanish original of the poem is “Corriente alterna” (Ferré, *LD/DL* 7).

bilingual poetic voices' perspectives, including how they feel when speaking the two languages. "Language Current"/"Corriente alterna" consider the two languages as equal, but not equivalences, and instead propose that each language has different connotations and values, and thus serve to complement each other. Furthermore, "Language Current" debates the presentation of both languages as male.

In both "Language Current" and "Corriente alterna," English is presented as undeniably and almost harshly scientific. The EPV describes her language as "a nuclear reactor" ("Language Current" 1) whereas the SPV describes English as "un lenguaje aerodinámico" ("Corriente alterna" 1). Both poetic voices also describe English as violently quick. In "Language Current," "Whole sentences gush forth / and slam themselves against the page" (6-7), whereas in "Corriente alterna," thoughts in English "se disparan / por el aire como relámpagos" (2-3) and the SPV, when speaking English, travels at 380,000 miles per hour ("Corriente alterna" 5). The English language allows for no playfulness, but instead moves directly towards its target: "In English you have to know where you're going: / towards the splitting of the self / or the blasting of the molecules around you⁵¹" ("Language Current" 15-17). Here, English is inherently violent, either to the self or to the surroundings, harkening back to "Language Duel" and the blame cast solely on Queen Elizabeth I for the sinking of the Spanish Armada, and forecasting later colonialist criticisms against the United States in this same work.

If English is inherently scientific and destructive, Spanish is the opposite: poetic and life-giving. The EPV laments the lack of "excess baggage" ("Language Current" 10) and "playful, baroque tendrils" ("Language Current" 11) available in English, but presumed to

⁵¹ "El inglés tiene que saber adónde va: / hacia la fisión nuclear del yo, / o hacia el estallido de las moléculas que lo rodean" (12-15).

be a part of her Spanish. Both poetic voices also compare Spanish to gemstones, the uterus and the “moist shaft” of the birth canal (“Language Current” 24). As Montilla points out, Spanish is “rendered as the language of creation” not only in “Corriente alterna” but also in “Language Current” (5). However, even more important is the *type* of creation; Spanish is not merely the language of creation but of maternity. By making reference to the uterus and the birth canal in both poems, speaking Spanish is compared to the process of (re)birth, to creation that puts back together the poetic voices, who experienced a “splitting of the self” through previous English use (“Language Current” 16). It is in this way that the poetic voices hint at an alternative solution to the crab problem presented in “Language Duel.” If two *male* crabs cannot cohabit the same place, there is no such distinction against a male and a female crab. When the poetic voices equate Spanish with birth and thus maternity, they suggest that Spanish is more feminine, and therefore that by accepting and embracing the dual and yet disparate uses of the two languages, the duel between them can be avoided, or at least mitigated.

However, there is also an important aspect that can only be gained by reading these two poems side by side. While both poems describe English as scientific, the SPV playfully and poetically asserts that Spanish can be scientific as well as maternal and poetic. For example, The EPV states that, when speaking Spanish, “you feel you’re navigating / the uterus” (“Language Current” 20-21), but the SPV says that those same curves and twists “nos hace sentir / astronautas del útero” (“Corriente alterna” 17-18). The SPV thus marries scientific language (astronautas) with the maternal imagery of Spanish (útero). The same marriage also occurs in the title of the Spanish edition: “Corriente alterna.” Limited access to Spanish or the ability to read cognates might lead the monolingual reader to understand

the title as “Alternate/Alternative Current,” which is not wholly incorrect. However, the term is also used for what, in English, would be referred to as *alternating* current, or AC, the most common form of electricity in homes and businesses. The title allows the SPV another chance to marry the supposedly English scientific terminology with the “playful, baroque tendrils” inherent to Spanish. This, combined with the reference to Spanish as “nuestra lengua” underlines the fact that the Spanish is the original, and allows the Spanish reader to indulge in the poetic nature of her language, but without sacrificing the wink the Spanish poem gives toward scientific modernity.

A further examination of the different poetic uses of the two languages occurs in “A *Beso* Is Not a Kiss⁵²” (Ferré, *LD/DL*, 52). Both poems play with the connotational problems inherent in translation by presenting descriptions of two words, *beso* and *kiss*. Each poem opens with a metaphorical description of the word *beso*, which is followed by a description of the word *kiss*. However, whereas “Language Current” and “Corriente alterna” seem to present similar perspectives on the two languages, the English and the Spanish versions of “A *Beso* Is Not a Kiss” offer disparate ideas of the two words. For instance, the EPV is openly disdainful of Spanish; for the EPV, a *beso* is “eating leeches on a mountaintop” (“A *Beso* is Not a Kiss” 2). The SPV has a very different idea of that same *beso*: “La palabra beso es como una joven / comiéndose una pomarrosa / en la cima de una montaña” (“Un beso no es un *Kiss*” 1-3). The difference in connotation is undeniable. The appealing eroticism of a *beso* for the SPV contrasts with the disgust that the EPV associates with the same word. The implication therefore is that the EPV, and possibly the English reader as well, have negative connotations of Spanish, meaning that even a positive word such as *beso*, when combined

⁵² “Un beso no es un *Kiss*” (Ferré, *LD/DL*, 53).

with the imagery of eating leeches, becomes infected by the negativity the EPB associates with Spanish.

The description of the word *kiss* between the two poems diverges less than the description for *beso*. Nevertheless, the two descriptions, especially when read side by side, show important distinctions. The EPV is more condensed and concise:

In a kiss Cleopatra
 draws the asp to her breast
 so as not to enter Rome
 in chains. (“A *Beso* Is Not a *Kiss*” 3-6).

The SPV also makes reference to Cleopatra and her suicide, although with slight variation:

Kiss trae consigo
 el silbido del áspid
 que Cleopatra acercó a su pecho
 cuando rehusó entrar a Roma
 encadenada. (“Un beso no es un *Kiss*” 4-8).

Both poems speak of desperation inherent in Cleopatra’s action, but also the agency that she embodies in her final moments; it is, after all, she herself who both makes the decision and embraces the snake. This agency makes *kiss* and therefore English seem powerful, even if that power is used towards destruction, i.e. suicide. Also significant is the reference to sound found only in the Spanish poem, in which *kiss* is compared to the sibilant hissing of a snake. The comparison makes the English word appear somewhere between annoying and dangerous to the SPV. When we consider that the EPV compares *beso* to a leech, and the

SPV compares a *kiss* to a snake, it becomes clear that each speaker stigmatizes her non-preferred language, building a hierarchy of language.

If this were the extent of the differences between the two, then it might be fair to state that the two poems mirrored each other, with each language preferring its own signifier for the signified act. However, there is a further difference exhibited in the English version: its very dispassionate description of both languages. The EPV describes both words almost neutrally. While eating leeches is far from pleasant, the EPV's unadorned description is far inferior in the emotion evoked by the SPV when she describes "una joven / comiéndose una pomarroza," if for no other reason than the intensifier of the reflexive "se" ("Un beso no es un *Kiss*" 1-2). Furthermore, if the English version more strongly preferred its own word, we might expect this English description of a *kiss* to be more intense than its Spanish counterpart, but this is hardly the case. Indeed, Cleopatra even has more agency in the Spanish version, where she *refuses* to enter Rome, rather than the avoidance described in the English version. The EPV's descriptions of both words almost disappoint when read compared to the Spanish, since the images and the emotions cannot compete with those described by the SPV. It is in this way that Ferré again asserts the association with English as the more scientific and Spanish the more poetic: if we read this in concert with "Language Current" it is not a leap to say that the English version is less satisfactory because it is missing the "playful baroque tendrils" that Spanish allows. Furthermore, it is yet another means through which the poet emphasizes the message of both titles. A *beso* is not the same as a *kiss* not only because their connotations are different, as both poems state, but because the languages from whence they come are different. Once again, however, it becomes necessary to read *both* poems to make this comparison.

Without the ability to read the Spanish *and* the English, it is impossible to grasp the difference in their emotive use of language, and thus the deeper implications of the title are lost.

If “Language Current,” “Corriente alterna,” “A *Beso* Is Not a Kiss,” and “Un beso no es un *Kiss*” show the two languages from the poetic voice’s perspective, “Spanish at the Ritz⁵³” instead focuses on the way that Spanish is perceived in the largely English-monolingual United States (Ferré, *LD/DL* 48). The poems encourage the reader to imagine himself or herself as a well-dressed, well-educated individual in a crowded elevator of the Ritz. The EPV additionally encourages the reader to imagine “doing your best / to speak a perfect English” (“Spanish at the Ritz” 3-4). The implication is thus that the reader should imagine him or herself as a non-native English speaker. This qualification is missing from the Spanish version of the poem, which could lead the reader to believe that such an effort is implied, so integrated into the non-native English speaker’s brain that he/she does not need to imagine it. The reason for the importance of English is explained a few lines later, when the reader is asked to imagine that someone has stepped on their foot:

A ¡*Coño!* bursts forth,

an expletive so

gross

it’s like a bullet in the head. (“Spanish at the Ritz” 7-10)⁵⁴

The expletive, the same in both versions of the poem, explodes, and is immediately qualified as both violent and gross, so much so that the second adjective deserves its own line and thus its own emphasis. However, while this particular word is certainly considered

⁵³ “El español del Ritz” (Ferré, *LD/DL* 49)

⁵⁴ “Suelta un ¡*Coño!* más grosero / que una bala de cañón” (“El español del Ritz” 6-7)

vulgar in the regions that use it, it is not the most offensive of terms, especially when used in this context. The emphasis on its violence and crudity is not because the word is the most vulgar that Spanish has to offer, but rather because it is offered in Spanish itself. Indeed, the people surrounding the swearer immediately dismiss all previously detailed evidence of wealth and education (Gucci shoes, presence as a client at the Ritz), and grasp the expletive as the most important identifier:

Does that skin look a little dark?

Is that huge ass Cuban,

those oily

hair licks sitting insolently on the head

Puerto Rican?

Of course they are.

I wonder what the Ritz is coming to? (“Spanish at the Ritz” 19-25)⁵⁵

Once the expletive has been uttered, the crowd searches for more “Hispanic” identifiers, e.g. darker skin, a fuller figure, unruly or dirty hair. Important as well is that these particular identifiers ignore any eroticized aspects of Hispanic attractiveness, but rather focus on insolent hair, dark (but not caramel or cinnamon) skin, and the ass. Furthermore, in order to negate any previous doubt that the Spanish expletive was bad simply because it is an expletive, the use of the inappropriate English word *ass* is used without the same

⁵⁵ Esa piel, ¿no está un poco acaramelada?

Ese culo monumental, ¿no será cubano?

Esos ricitos grifos que se yerguen

insolentes sobre la cabeza,

¿no serán puertorriqueños?

“¡Claro que sí!” exclama.

“A dónde ha ido a parar el Hotel Ritz?” (“El español del Ritz” 16-22)

prejudice given to *coño*. Which language is used becomes the primary and all-encompassing identifier of class; indeed, once the swearer is presumed to be Hispanic, the thoughts of the crowd reject the curser, not for having cursed, but for having cursed in Spanish, the more dangerous threat to the status and status quo of the Ritz.

While the English version of the poem provides the benefit of the use of *ass*, thus helping to distinguish that it is not cursing in and of itself that is offensive, the Spanish version also provides a unique twist on both the title and the final lines of the poem. To begin, the Spanish title, “El español *del* Ritz” (my emphasis), more directly translates as *of the* rather than *at the*. This implies a sense of ownership, the Ritz owns, or possesses some level of Spanish. Despite the classy, expensive, racially White appearance of both the hotel and its clients, Spanish still exists, as can be seen with the presence of the (silent) Hispanic elevator attendant. The Spanish poem therefore claims pride in the Spanish language by opening the poem with the suggestion of belonging. This is further emphasized in the slight difference between the final two lines of the English and Spanish poems. In the English poem quoted above, one could easily assume (perhaps correctly) that the line “Of course they are” is the final judgment of the same English-speaking people thinking about the insolent hair and huge ass of the original speaker. However, the Spanish poem ends not in paraphrase, but rather in direct quotations: “ ‘¡Claro que sí!’ , exclama. / ‘¿A dónde ha ido a parar el Hotel Ritz?’ ” (“El español del Ritz” 21-22). With the use of singular *exclama* in the penultimate verse, it becomes clear that the “¡Claro que sí!” statement is not made by the people judging, but rather by the singular swearer him or herself. The emotion therefore is converted from the implied disgust in the English to a sense of pride in the Spanish; the speaker *exclaims* his or her belonging as Hispanic. The final two lines are less a

continuation of the same discussion, but rather a conversation then, with the curser proclaiming pride in his or her Hispanic heritage, even with its less desirable traits, and the rest of the people responding by asking about the status and status quo of the Ritz. The Spanish version therefore both opens and closes with a sense of belonging and pride in the Spanish language, despite the negative feelings towards it expressed by others. It gives more agency to the speaker of Spanish, not only in its very use of Spanish to voice the poem, but in the way that this poem, in contrast to the English, allows the speaker to reclaim Spanish rather than hide or dismiss it. Spanish is still portrayed as dangerous to monolingual English speakers, but there is no insinuation that that danger should be cause for rejection by its own speakers.

Language and the Body

Ferré consistently draws on the tongue and the foot as symbols to convey her messages encouraging the acceptance of bilingualism. In this section, I will begin by examining how she expands upon the idea of the tongue and then examine how she uses the foot.

Tongue

“Coming Up the Archipelago⁵⁶” (Ferré, *LD/DL*, 12, 14, 16) opens with the line: “The words Carib and cannibal have the same root,” (“Coming Up the Archipelago” 1). The EPV continues the cannibalism metaphor, using the consumption of the tongue for the conquest of a people and their language. The statement that opens the poem is true: the phonetic shift from Canib (the name Columbus gave to them) to Carib (what they came to be called

⁵⁶ “Subiendo por el archipiélago” (Ferré, *LD/DL*, 13, 15, 17, 19)

by Spaniards) likely came from a mispronunciation (Schutt 103). However, it is unlikely that Columbus actually encountered cannibals upon his arrival. Their mythologized presence arose through various Spanish decrees that incentivized the classification of Caribbean islanders as cannibals, with or without evidence. Since the Catholic Church in 1510 denounced cannibalism as a sin, Spanish Christians conquistadors were allowed to punish and “correct” this behavior as a part of their imperial or religious missions. Indeed, once this decree was enacted, several previously peaceable tribes were suddenly described as cannibalistic, often when gold was found or suspected on the island (Schutt 106). Schutt, in his book *Cannibalism: A Perfectly Natural History* succinctly summarizes the use of the term cannibalism for the indigenous Caribbean people:

In the end, tall tales, especially those with bestial or cannibalistic angles, effectively dehumanized the islanders. Not only did this serve to justify Spain’s rapidly evolving slave-raiding agenda, but it also established a mindset toward the locals that came to resemble pest control. (Schutt 108)

With this context, we can enter into the poem and the linguistic and cultural implications it puts on cannibalism of the tongue. Perhaps most important when considering the context and the poem together is the way that the poem subverts such historical dehumanization, instead attaching pride and power to the act. Both poems use the first person plural to describe the Caribs, identifying both the EPV and the SPV as a member of this group. Their cannibalism is not described as a taboo act, but rather serves as a source of pride: “They [the poetic voice’s Carib ancestors] were fierce warriors and took pride in their

scarifications” (“Climbing Up the Archipelago” 8-9)⁵⁷. Cannibalism in the poem is also a tangible way to increase one’s personal power; the EPV “love[s] to suck the bone to get to the marrow / and imbibe the strength” (“Climbing Up the Archipelago” 4-5)⁵⁸. Even more powerful is the fact that this cannibalism is the means by which previous tribes were conquered. Each wave of conquistadors consumes the prior people, often whole:

When they arrived in Puerto Rico they ate the Arawaks,
 who were peaceful and planted manioc root.
 Then the Spaniards arrived and ate the Caribs
 who had swallowed the Arawaks whole. (“Coming Up the Archipelago” 10-13)⁵⁹

The use of cannibalism as a metaphor for conquest here serves a dual purpose. First, as previously mentioned, it allows the poem to subvert the historical use of cannibalism to dehumanize indigenous people. Indeed, cannibalism *instills* power in the Carib ancestors, and the Spanish themselves also take part in the cannibalism act when they conquer the Caribbean people, thereby including them in the cycle of cannibalism and power rather than allowing them to criminalize it. Secondly, by consuming and taking in another people, the consumed and the consumer become one. When the Caribs eat the Arawaks, for example, the Arawaks, rather than completely disappearing, become the source of nutrition

⁵⁷ “Éramos guerreros feroces, orgullosos / de nuestras escarificaciones” (“Subiendo por el archipiélago 9-10). I will return shortly to the use of the *nosotros*, which is more prevalent in the Spanish version than the English.

⁵⁸ “Nos gusta chupar el tuétano / para adquirir su fuerza” (“Subiendo por el archipiélago 3-4).

⁵⁹ “Cuando llegamos a las Antillas Mayores nos comimos a los arauacos, que eran pacíficos y sembraban yuca. Entonces los españoles desembarcaron Y nos engulleron sin compasión a su vez.” (Subiendo por el archipiélago 11-15)

and strength for the Caribs, who now, at least in part, embody the Arawaks. The metaphor, while definitely one of conquest, also implies some level of assimilation and acceptance of the previous culture: while the conquering culture is the one that remains, they are also made up of the previous, consumed culture.

This process changes considerably when it comes to the arrival of the English, who “ordered everyone to speak English” (“Coming Up the Archipelago” 15)⁶⁰. The Americans did not consume their conquest, but rather attempted to both keep it separate from themselves and under their control. The strategy is ineffective, since Spanish “bred strong on their [the Caribbean people’s] tongue⁶¹,” and they were able to maintain it despite the new American empire (“Coming Up the Archipelago” 18). The description here can be tied to the way Americans historically and unsuccessfully attempted to linguistically conquer Puerto Rico, which, despite more than a century of American control, continues to be mostly Spanish speaking.

Despite the resilience of Spanish in the face of English, the EPV acknowledges that, particularly in the case of Puerto Rico, Spanish can be seen as “a dangerous umbilical cord” for immigrants attempting to survive or thrive in the continental United States (“Coming Up the Archipelago” 32)⁶². Because they had previously consumed, and thus embodied, Spanish, it was hard to get rid of, and immigrants who want to remove it are forced to pick “Spanish from their tongues / as if it were a fish bone” (“Coming Up the Archipelago” 61-

⁶⁰ “nos ordenaron hablar inglés” (“Subiendo por el archipiélago” 18)

⁶¹ “Pero el español / . . . / estaba tan arraigado en nuestra lengua / que no hubo manera de sacarlo” (“Subiendo por el archipiélago 20-4)

⁶² “una placenta peligrosa” (“Subiendo por el archipiélago” 34)

2)⁶³, or alternatively to literally scrub Spanish from their tongues “with corn husks / and whisk brooms, / even with Brillo pads when necessary” (“Coming Up the Archipelago” 46-48)⁶⁴. Just as any fish bone, Spanish is depicted as trash, as extra, capable of choking (as a fish bone might) but not providing sustenance. Indeed, the use of a *fish* bone directly contrasts with the early description of the Carib ancestors sucking out bone marrow for strength. Spanish is no longer a form of strength, but rather a danger. Furthermore, it is unclean, and needs to be literally scraped from the tongue, using the particularly abrasive Brillo pads if necessary. Both the EPV and the SPV portray Spanish not only as trash, but an intrinsic and dirty part of the immigrant’s body that needs all but surgery to remove. However, these immigrants are willing to do so because “Next to an American passport, / perfect English was the second most convincing proof / of American citizenship” (56-58)⁶⁵. English language use becomes a mark of Americanness. The irony of this way of thinking is that Puerto Ricans have been U.S. citizens, albeit with some restrictions, since the Jones Act of 1917⁶⁶ and thus should have no need beyond the passport to prove citizenship, regardless of their language use.

⁶³ “Se arrancaron la lengua / como si se tratara de una espina” (“Subiendo por el archipiélago 69-70)

⁶⁴ “Les cepillamos la lengua con tusa de mazorca, / con escobilla de enea, / hasta con *brillo pad* cuando fue necesario” (Subiendo por el archipiélago 49-51)

⁶⁵ “Junto al pasaporte norteamericano / hablar un inglés perfecto era la prueba / más fidedigna de ciudadanía” (“Subiendo por el archipiélago” 63-5)

⁶⁶ This Jones Act, more completely known as the Jones-Shafroth Act, is different from the Merchant Marine Act of 1920, also informally known as the Jones Act. The former granted American citizenship to Puerto Ricans, while adjusting the self-governance of the island more in their favor. The second law, which requires that goods shipped within the United States be transported on US vessels, has also affected Puerto Rico, most recently after 2017’s Hurricane Maria, when some lawmakers argued that the law prevented much needed goods and supplies from reaching the hurricane-wrecked island. It was also this second Jones Act, not the 1917 Jones Act, that President Trump temporarily waived in early October 2017 in an attempt to help the island.

While the first two thirds of the poems merely allude to a more general process of immigration, the final third is more direct, with specific references to “a second wave of Caribs,” which include not only the Puerto Ricans referenced earlier in the poem, but also Cubans, Haitians and Dominicans (“Coming Up the Archipelago” 65).⁶⁷ This second, more recent wave of immigrants lacks the strength of their earlier counterparts, and indeed arrive “half-drowned” (73),⁶⁸ “famished and paper thin from the voyage” (77),⁶⁹ and clinging to each other for fear that “the slightest breeze would blow them right back / down hurricane alley” (79-80).⁷⁰ However, just as with earlier immigrants, Americans immediately ordered them to lose their native language:

whatever they had spoken
must be instantly forgotten.

*Lengua, langue,*⁷¹ *cohoba,*⁷² for example,
which had crossed the sea with them,

henceforth would be called “tongue.” (“Coming Up the Archipelago” 82-86)⁷³

Just as before, Americans mandate language use rather than consuming the immigrants’ languages. The American conquest is therefore incomplete. By not consuming French, Spanish and Taíno, Americans neither assimilate their Caribbean immigrants, nor do they

⁶⁷ “una muchedumbre inmensa” (“Subiendo por el archipiélago” 73)

⁶⁸ “medio ahogados” (“Subiendo por el archipiélago” 83)

⁶⁹ “famélicos y casi transparentes” (“Subiendo por el archipiélago” 90)

⁷⁰ “Tenían que ingerir algo enseguida / o la menor brisa podría remolcarlos de nuevo / por el callejón de los huracanes” (“Subiendo por el archipiélago” 91-93)

⁷¹ French for *tongue*

⁷² Taíno (an indigenous Caribbean language) for *tongue*

⁷³ “Cuando llegaron les ordenaron deshacerse
de todo lo que había cruzado
el océano con ellos.

Lengua, langue, cohoba,

En adelante se llamaría *tongue.*” (“Subiendo por el archipiélago” 94-98)

stop the spread of the languages, as previous conquest and consumption had done. Because Spanish, French and Taíno are not cannibalized, the Americans open themselves up for conquest by their immigrants:

But the Caribs were so famished
they took a stone ax by the handle,
chopped the English word “tongue” in two
and swallowed it whole. (“Coming Up the Archipelago” 87-90)⁷⁴

The Caribs, starved for culture, power, language, acceptance, or simply for food, have no choice but to cannibalize and make the American tongue their own. The reference to swallowing whole alludes to the beginning of the poem and the Spanish conquest of the Arawaks, who were also consumed whole. However, the key difference here is that English is chopped in two before it is consumed. Because English is distorted and broken apart before being eaten, the Caribs are unable to fully assimilate the English language. This action also implies that any linguistic gain will consist of a broken tongue rather than a standard version of the language. Nevertheless, the poem ends with this final consumption and does not share the results thereof. Despite the hint that the immigrants might have consumed and thus conquered English, we cannot tell for certain if the conquest is fully successful or a failure. We also do not see the possible impact of such consumption on the Americans and their language – after all, through the cannibalization of English, the immigrants come to, in part, embody English and the United States. Despite the

⁷⁴ Pero los caribe que repecharon por el archipiélago
tenían tanta hambre
que agarraron el hacha petaloide por el mango,
picaron en dos la palabra *tongue*
y se la tragaron de un bocado.” (“Subiendo por el archipiélago” 102-6)

cannibalism, the poem ends on the duel, on the tensions between the previous and the newly consumed languages, rather than on any sort of agreement or assimilation on the part of either party.

The SPV of “Subiendo por el archipiélago” provides a few more valuable details about the Caribs, for whom, to start, to speak “en lenguas extrañas / es una de nuestras destrezas” (“Subiendo por el archipiélago” 5-6). The explicit reference to this linguistic skill, which is missing in the English translation, is linked to the action of “chupar el tuétano,” and makes more clear the link between cannibalism and language use or gain (“Subiendo por el archipiélago” 3). With the consumption of marrow, the conquerors consume a new language, and their inherent linguistic strength allows them to pick it up easily.

Perhaps the more important distinction between the EPV and the SPV, however, lies in the SPV’s more consistent use of the first person plural to refer to the Carib ancestors, emphasizing the collective not only of Puerto Ricans, but all Caribbean immigrants (Montilla 5-6). However, in contrast to Montilla’s argument, the EPV does begin with this pronoun; however, she loses it in the first wave of immigrants. The SPV, however, continues the use of the first person plural throughout, as can be seen in these lines, found about half way through the poem:

Era preciso ocultar el español
 que devoró el caribe
 que se tragó el arauaco
 pero lo arrastrábamos en hilachas
 de cilantro y ropa vieja.

No importaba lo que hiciéramos,

no lográbamos librarnos del acento. (“Subiendo por el archipiélago” 40-46).

These lines are not strikingly different from the English version, except in the expanded use of the first person plural. This makes the Spanish poem consistently more personal, and, perhaps in part due to the use of the imperfect, harder to consider as part of a distant past; the history becomes readily relatable to the current Spanish-speaking reader.

The final major difference between the two poems is in the use of foreign and italicized words. Both poems identify *langue* and *cohoba* as foreign. However, the EPV also italicizes several other words to indicate their foreignness. Some of these words might be recognizable or even used in English: *cilantro* (“Climbing up the Archipelago” 39), *ropa vieja* (39), *ajo* (52), *carajo*, (52), *coño* (53), and *cebolla* (53). All of these words appear in the Spanish original of the poem, but do not appear in italics. Thus, between the consistent use of the first person, and the use of far fewer italicized foreign words, it is the Spanish version of the poem that is supposed to be more relatable, to speak more directly to the reader about him or herself, rather than describing the history of others, as the English poem does. It is thus one of the few instances in which the Spanish poem alone is actually more successful than the English poem, because it does not allow for, nor need, the distance that the English poem imparts.

As with “Climbing up the archipelago,” “Tongue Less⁷⁵” (Ferré, *LD/DL* 54) plays with the double nature of *tongue/lengua* as describing both an organ and a language.

Furthermore, as with “Spanish at the Ritz” it again presents the idea that Spanish is somehow dangerous to the status quo. However, in this poem, the warning is overt rather

⁷⁵ The Spanish original of the poem is “Deslenguado” (Ferré, *LD/DL* 55).

than implied: both poems begin with an explicit word of caution (“Warning!” (“Tongue Less” 1); “¡Cuidado!” (“Deslenguado” 1)), and the third verse of both poems warns that Spanish puts the speaker’s life in danger. Both the EPV and the SPV compare Spanish to sex (“Tongue Less” 4-5) (“Deslenguado” 4), indicating that through use, Spanish (and sex) become more desirable. It references more conservative, puritanical portions of the American population that fear and censure pre-marital sex, and according to Montilla, “ridicules [American] conservatism upon comparing the growing use of Spanish to sexual activity, as a sinful behavior” (9). Spanish here is depicted as a force that is slowly invading and trying to take over, becoming more important or appealing than English itself. The EPV attributes this invasion to excessive use:

The more you *habla español*
 the more Spanish
 wants to be the official language
 of this country. (“Tongue Less” 5-8)

The use of the Spanish by the EPV provides for a visual means of how Spanish is taking over. Despite the EPV discussing “this country” (presumably the United States), she also uses Spanish (*habla español*) to indicate that the language has already invaded sufficiently for a presumably monolingual English voice to know and use it, derisively to be sure, but use it nonetheless. What is not accurate is the notion that Spanish could be an official language of the United States: the country as a whole to this date (2018) has no official language, although many individual states do (see the first chapter for more details), and the idea that Spanish would be chosen rather than English if the government were to

impose an official language is hyperbolic at best. Such hyperbole again ridicules fears among some Americans about the presence and perceived prevalence of Spanish.

The SPV expresses a similar sentiment, but the invasion of Spanish is hinged not on its excessive use, but rather on its prohibition: “Mientras más se prohíbe, / más se empeña este país / en hablarlo” (5-7). Furthermore, the SPV includes an additional few lines not translated or conveyed in the English edition: “Nos recuerda el dicho: / meter, comer y rascar / todo es cuestión de empezar” (8-10) The saying, which indicates that it is the beginning of an action is always the hardest, could allude to the difficulty of banning the language, for the next verses in the poem indicate the possibility of eradication. The SPV also makes reference to the family more, referring to Spanish as “el idioma / de sus abuelos” (16-17), emphasizing the idea of language and the cultural heredity inherent in language choice. The question of language use thus becomes less a political question (as it is in the English poem), and more a cultural or familial question. The fact that *meter* can have a sexual connotation in Puerto Rico, and combined with other body-related actions (*comer* and *rascar*) suggests that the choice of language is also deep within the body, in its most primal urges (sex and food). This shift belies the perceived simplicity that some Americans have of language use and choice.

Both poems allude to further societal prejudices of Spanish by describing the language as inherently dirty: both poetic voices make reference to both Brillo and Ajax cleaning products and refer to the monolingual citizen as “sparkling clean⁷⁶” (“Tongue Less” 18). However, even in this instance “the use of *Brillo pads* is recommended over *limpiador Ajax*” (Montilla 9), especially in the Spanish original of the poem, in which a

⁷⁶ “resplandecientemente limpio” (“Deslenguado” 26)

lawyer “le recomiend[a] a su cliente / el uso de los *Brillo pads* / en lugar del limpiador *Ajax*” (“Deslenguado” 19-21). Indeed, the EPV indicates that by ridding yourself of Spanish “all your troubles will be over,” again stating the idea that it is language, far more than visual appearance or mannerisms, that indicates a Hispanic, and therefore less than ideal citizen⁷⁷. The dual nature of the tongue or *lengua* again appears in the final verses, when Spanish disappears from the newly minted perfect citizen: “Spanish will get rusty, shrivel / and fall off / when you don’t use it” (20-22). For the monolingual citizen or the citizen wishing to hide their Spanish, this might seem ideal. However, the danger is not only the loss of Spanish, but the loss of all language. There is no bifurcation here as there is in “Coming Up the Archipelago:” the loss of the Spanish tongue is not differentiated from the gaining of an English tongue. Spanish must be cleaned out, but no attention is given to the learning of English. The suggestion is therefore that the “sparkling clean citizen” might not be an English-speaking one, but rather a silent one, an idea further emphasized by the use of “monotone” to describe that same “sparkling clean citizen.”

However, this loss of language is not as complete in the Spanish version of the poem. Whereas the EPV makes no differentiation between Spanish and the tongue, the SPV does: “El español se le marchitará, / y acabará por caérsele / *de la lengua*” (28-30, my emphasis). Spanish falls *from* the tongue, indicating that there is still a tongue remaining. Here, while Spanish might be eradicated to make a sparkling citizen, this same citizen is still granted

⁷⁷ Montilla’s article repeatedly discusses how the *poemario* is meant to unite and bring together Hispanics of all backgrounds. We see in quotes like this, as well as in “Spanish at the Ritz,” that this statement is not altogether true: the *poemario* brings together all *White* Hispanics. Many Hispanics do not appear *White* to American eyes, and therefore face their own discriminations separate from their language. In other words, for these Hispanics of Color, learning English takes care of one set of troubles, but certainly not all. For many Hispanics, speaking the majority language is not, and never will be, a straightforward path to acceptance.

the ability to speak. They lose “el idioma/ de sus abuelos” but they retain the ability to advocate for themselves, and their people. Perhaps it is here again useful to consider the saying not present in the English version: “comer y rascar / todo es cuestión de empezar” (9-10). The hardest step for such advocating is beginning, but since Spanish fell *from* the tongue, rather than *being* the tongue, the “usted” from the “Deslenguado” poem retains more possibility of redemption.

Foot

Whereas the symbol of the tongue seems self-evident, given its dual definition as an organ and a language in both languages, the repeated references to the foot is a less obvious symbol in a *poemario* dedicated to language. Indeed, even the first and most important reference, the poem “The Humble Foot⁷⁸,” makes reference to the singular, rather than the plural (Ferré, *LD/DL* 24, 26). Nonetheless, careful reading of the ode to the foot makes clear its place in the work. Although important for movement, it is balance that makes the foot so important: “First is the ever-important question / of balance, the need to be in a solid / position at the start” (“The Humble Foot” 6-8)⁷⁹. As with the rest of the work, the foot serves as another symbol of duality and balance that the *poemario* encourages between languages. It is this balance that not only carries us through life, but also allows us to endure the hardships of life:

When a foot is well placed
 death and taxes still
 stalk us, but they appear

⁷⁸ “La humildad del pie” (Ferré, *LD/DL* 25, 27)

⁷⁹ “en primer lugar está el asunto / inevitable del balance, / la necesidad de ocupar una posición / sólida al comienzo” (“La humildad del pie” 6-9)

less threatening.

The body complies

and accepts its destiny. (“The Humble Foot” 22-27)⁸⁰

Accepting and taking advantage of the balance that both feet (languages) provide does not eliminate threats and obstacles, but allows us to center ourselves and “accept [our] destiny.” Furthermore, if the idea of balance is not sufficient to tie these poems to the rest of the work, they make a reference that connects the foot to language: “The foot carries laughter” (“The Humble Foot” 16)⁸¹. While not as obvious as the connection between the tongue and the duel between languages, the foot also serves as another link between the body and language. This same symbol also appears to bring the idea of balance to the poems “Juan de Oñate” and “Saguaro Countdown,” both of which are discussed in more detail in the next section.

Historical Language and Culture

In addition to examining current perspectives of Hispanic language and culture in the United States, the *poemario* also challenges the Anglo-centric view of United States history. It does so by presenting both Spanish conquistadors in the United States as an integral part of American history and by acknowledging indigenous antecedents in both the Caribbean and the continental United States. In this section, I examine the importance of

⁸⁰ “Cuando el pie está bien plantado
no hay que temerle a la muerte
ni a las contribuciones.
El cuerpo se conforma
Y acepta su destino.” (“La humildad del pie” 30-4)

⁸¹ “El pie lleva la risa” (“La humildad del pie” 22)

this history to the previously stated bicultural and bilingual view of the *poemario*, as well as examine the extent to which Ferré's inclusion of indigenous people is successful.

As a transition between this section and the previous one, we can consider the symbol of bones, as used in the poem "The Bones of Conquerors"⁸² (Ferré, *LD/DL* 30). In this poem, and its original in Spanish, the EPV begins by referencing conquistadors such as Ponce de León, Coronado and Cabeza de Vaca, and in particular how these men are unavoidable in present-day Florida: "In Miami you step over the bones of the Conquistadors / every time you walk on the sidewalk. / Many streets are named after them" ("The Bones of the Conquerors" 1-3⁸³). Both poems then connect these ancient conquerors, and their deaths, with present day Caribbean immigrants: "Today the conquerors are here again: / Cubans, Haitians, Puerto Ricans. / The ocean is paved with their bones" ("The Bones of the Conquerors" 10-12)⁸⁴. Despite the comparison, the reference to the ocean lessens the future impact of these recent immigrants. The ancient (Spanish) conquerors remain in Miami, memorialized in street names and in poems. They can be found, identified, and studied. The recent (Caribbean) conquerors, however, are nameless, and lost forever to the ocean, never even having reached their intended destination. There is no reclaiming of individuals in this second wave of conquistadors, either in name or in body, only a possibility of collective recognition.

⁸² "Los esqueletos de los héroes" (Ferré, *LD/DL* 31)

⁸³ "En Miami uno se tropieza a cada paso / con los esqueletos de los héroes. / Muchas calles ostentan sus nombres" ("Los esqueletos de los héroes" 1-3)

⁸⁴ Hoy los Conquistadores están de vuelta:
los cubanos, los haitianos, los puertorriqueños.
El océano está empedrado
con los huesos de los héroes. ("Los esqueletos de los héroes" 12-15)

However, it is in the comparison of the two poems that deeper connotations become visible. Most notable is the word used to refer to the Hispanics that come to the United States. For the EPV, they are both Conquistadors and conquerors. However, the SPV refers to both the ancient and the recent as “héroes” (“Los esqueletos de los héroes 2, 15). Even the conquest is described in different connotations: in English, “They came, they conquered and they died / before they were vanquished in turn,” a rewording and reimagining of Julius Caesar’s famous “Veni, vidi vici” (I came, I saw, I conquered) (“The Bones of the Conquerors” 5-6). Although they are called conquerors, the EPV also highlights that they too were conquered, and that ultimately English reigns in Miami and Florida (consider, for example, the Miami-Dade County English-Only laws mentioned in Chapter 3). However, the Spanish version sees no need for this equivocation: “Llegaron, vencieron y perecieron / bajo los cascos de la ambición y de la gloria” (“Los esqueletos de los héroes 6-7). For the SPV, the conquerors are never vanquished; indeed they live and die in glory. The difference in the way that history is told from the English and the Spanish perspective is one that echoes the overall historical narrative from either side. Americans see their relationship with the Spanish and the Hispanic as one of triumph over invaders, whether those invaders come on military ships or rafts. The Spanish and the Hispanic, on the other hand, recognize these stories as another important moment in American history, granting Caribbean immigrants and Spanish conquistadors the same title as the founding fathers: heroes. For many Hispanics, their ancestors and family are also critical to the foundation of the country as it stands today. The poem thus introduces a message that is seen throughout the book: Spanish or Hispanic influence and history, although often forgotten or ignored, holds a key place in the way American history should be told.

The poemario continues as a reminder of Spain's presence in American history⁸⁵ with the "Juan de Oñate" poems (Ferré, *LD/DL* 32-35). The poems, titled the same in both Spanish and English, introduce Juan de Oñate, a Spanish conquistador and governor of New Mexico from 1598-1608. He is most known today for his excessive retaliation on the native Acoma people after the death of thirteen Spaniards were attributed to the Acoma. Oñate's vengeance culminated with the massacre of between 800 and 1000 Acoma. Afterwards Oñate sentenced most of the indigenous survivors to forced servitude and ordered that all men over twenty-five lose a foot. The Spanish government later convicted him of using excessive force, and Oñate today remains a controversial figure in New Mexican history. In fact, his ancient order to remove a foot from grown Acoma men led a protestor to remove a foot off a statue of Oñate in 1998. It is actions like these that further problematize the characterization of the conquistadors as heroes.

The fact that a statue remains honoring Oñate is a reminder that American history today continues to celebrate the colonizers and minimize the colonized. However, as the EPV points out, the Anglo or English colonizers are still given precedence in the way Americans narrate their history:

Why
 if New Mexico was settled
 by Juan de Oñate
 ten years before
 the Pilgrims arrived in Massachusetts,

⁸⁵ It is interesting to note, despite the multiple references to Spanish conquistadors and conflicts between the English and the Spanish, that there are no important references to the Spanish-American War in the book.

do *you* insist that Plymouth

Rock was the first colony? (“Juan de Oñate” 1-7, my emphasis)

Whereas the SPV asks why “los norteamericanos” (“Juan de Oñate” 5) do this, the use of the second person in the English version forces the English reader to personally reassess their narrative of American history, and with their relationship with the English language, as can be seen with the lines, “Two hundred years later / Americans claimed / English as their Mother Tongue” (“Juan de Oñate” 35-7). The SPV highlights even further this error of recognizing an exclusive relationship with (the) English:

Doscientos años más tarde

los norteamericanos reclamaron

el inglés

como *su única lengua*. (38-40, my emphasis)

Although the Spanish language has been, throughout the *poemario*, associated with maternity (see the former discussion of “Language Current”), the SPV refers to the English language not as the Mother Tongue, but rather as the North Americans’ “única lengua,” (40) which they did not claim, but rather “reclamaron” (38). While the Spanish verb can be translated as *claim*, it also is a synonym of *exigir*, to demand, or require, giving much more insistence to the statement. The irony of using Spanish as the language used to describe Americans’ “only” language once again emphasizes the importance of reading both the Spanish and the English versions of the poems. By only reading the English, the reader is denied the chance to see the SPV’s jab; by only reading the Spanish, the irony of the statement only appearing in the Spanish is lost.

Although they argue for his placement in the American narrative of history, the poems do not ignore Oñate's controversial history. Oñate is presented as an important figure in American history, but he is not glorified. Indeed, the EPV refers to him as a "beast," (8) and the Acoma as a "peaceful" (11) people who "eventually rebelled when he [Oñate] savagely / exploited them" (12-13). The Acoma are not defeated in the poem, however, and return to commemorate their survival in the face of tragedy: "Twenty four warriors limping / on bloody stumps! / What a publicity stunt!" (32-34)⁸⁶. This reference to one-footed indigenous men might seem to undermine the previous discussion of balance and the importance of being bipedal/bilingual, but the poem ends with two-footed Pueblo people:

But today the Pueblo are back
marching without a limp,
both feet planted firmly
on *Madre Patria* ground. ("Juan de Oñate" 38-41)⁸⁷

Despite the massacre of their people by Oñate, the Acoma Pueblo have managed to rebuild themselves. Today they are a federally recognized U.S. Indian Tribe, their home is a recognized as a Historic Site by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and their artwork is recognized worldwide. Their return is marked in the poem by their use of both feet – they are balanced, centered and able to march. The importance of duality is also reinforced with the use of the phrase *Madre Patria* in both poems. The English equivalents

⁸⁶ "¡Veinticuatro guerreros marchando / sobre una sola pierna! / ¡Qué golpe tan astuto de publicidad!" ("Juan de Oñate" 34-6)

⁸⁷ "Hoy los acomas
están de vuelta
marchando sin el menor asomo
de una cojera,
ambos pies plantados firmemente
en la madre patria." (Juan de Oñate" 42-7)

of *Madre Patria* (mother country or fatherland) would require choosing one parent, whereas the Spanish term allows reference to both mother and father. The double reference to both parents is more balanced, more reminiscent of the bipedal over the “limping,” which explains the phrase’s use in the English poem.

Nevertheless the use of the Spanish in the English “Juan de Oñate” points to a major deficiency in the poem itself – the lack of language or voice given to the Acoma Pueblo people themselves. The Pueblo’s appearance in a poem about Juan de Oñate and his place in American history does serve to signal the indigenous people’s place in the American historical narrative, and encourages the inclusion beyond just well-known Eastern or Midwestern tribes that more commonly known as part of American history. However, the indigenous presence is less complete than Juan de Oñate’s. No reference, for example, is made to *how* the Acoma people moved from “limping” warriors to proud bipedal marchers, making what must have been perseverance and diligence on the part of the people to maintain their heritage instead seem instantaneous and effortless. Furthermore, in a book devoted to the balance of languages, what is perhaps most notable about the poem is the lack of voice given to the Acoma people in any language. Their appearance is limited to their feet rather than their tongue, and their native language is not even mentioned. Indeed, their home is defined as *madre patria*, in Spanish, which is not even the second most common language among their people⁸⁸. Even their name, while it is the one that the tribe is most known by, derives from the name the Spanish bestowed upon them. While their place as a part of America is secured within the *poemario*, their history, and more importantly their voice and their language, is not.

⁸⁸ The Acoma people most commonly speak Acoma and English. Only the Elders of the tribe traditionally speak Spanish.

The poem that follows, “Saguaro Countdown” (Ferré, *LD/DL* 36, 38)⁸⁹, attempts to remedy this problem. The poetic voice of both poems is a saguaro, a type of cactus common in the American Southwest. The saguaro, who describes himself⁹⁰ as a “conquistador de tierras” (“La marcha de los saguaros” 20), describes the long history of linguistic conquest that he has seen and participated in:

I’ve been speaking Spanish to the O’odhams,
and Hopi to the Pueblos for centuries⁹¹
and hardly had time to grow
a stump or two on each arm
before the new Conquistadors arrived,
the English speaking Conquistadors. (“Saguaro Countdown” 25-30)⁹²

The poem does not pair the language to the people that speak it, implying therefore that each language signaled another instance or wave of conquest. Indeed, conquest itself is defined by the use of a new, foreign tongue with the conquered people, similar to the way in which “Climbing Up the Archipelago” equates conquest to cannibalism. The time frame of this takeover is also important – this has been happening for centuries, but the new conquistadors seem not to recognize, as “They have been here less than three centuries / and have already forgotten / what came before them” (“Saguaro Countdown” 32-34). The Spanish is even more explicit in chiding the English-speakers for this forgetting:

⁸⁹ “La marcha de los saguaros” (Ferré, *LD/DL* 37, 39)

⁹⁰ In contrast to many of the poems, the poetic voice, at least in the Spanish, has a definitive gender marker – the saguaro uses masculine adjectives.

⁹¹ These first two lines do not have clear correlative lines in the Spanish original.

⁹² “Casi no tuve tiempo
ni de crecer un muñón elemental de cada brazo
cuando un segundo Conquistador
hizo temblar a mi alrededor la pampa” (“La marcha de los saguaros” 27-30)

Los recién llegados guerreros
 proclamaron en inglés ser los primeros
 en hollar las arenas del Cipango,
 olvidando los que aquí marcharon antes.
 Yo jamás hubiera osado
 reclamar ese derecho sagrado. (“La marcha de los saguaros” 31-36)

The SPV rebukes the English-speakers not only for forgetting – or perhaps rewriting – the past, but also for declaring themselves first. It is this declaration that the Spanish saguaro speaker sees as arrogant blasphemy. The crime is not merely against history and the past, but also against the future:

De no ser un saguaro
 que marcha en el desierto de Sonora
 no estaría tan seguro
 de que detrás de mí otros cien mil
 vienen marchando. (“La marcha de los saguaros” 43-7)⁹³

The hubris of the English-speaking conquistadors is that they cannot see that they are merely one in a line of conquerors, and that they themselves, and their language, are conquerable. This is further emphasized in the way that the English poem merely proclaims this history, but the Spanish poetic voice must precede this history with “nadie

⁹³ A hundred thousand *saguaros*
 speaking Hopi to the Pueblos
 speaking Navajo to the O’odhams,
 speaking Spanish to the Navajos
 make me suspect
 there are a hundred thousand *saguaros*
 marching right behind us. (“Saguaro Countdown” 38-44)

me cree cuando insisto” (37), thus implying that the conquered Spanish speaker has less power of persuasion than the English. While the comparison between the English and the Spanish version of these lines does strengthen the current place of power that English holds, the crime of the English speakers is not their conquest, but their arrogance. Once again, the English-speaking reader is warned against forgetting the wide linguistic span of the past, particularly that of the Spanish and the indigenous peoples of the US.

Nevertheless, the voices that warn against American arrogance and hegemonic narratives of history belong entirely to Spanish and English speakers. Indigenous speakers are referenced, but their language is never used, nor are they themselves speakers in any of the poems. Furthermore, in earlier poems that spoke of Hispanic immigrants wanting to rid themselves of Spanish, the language barrier is both implicitly or explicitly stated as the largest barrier to acceptance into American society. Remember, for example, the statement in “Tongue Less” that, after forgetting Spanish and learning English “all your troubles will be over” (19). These two considerations point to a key limitation of the *poemario*’s message of biculturalism and inclusivity: this inclusivity does not yet extend to non-white discrimination, or to far more minority languages than Spanish. That does not mean that the book endorses these discriminations; indeed by referencing multiple times various indigenous tribes, there is some attempt at inclusivity. However, the extension is incomplete, meaning that the *poemario* focuses on and promotes not bilingualism and biculturalism in general, but Spanish-English bilingualism and (White) Hispanic-American biculturalism specifically. The focus is on the dual, not the multiple, on Spanish and English, not to the broad range of languages present in the United States.

Conclusion

Ferré chose to title both her book and its first poem *Language Duel / Duelo del lenguaje*. Although the homophone *dual* does not appear in either title or poem, the side-by-side poems, the two languages and people contrasted, and the list of dichotomies in the first lines of the titular poem encourage readers to consider the poems within not as singular entities, but as duals. The poems are meant to be read together, and only by doing so can the full depth of the poems and their intricacies be examined. This duality also encourages the messages of bilingualism and biculturalism found in many of the poems themselves.

The question then must move from *dual*, which does not appear directly, to the word *duel*, which does appear, and in both languages. Are the two languages, presented and meant to be read side-by-side and in dialogue with each other, truly dueling? In some ways, no – because the poems when read *together* enhance the message, they need not fight either for supremacy or for the attention of the reader. The two languages are thus not in competition *within* the work. However, equally clear is that in the American society and culture portrayed *by* the poems, the two languages have been and continue to remain very much in battle. While Montilla argues that the languages remain in contest because “of the many generations of Latinas/os in the country who refuse to assimilate into the now antiquated notion of the melting pot,” *Language Duel / Duelo del lenguaje* more accurately blames America(ns), who are very much winning the duel (1). English is consistently praised as being clean and favorable, while Spanish is dirty and holding back its speakers. Americans are proud and confident of their Anglo heritage, whereas Hispanics (and

indigenous peoples) must fight for their rightful place as part of that cultural and historical narrative. This victory over Spanish is apparent from the beginning: in the very first poem of the book, Queen Elizabeth I destroys the Spanish Armada, and the poem written in her language (English) appears before the poems written in the conquered Spanish, despite the fact that, in every case, it is the Spanish poem that is the original, and English the translation. The only moments of victory for Spanish speakers within the poems are their ability to accuse the English speakers of arrogance, but that is a minor victory compared to the loss of history, culture, and language they must also experience. It is this loss that *Language Duel / Duelo del lenguaje* attempts to remedy. However, more than a means of moving forward to an America that embraces dual languages, the poems sadly continue sixteen years after their publication to describe the same bitter language duel that has been in place since long before Ferré wrote of it.

Conclusion: Where do we go from here?

I began writing this dissertation in the fall of 2016, amidst a particularly contentious presidential election. While immigration has always been – at least certainly in my short living memory – a topic of debate, suddenly immigration was pushed to the forefront, not because of an economic debate, but because of rhetoric by then presidential candidate Trump that argued that immigrants from non-white countries were inherently dangerous to the United States. Middle Eastern immigrants and refugees were denied access early in his presidency because of fears of terrorism, and, as I write this, the president has declared a state of national emergency over security at the border, arguing – despite evidence to the contrary – that drug and human trafficking through illegal crossing of the Mexican border is at an all time high and literal walls are the only way to keep us safe and secure.

This fear of the foreign is nothing new to this country. As I discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, there have been multiple periods in United States history in which there was heightened fear of people perceived to be foreigners, whether or not those people are or are not actually United States citizens. The question is less of citizenship and more of being “American enough” – of fitting into a specific mold that we can acknowledge feels American, often White and English-speaking, a problem that Ferré alluded to in her work, *Language Duel/Duelo del Lenguaje*. Even today, being English-speaking continues to be a major component of being American. A considerable number of states have enacted official languages in their state constitutions, and questions over the legal right to speak one’s language in an official capacity – such as to be educated in one’s first language or to fill out official state paperwork in one’s preferred tongue – are far from settled in this country. Indeed, as pointed out in the first chapter, one’s language preference is not

specifically protected under current federal anti-discrimination legislation. Perhaps for this reason, non-English languages quickly die out in immigrant communities, often within the second generation, and almost certainly by the third generation. Societal pressure to speak English – which is often pressure to speak *only* English – has been incredibly successful in this country.

Nevertheless, Spanish is far from dead in the United States, particularly as more and more second or third generation immigrants look back to Spanish to better get in touch with their heritage. This is particularly noticeable in the growing literature published in the United States but incorporating both Spanish and English. While Chicano literature is probably the best studied of this bilingual literature, Caribbean-American authors who write bilingually are also quite present, and some, like Julia Álvarez and Junot Díaz, have received national attention for their books. Even as more and more U.S. Latino authors are celebrated and empowered to use both of their languages, the scholarship on these works has not kept up with this crucial component to their works. Bilingualism in U.S. Latino literature is far too often understudied or is considered one-dimensionally as a purely aesthetic choice to set the scene and make it feel more Hispanic. While books such as *Weird English* and *Wanderwords* have attempted to set a framework for reading this bilingualism more critically, the scope of bilingual literature in the United States simply does not allow such projects to enter into great depth on a large variety of authors.

This dissertation enters into that space in the scholarship. By focusing not on several authors using several languages, my reading can be more focused on what it is to read a work fully understanding both languages incorporated into a given work. Also by focusing on the same language combination, my study allows me to show a broad spectrum

of ways not only to combine the two languages, but also the uses that those two languages present within the work. For example, by studying Fernández across his career, I can show how Spanglish, even for one author, is far from a single unified concept, but rather means a wide variety of different dialects, pronunciations, lexical choices, and calques. By studying Ferré, I can examine how translation can be used both to open the work to monolingual readers and yet still strongly encourage bilingualism. By studying Cruz, I can illustrate that the use of bilingualism within a work is not tied solely to a political discourse about the right to speak the language one chooses; instead, bilingualism, just as any other language choice, can serve as a key component to character development.

However, this dissertation is not the final word in Caribbean-American bilingual literature. Even among the authors studied, Angie Cruz has a new novel slated to be published later this year (2019), which opens an opportunity to reexamine the bilingualism in her characters. Furthermore, Cruz, Fernández, and Ferré are not the only Caribbean-American authors writing bilingually. The opportunities for future research are numerous, with new works by still living authors, other authors not studied here in this dissertation, and new authors being continuously published and then discovered by scholars. However, what this dissertation does do is provide a blueprint for the reading of these other bilingual works. By considering not only why an author might include bilingualism, but also what the two languages *do* in a given work, it is more difficult to dismiss bilingualism as whimsical or purely aesthetic. Language has purpose, and bilingual language is no exception.

While this critical study of the bilingualism of these three authors is only the beginning of the study of U.S. Latino writers who write bilingually, it provides one path for how to begin studying works published in the U.S. and written in both Spanish and English.

It acknowledges that bilingual works each use their language uniquely and encourages readers to cast a critical eye at why an author has chosen to incorporate more than one language into the text, and what each language accomplishes in a particular work. In this way, I hope this dissertation spurs future study of the bilingual nature of texts, and thus continues to encourage writers to take advantage of any or all of their personal languages so that Spanish continues to thrive within the U.S.

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