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## On Loss and Gain: The Translation of Linguistic Simultaneity in *This is How You Lose Her*, by Junot Díaz

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## Abstract

Pulitzer-prize winning author Junot Díaz stages culture clashes in his work by dramatizing the linguistic tension between English and Spanish. This strategy, which he calls “linguistic simultaneity” (code-switching), is central in his fiction because it expresses his Latino identity, and it is artistically and politically significant. Translators who wish to recreate his texts for another readership are forced to rethink what translation is and thus to consider new paradigms, since code-switching defies the traditional conception of translation as the transposition from one closed linguistic system to another. Translations into one of the languages that make up the fictional universe of the source text (in this case, Spanish) are especially challenging. Focusing on the extent to which translators transpose the linguistic simultaneity of Díaz’s source texts, this paper explores the possible reader responses to strategies used to maintain or downplay linguistic tension in the target texts. A comparison of two translations into Spanish of Díaz’s short stories “The Sun, The Moon, The Stars” and “Otravida, Otravez” from *This is How You Lose Her* (2012) will illustrate how linguistic simultaneity is recreated.

**Keywords:** code-switching, literary translation, Junot Díaz

## Résumé

L’auteur Junot Díaz, récompensé par le prix Pulitzer, met en scène dans son œuvre le choc de cultures en accentuant la tension linguistique entre l’anglais et l’espagnol. Cette stratégie, qu’il nomme « simultanéité linguistique » (alternance codique), y est fondamentale, non seulement parce qu’elle exprime son identité latino-américaine, mais aussi parce qu’elle est artistiquement et politiquement significative. Les traducteurs qui souhaitent recréer ses textes pour un autre lectorat sont contraints de repenser la traduction et ainsi de réfléchir à de nouveaux paradigmes, puisque l’alternance codique défie la conception traditionnelle de la traduction, à savoir la transposition d’un système linguistique fermé à un autre. Les traductions dans une des deux langues qui

composent l'univers fictionnel du texte source (ici, l'espagnol) posent un réel défi. En mettant en évidence la latitude avec laquelle les traducteurs transposent la simultanéité linguistique des textes sources de Díaz, le présent article explore les réponses possibles du lecteur aux stratégies retenues pour maintenir ou minimiser la tension linguistique dans les textes cibles. Une comparaison de deux traductions en espagnol des nouvelles de Díaz «The Sun, The Moon, The Stars» et «Otravida, Otravez», tirées de *This is How You Lose Her* paru en 2012, illustrera les stratégies employées par les traducteurs pour recréer la simultanéité linguistique.

**Mots-clés :** alternance codique, traduction littéraire, Junot Díaz

## Introduction

Multilingualism is considered one of the “blind spots” both in translation studies (Meylaerts, 2011, n.p.) and in American letters (Sollors, 2000, p. 4), yet in multicultural literature, it is an unavoidable topic. One of the reasons why code-switching is common among authors of Latino literature is that it allows writers to stage culture clashes within their texts. This strategy, which Junot Díaz calls “linguistic simultaneity” (2013b, n.p.), is central to this Dominican–American writer’s fiction. The prose of this Pulitzer-prize winning author is characterized by the linguistic tension between English and Spanish, which is artistically and politically significant and central in terms of expressing his Latino identity. This is a challenge for translators who wish to recreate his texts for a non-English-speaking audience. They are forced to consider new translation paradigms since code-switching defies the traditional conception of translation: the transposition from one closed linguistic system to another. Focusing on the extent to which translators transpose the linguistic simultaneity of Díaz’s source texts when they rewrite his multilingual texts for another audience, I will analyze some strategies that translators use to maintain linguistic tension in the target text. A comparison of translations into Spanish of Díaz’s short stories “The Sun, The Moon, The Stars” and “Otravida, Otravez” from *This is How You Lose Her* (2012) will provide examples to illustrate how, and to what extent, linguistic simultaneity may be recreated in translations of his prose.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Although there are some studies about the translations into Spanish of *Drown* (Cresci, 2017) and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (e.g. Boyden and Goethals, 2011; Jiménez Carrá, 2011; Cresci, 2014, 2015; López and Requena 2016; Humblé and De Wilder, 2016), research on translations of *This is How You Lose Her* is scarce.

## 1. Code-switching in Latino Literature

The study of the phenomenon of code-switching began in the late 1970s in the field of sociolinguistics. The focus was mainly on verbal exchanges between speakers.<sup>2</sup> Shana Poplack's influential article "Sometimes I Start a Sentence in Spanish Y TERMINO EN ESPAÑOL: Towards a Topology of Code-switching" (1980) was one of the first to concentrate on code-switching in Latino communities. Poplack's findings from a case study of Puerto Rican heritage New Yorkers living in East Harlem suggested that "code-switching, rather than representing debasement of linguistic skill, is actually a sensitive indicator of bilingual ability" (1980, p. 581).

Latino authors often display this "bilingual ability" in written form in their works. Although some claim that Latino literature is written in English,<sup>3</sup> most critics contend that it is an inherently multilingual literature.<sup>4</sup> For instance, Alejo López defines Latino literature as a heterogeneous corpus which "comprende textos escritos en inglés, en español o en las diversas combinaciones entre ambas lenguas, entre ellas, el difundido uso interlingüe del spanglish" [includes texts written in English, in Spanish, or in the diverse combinations between both languages, among them the extended interlingual use of Spanglish"] (2015, n.p.).<sup>5</sup> Suzanne Bost and Frances R. Aparicio also underscore the multilingual nature of Latino literature, and consider it to be a result of its "multiple histories and political developments" (2012, p. 4).

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2. See Blom and Gumperz (1972) and Appel and Muysken (1987).

3. For example, writer Lorraine López defines Latino literature as "American literature written by people of Hispanic heritage who identify themselves as Latinos, reside in and are inculcated with an experience of the United States, and write in English" (2009, p. 143). According to López, Latino literature would not include works written in any language other than English. Similarly, *The Prentice Hall Anthology of Latino Literature*, edited by Eduardo del Rio (2002), only includes works written in English. However, some of the works presented in this anthology do include terms in Spanish.

4. Even the novel that is considered by most to be the first Latino novel, *Pocho* by José Antonio Villarreal, published in 1959, includes code-switching. In this case, however, the author's intended readership seems to be monolingual and English-speaking, since the terms in Spanish are immediately followed by translations into English (González, 2015, p. 10).

5. All translations from Spanish into English are mine, unless a published translation is cited.

Regarding code-switching in literature, a vast array of labels has been used to discuss the phenomenon of the mixture of languages.<sup>6</sup> Due to its prevalence in specialized literature, its relation to the representations of hybrid identities, and its political nature, the term “code-switching,” namely, “the alternation of two languages in a verbal or written text” (Torres, 2007, p. 76), will be used here interchangeably with the term “linguistic simultaneity,” used by Díaz (2013b) to refer to this phenomenon.

About code-switching in Latino literature, Marian Pozo has stated that

[it] is not merely a linguistic phenomenon; it also signals a hybrid identity. The hybrid condition of Latinos results from the convergence of American English-speaking and Spanish-speaking cultures. When Latinos code switch, they may find that communication between Spanish- and English-speaking communities impedes absolute identification with one or the other culture. Consequently, the expression of cultural identity, whether in Spanish, English, or both languages, is a major concern in Latino literature [...]. The switching of codes can also imply a political act because its deliberate use is meant to reaffirm a Latino identity within the United States. (2008, p. 75)

Code-switching as a strategy, then, has a performative value; in other words, it is a political act that reasserts Latino identity in the United States.

Of course, code-switching in literature is not in itself an innovation; there is a long tradition of multilingual literature. What

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6. For example, “bilanguaging” designates the process of integration of two or more languages that allows the connection of linguistic geographies, and literary and philosophical landscapes (Mignolo, 1996, p. 196); and “heterolingualism,” introduced by Rainier Grutman in his study of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Quebec novel, refers to the use of foreign languages or social, regional, and historical language varieties in literary texts (Grutman, qtd. in Meylaerts, 2006, p. 4). Juan Bruce-Novoa uses the term “interlingualism” to refer to the formation of a new, third language: “two languages in a state of tension which produces a third, an ‘inter’ possibility of language [...] ‘interlingualism’ implies the constant tension of the two at once” (1982, p. 226). Another term which has been used is “linguistic hybridity” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 358; Young, 1995, p. 18). It is worth noting that the title of a talk by Liliana Valenzuela, an acclaimed Spanish translator of works by Latina writers such as Sandra Cisneros, Julia Alvarez, and Denise Chavez, at the 8<sup>th</sup> International Congress on the Spanish Language held in Córdoba, Argentina, was: “Reverse Mirror: Recreating the Hybrid Aesthetic of US-based Hispanic Authors in Translation” (28 March 2019).

has changed in the last decades are its modalities: thanks to recent technological and political developments, the objects of study in disciplines such as linguistics, literature and politics are more often conceptualized as multilingual (Meylaerts, 2006, p. 1). Reine Meylaerts goes so far as to talk about a “multilingual turn,” which has allowed us to gain new insights into the dynamics and redefinition of literatures in a globalized world (*ibid.*, p. 2).

In Latino literature, code-switching often has a mimetic function. It enables Díaz to vividly represent the hybrid identities of his Latino characters. These characters—like Díaz himself—“straddle” cultures<sup>7</sup> on a daily basis, and this interstitial position is frequently expressed through their language use. However, mimesis is not the sole purpose of code-switching; it also multiplies the possibilities of creative experimentation and serves to defy the prevalence of an “ethnocentric Anglo-culture-only attitude” (Villanueva, 2000, p. 697). As Lisa Bradford explains in her article “Uses of the Imagination: Bilanguaging the Translation of U.S. Latino Poets,” Latino poets seek to “deterritorialize the English language” (2009, p. 30); in other words, “[w]hile representing their bicultural experience through intentional linguistic transfers, they undermine the monolingualism imposed by the U.S.” (*ibid.*). This also holds true for Latino fiction writers, such as Díaz.

Contrary to popular belief, code-switching is not simply connected to linguistic competence. Although the degree of competence in English and Spanish among Latino writers obviously varies, their code-switching highlights the fact that they are torn between competing tongues. There are stakes involved: a question of allegiance tied to language use. By infusing English with the alterity of Spanish, many Latino writers underscore the hybridity of their cultural affiliation, their emotional attachment to both tongues, and their language politics. In short, literary code-switching allows writers such as Díaz to highlight issues of cultural, sociological and political import,<sup>8</sup> and also to expand the possibilities for creativity.

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7. As Salman Rushdie puts it: “Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy” (1991, p. 15).

8. As Meylaerts points out, “debates about language, about heterolingualism in/and translation are never just debates about language and translation but are closely tied to discussions about nationhood, identity etc.” (2006, pp. 5-6).

Many Latino/a writers, such as Sandra Cisneros<sup>9</sup>, Julia Álvarez, Rolando Hinojosa-Smith, and Cristina García, intersperse Spanish in their texts, but their prose is generally easily understood by monolingual readers because they often provide “cushioning techniques,” such as italics, self-translations, glossaries and footnotes. They differ from other texts which Lourdes Torres has labelled as “radical bilingual literary texts” (2007, p. 92). Some examples are *Yo-Yo Boing* by Giannina Braschi (1998) and *Killer Crónicas* by Susana Chávez-Silverman (2004). Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La frontera* (1987) is another emblematic work, repeatedly cited by postcolonial critics, that illustrates hybrid literary practices representing the plurality of the border through the juxtaposition of languages. The following section explores why Díaz’s literary project is another example of a “radical bilingual literary text.”

## 2. Code-switching in Junot Díaz’s prose

Born in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, in 1968, Junot Díaz immigrated to the United States, more precisely to Parlin, New Jersey, with his mother and siblings when he was seven years old. At the time he spoke only Spanish, and learning English was not an easy task for him:

I found English to be enormously difficult, growing up in Central New Jersey surrounded primarily by English speakers. [...] Eventually the school approached my family, saying, This kid probably needs some sort of intervention. I got pulled into special ed and assigned all sorts of people to try to get me to speak English with any facility. But it took a while. It was torturous, man. While this is rather simplistic, I do think my obsession with language stems partially from my lack of any kind of control or comfort around English in my first years. (Díaz, 2016a, n.p.)

This difficulty in acquiring the English language, a traumatic experience for Díaz, marked his life forever. He claims that using Spanish in his texts in English is a vengeance of sorts:

When I learned English in the States, this was a violent enterprise. And by forcing Spanish back onto English, forcing it to deal with

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9. In her analysis of code-switching and the translation of Sandra Cisneros’ *Caramelo or Puro Cuento*, Nieves Jiménez Carra points out that “the original text is mainly characterized by the occurrence of Spanish terms followed by their English translations” (2004, p. 37). On Lilita Valenzuela’s reflections on translation and how she approaches the translation of Cisneros’ works, see Camps (2011).

the language it tried to exterminate in me, I've tried to represent a mirror-image of that violence on the page. Call it my revenge on English. (Díaz, 2000, p. 904)

Díaz's ambivalent relationship towards English and Spanish mirrors that of many of his characters, as is revealed in their voices.<sup>10</sup>

Díaz works against the myth of linguistic purity quite consciously in his fiction. The very distinction between source language and target language is blurred. Code-switching or, as he calls it, "linguistic simultaneity" (Díaz, 2013b, n.p.) is central to his fiction. By including Spanish in his texts, Díaz highlights his hybrid cultural loyalties, and makes an emotional and political statement. His use of language is one of the main distinctive features of his prose (González, 2015, p. 9). As Glenda R. Carpio points out, "[t]he capacity to enact the immigrant experience in language for the reader is one of the most significant accomplishments of Díaz's work" (2012, p. 62). Through linguistic simultaneity, he renders vivid the voices of the first-person Latino narrators who come alive in his books.

Although code-switching in Latino literature is not in itself an innovation, what differentiates Díaz's use of Spanish from that of many other Latino writers is that he does not provide any "help" to readers who do not understand Spanish: he does not differentiate terms in Spanish typographically nor offer translations in footnotes. Moreover, he usually does not include glossaries with definitions at the end of his books.<sup>11</sup> Even though readers may deduce the meaning of some of the words in Spanish thanks to contextual clues, Díaz creates, as Christopher González puts it, "a potentially volatile relationship between reader and text" (2015, p. 11).

There are mixed opinions as regards the effect of Díaz's code-switching on readers. For example, while, in her *New York Times* review of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Michiko Kakutani claimed that "even the most monolingual reader can easily inhale"

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10. Díaz considers that "returning to a language is like returning to an old relationship—it often requires more courage than striking up a new one" (2013b, n.p.). He himself "returned" to Spanish as an adult, after having spent his adolescence without reading in Spanish (*ibid.*).

11. For example, the edition of *Drown*, Díaz's first short story collection, published in England by Faber and Faber (1997), includes a glossary with 52 definitions. This paratext was probably included since the European readership is generally less familiar with Latino culture and Spanish terms than the American readership.



Díaz's "streetwise brand of Spanglish" (2007, n.p.), critics such as Raphael Dalleo and Elena Machado Sáez have applauded him for the opacity of his insertion of Spanish in predominantly English texts without the benefit of italics, quotation marks, or asides (2007, p. 74).

Díaz seeks to differentiate himself from other Latino writers who merely "season" their texts with terms in Spanish and facilitate the monolingual reader's task by providing typographical, paratextual or explanatory assistance:

I feel I'm not a voyeur nor am I a native informer. I don't explain cultural things, with italics or with exclamation or with side bars or asides. I was aggressive about that because I had so many negative models, so many Latinos and black writers who are writing to white audiences, who are not writing to their own people. If you are not writing to your own people, I'm disturbed because of what that says about your relationship to the community you are in one way or another indebted to. You are only there to loot them of ideas, and words, and images so that you can coon them to the dominant group. That disturbs me tremendously. (2000, p. 900)

Díaz wants to distance himself from this tradition of pandering to the other. When his short story "The Sun, the Moon and the Stars" was published in *The New Yorker*, Díaz explained that "*The New Yorker* forced me to put italics in, but after that I stipulated as part of my contract that if they didn't accept the stories' nonitalics that's that—they can't publish it" (Ch'ien, 2004, p. 207). Díaz's adamance reveals that the presence of nonitalicized words in Spanish is key to his literary project. His attitude towards linguistic simultaneity is thus a literary and political statement. Additionally, it allows him to draw the reader's attention to the role that Spanish is gaining in the United States:

For me allowing the Spanish to exist in my text without the benefit of italics or quotations marks a very important political move. Spanish is not a minority language. Not in this hemisphere, not in the United States, not in the world inside my head. So why treat it like one? Why 'other' it? Why denormalize it? By keeping the Spanish as normative in a predominantly English text, I wanted to remind readers of the fluidity of languages, the mutability of languages. And to mark how steadily English is transforming Spanish and Spanish is transforming English. (Díaz, 2000, p. 904)

Evelyn Ch'ien calls Díaz's language use "the art of assertive non-translation" (2004, p. 209), that is, placing Spanish words side by side with English words without calling attention to them, without contextualizing them or grammatically indicating that Spanish is other. This does not mean that Díaz seeks to limit his audience to the Spanish-speaking Latino community in America. It is a stylistic device that contributes to make readers feel they are somehow immersed in the Latino community, even if they do not belong to it. However, Rune Graulund considers that Díaz implements a "politics of exclusion" (2014, p. 34): he forces his readers "to accept that parts of his text will likely remain indecipherable to them" (*ibid.*).<sup>12</sup> Adopting this stance is a way of resisting the "commodification" of his community: he avoids the "domestication" and standardization of their voices.

What differentiates Díaz's works from other "radical bilingual literary texts" such as Braschi's *Yo-Yo Boing*, Chávez-Silverman's *Killer Crónicas* and Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La frontera* is that *This is How You Lose Her* was published by a mainstream commercial publisher. This is significant because these publishers are generally more reticent to publish bilingual works that do not cater to monolingual readers. As Rachael Gilmour and Tamar Steinitz point out, "not only literary texts themselves, but their publishing and circulation, in relation to linguistic diversity and the politics of language and translation, demand new kinds of critical focus" (2018, p. 4). Díaz's works and their translations reflect some of these gradual changes in the translation and publication of works that feature literary code-switching.

### **3. Code-switching in translation**

Producing conscientious translations of Latino literature, especially into Spanish, is extremely important. Although it is true that every translation enterprise plays a key role in cultural border crossing, the case of the translation of Latino texts into Spanish is significant in terms of the ancestral cultural links shared among Latinos and Latin Americans. The hope that often underlies the dissemination of these texts to a Spanish-speaking audience outside the United States is that it may ultimately contribute to strengthen the bonds

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12. Even though Graulund's comment refers to *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, the same may be said of all of Díaz's works.

between communities of common cultural heritage. This is especially important to Díaz. When he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, he said he hoped it would help shed light on Latino writers who, he claims, are second class citizens in the republic of letters not only in the United States, but also in Latin America (Lago, 2008a, n.p.).

One of the main difficulties when translating multilingual literature stems from the fact that, as Reine Meylaerts puts it, “[i]mplicitly or explicitly, translation is still approached as the full transposition of one (monolingual) source code into another (monolingual) target code for the benefit of a monolingual target public” (2006, p. 5). Adopting this approach, Meylaerts adds, neglects at least two significant considerations. First, by definition, discourses are never completely monolingual, and second, “the monolingualism of the authors, critics, audiences, etc. in the source and target cultures may be less absolute than conventionally expected” (*ibid.*). Conventional expectations about translation, discourses, authors, critics and audiences need to be reshaped to approach multilingual texts.

The difficulty of translating Junot Díaz’s work into Spanish stems not only from code-switching itself, but also, and perhaps mainly, from the fact that the target language (Spanish) is the language embedded in the source text. When the target language of a translation is the embedded foreign language of the source text, “the linguistic elements that signalled Otherness in the original run the risk of having their indexical meaning reversed and being read as ‘familiar’ signs of Sameness (and vice versa)” (Grutman, 2006, p. 22). As Michael Boyden and Patrick Goethals explain:

Particularly challenging are those translations where a literary work is translated into one of the languages that make up its original fictional universe [...]. In general, it is assumed that the translation process tends to reduce the interlingual tensions present in the ST [...]. As translation scholars have pointed out, the translation often not only homogenizes the original, but sometimes also inverts its values by familiarizing what was supposed to remain foreign (the embedded language or languages) and, vice versa, by defamiliarizing what was supposed to remain familiar (the surface language). (2011, p. 21)

In other words, the translator faces a dilemma. Simply keeping the Spanish from the source text and translating the English into Spanish would produce a homogeneous text, without the source

text's linguistic tension. This often responds to the priority of translating into a standard variant of the target language. However, as Anna María D'Amore points out, "obliterar las huellas reveladoras de la identidad cultural de un autor o de sus personajes so pretexto del uso correcto de la lengua de llegada es inapropiado e irrespetuoso" [obliterating the revealing traces of cultural identity of an author or his characters on the pretext of the correct use of the target language is inappropriate and disrespectful] (2010, p. 41). This becomes crucial when translating Díaz's literary oeuvre.

By contrast, if the translator simply reverts the relationship between tongues, that is to say, if all the words in Spanish which are present in the source text are merely transposed to the target text in English, the hierarchy of voices may disappear. Translators should consider these risks and the political and ethical implications of their task.

As Rainier Grutman points out, "[t]ranslators of linguistic 'hybrids' who *do* want to convey a sense of the original text's balancing act between languages [...] go against the grain of institutionalized monolingualism. They are often facing an uphill battle" (2006, p. 23). Although they use different strategies, both Daniel Gascón and Achy Obejas are examples of translators who fight against institutionalized monolingualism in their versions of Díaz's texts.

To approach the challenge of translating multilingual texts critically, Anna María D'Amore suggests a useful conceptual framework based on Lawrence Venuti's foreignizing approach to translation: the "Spanglish continuum"<sup>13</sup>: "This continuum ranges from Standard varieties of English, such as General American at one extreme to

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13. The concept of Spanglish has been the object of heated debates. The definition of "españolish" included in the previews of the 23<sup>rd</sup> edition of the dictionary of the Real Academia Española was controversial: "Modalidad del habla de algunos grupos hispanos de los Estados Unidos, en la que se mezclan, deformándolos, elementos léxicos y gramaticales del español y del inglés" (2014, n.p.). Even though some scholars applauded the inclusion of this term, many others deplored the notion of "deformation" which was used to define it. The definition of Spanglish provided by the *Oxford English Dictionary* is particularly interesting for the purpose of this paper. Spanglish is defined as "A type of Spanish contaminated by English words and forms of expression, spoken in Latin America" (2011, n.p.). The very idea of "contamination" of either language would assume the purity of both linguistic systems. It should also be noted that Spanglish is by no means confined to Latin America. For example, there are communities of Latin American immigrants in Australia and in the United States who speak Spanglish.

Standard General Spanish at the other, with Spanglish at the center” (2009, p. 111). She adds that “a speaker may move up and down the continuum, according to the context of the speech act” (*ibid.*, p. 112). She suggests that this continuum may be used as a conceptual tool for translators: “As writers move up and down the continuum between English and Spanish, so can the translator. If a text is written in a Mexican variety of Anglicized Spanish, it can be translated into Hispanicized English” (*ibid.*, p. 113).

Considering the cases of loss of tension between Spanish and English in the Spanish translations, resorting to compensation<sup>14</sup> could be a viable solution. As D’Amore points out,

[c]ompensation does not necessarily need to be in place, that is, the use of a switch, loan or calque at the exact same locus in the TT [target text] as in the ST [source text], as it can be in kind, i.e., a similar departure from standard norms in the guise of a contact neologism can be recreated at some point in the TT. (*ibid.*)

Translators could thus bring words in English into their translations into Spanish.<sup>15</sup>

It is also important to consider that borders between languages are more permeable than ever, and this takes us to another important point: into what variety of Spanish should bilingual Latino literature be translated? The fact that Spanish is a language with a “polycentric” standardization, “where different sets of norms exist simultaneously”, often in different countries (Stewart, 1968, p. 534), adds another level of complexity to the translation of Díaz’s text. The two translations under analysis operate in different linguistic and cultural target systems, with their own norms.

In her 2009 book *Translating Contemporary Mexican Texts: Fidelity to Alterity*, Anna María D’Amore complained:

It is a shame that the majority of the translation into Spanish of literature produced by Latin Americans in the US is carried out in Spain [...] under the patronage of publishers who appear to be

14. The term “compensation” refers to “a technique which involves making up for the loss of a source text effect by recreating a similar effect in the target text through means that are specific to the target language and/or text” (Harvey, 2001, p. 37).

15. Although D’Amore’s proposal originally focused on the issue of bilingualism in Mexican texts rather than American ones, and although the use of the Spanglish continuum is definitely not all-encompassing, as she shows in her examples, her theoretical contributions provide an illuminative framework for the issue at hand.

reticent to recognize the linguistic variation of Spanish as a global language, thus opting for [...] ‘sterile’ translations. (2009, p. 201)

She adopted the notion of “sterile” from a complaint Díaz voiced about the translation into Spanish of *Drown*.

Translators into Spanish have the advantage that there exists a variety of Spanish that is being forged by U.S. Latinos and is gradually gaining legitimacy in artistic expressions.<sup>16</sup> As Díaz notes, “English is no more a stranger to the Dominican Republic than Spanish is a stranger to the U.S., though both countries claim the opposite” (2009a, n.p.). This linguistic cross-fertilization is even more evident in the Spanish used by many Latinos in the United States, which often includes words in English and is hospitable to words that come from the numerous nations that make up the Latino community.<sup>17</sup> Díaz himself highlights that “en los Estados Unidos we have a Spanish that is deeply affected by each other’s Spanishes. That un dominicano puede usar palabras mejicanas, palabras cubanas, palabras boricuas” [That a Dominican may use Mexican words, Cuban words, Puerto Rican words] (2013b, n.p.). Díaz complains about the misunderstanding of the linguistic drift that affects the mutation of languages: “It’s almost 20 years since *Drown* was published and I still have people saying to me: ‘Listen, you used a Puerto Rican word here. That’s not Dominican and therefore you’re not Dominican.’” (2013b, n.p.). These essentialist accusations bespeak of prevailing illusory conceptions of rigid linguistic divisions along national lines.

#### **4. *This is How You Lose Her***

In *This is How You Lose Her*, Díaz returns to many of the characters and the context of his first short story collection, *Drown*. Most of the stories are narrated by Yunior, Díaz’s alter ego (Wroe, 2012, n.p.).<sup>18</sup>

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16. See Lago (2008b) and González (2015).

17. Some characteristics of the Spanish used by Latino communities in the United States are: the use of Anglicisms (some are used with no alteration while others are adapted following Spanish morphological patterns), false cognates which become cognates (“aplicar” meaning “apply”), a more frequent use of the gerund, calques that stem from literal translations of English idiomatic expressions, the redundant use of pronouns and code-switching (Lipski, 2014, p. 44).

18. Several of these stories had already been published when the book came out. On the copyright page it is stated that “The following stories have been previously published, in a slightly different form: in *The New Yorker*, “The Sun, the Moon, the Stars,” “Otravida, Otravez,” “The Pura Principle,” “Alma,” and “Nilda”; in *Glimmer Train*, “Invierno”; and in *Story*, “Flaca”.

Díaz has claimed that in this book “his Spanglish is just one example of worlds colliding” (*ibid.*) and that it “was part of an attempt to unite the various parts of himself” (*ibid.*). In an interview he gave shortly after the book was published, Díaz described the audience he imagines when narrating his tales:

When I write I definitely think of a very specific audience as a strategy. I definitely think of the friends that I grew up with. Some of them were African American, some of them were Latino, many of them were immigrants, some of them were Asian, but all of us grew up rough. I know that a reader will put up with a lot of things that they don't understand. My Asian friends who don't understand Spanish, they'll put up with Spanish. My Puerto Rican friends who don't understand everything that has to do with Dominican stuff, they'll put up with that. My Dominican friends who don't always know all my nerdy crap, they'll put up with that. Readers will put up with a lot of gaps if they believe in your story and they believe in your characters. (2012a, n.p.)

Díaz trusts that his readership is ready to face the gaps that may result from running into new words which they may not fully comprehend, as his friends used to do. In most of the stories in *This is How You Lose Her*, Díaz created the effect of listening to a friend speak about his sentimental ups and downs.

### 5. “The Sun, The Moon, The Stars”

In this story, the first one in *This is How You Lose Her*,<sup>19</sup> Yunior is the first person narrator who retells his unsuccessful attempt at saving his relationship with his girlfriend Magdalena during their holidays in Santo Domingo a short time after she found out that he had been unfaithful to her.<sup>20</sup> Both Daniel Gascón's and Achy Obejas's translations into Spanish show a degree of linguistic tension between Spanish and English which imitates the “assertive nontranslation” of the source text.

19. This story was first published on 2 February 1998 in *The New Yorker*. It was also included in the collection *The Best American Short Stories*, published in 1999. Some minor changes were made to the versions of the stories that appear in *This is How You Lose Her*, published in 2012. Gascón's translations into Spanish were published in 2009, several years before they were compiled in *This is How You Lose Her*.

20. It is a fictionalized version of the essay “Homecoming, with Turtle” published in *The New Yorker* (2004).

The different backgrounds and audiences of these translators may shed light on some of their choices. Daniel Gascón (Zaragoza, 1981) studied English Philology and Hispanic Philology at the Universidad de Zaragoza in Spain. He has translated several works into Spanish by authors such as Christopher Hitchens, Saul Bellow, George Steiner, Mark Lilla, Sherman Alexie, and V.S. Naipaul. He is also a writer. His most recent book, *Entresuelo* (Random House), was published in 2013. He has also written *La edad del pavo* (Xordica, 2001), *El fumador pasivo* (Xordica, 2005) and *La vida cotidiana* (Alfabet, 2011). He was co-scriptwriter for the movie *Todas las canciones hablan de mí* (2010), by Jonás Trueba. He is also editor of the Spanish edition of the magazine *Letras Libres* (Gascón, n.d.).

Born in Havana in 1956, Achy Obejas is a prolific translator and writer who moved to the United States at the age of six. She is the author of *The Tower of the Antilles* (2017), a book of stories which was nominated for a PEN/Faulkner award. Her other books include the novels *Ruins* (200), *Days of Awe* (2001) and *Memory Mambo* (1996), the short story collection *We Came All the Way from Cuba So You Could Dress Like This?* (1994), and the book of poems *This Is What Happened In Our Other Life* (2007). She has translated works by Wendy Guerra, Rita Indiana, Adam Mansbach, Carlos Velazquez, F.G. Haghenbeck and Megan Maxwell, among others. She currently lives in the San Francisco Bay area. She worked as a journalist for more than twenty years (Obejas, n.d.). *This is How You Lose Her* is the second book by Junot Díaz that was translated into Spanish by Obejas. Many of the translation choices present in her version of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, which were generally well-received by critics, are also present in her translation of Díaz's second collection of short stories. For example, when she translated Díaz's novel:

There was additional pressure because Junot had had problems with Spanish translations before. His first book, "Drown," had initially been translated for a Spanish—as in Spain—audience that made his New Jersey homeboys sound like... well, Toni Morrison characters speaking in Irish brogue, or a Cockney accent. It was that dissonant. Junot was able to get a second translation, but it opted for a "neutral" Spanish that varnished off much of the Caribbean feel of the original. (Obejas, 2012, n.p.)

Thus, preserving the characteristic "Caribbean feel" became a priority for Obejas. In fact, she claims Díaz "wanted the translation to sound Dominican—Caribbean, yes, but leaning toward a more Dominican



sound”<sup>21</sup> (*ibid.*). With the exception of the many translator’s notes which are present in her version of Díaz’s novel, she worked along similar lines in her version of *This is How You Lose Her*.

In Daniel Gascón’s translation, there is an editor’s note which explains:

“Nilda”, “El sol, la luna, las estrellas” y “Otravida, otravez” son tres cuentos publicados de manera independiente. [...] Los relatos originales—sobre todo “El sol, la luna, las estrellas”—tienen algunas palabras en español. Para mantener ese bilingüismo, que es un aspecto esencial del original, se han dejado en inglés esas expresiones, excepto cuando se referían a elementos geográficos o culturales que habrían resultado inverosímiles en la lengua. El objetivo es que el texto español conserve le [*sic*] humor, el tono y los matices del original. (2009b, p. 5)

[“Nilda”, “The Sun, the Moon, the Stars,” and “Otravida, otravez” are three short stories which were published independently. [...] The original tales—especially “The Sun, the Moon, the Stars”—have some words in Spanish. To maintain this bilingualism, which is an essential feature of the original, expressions in English have been kept, except when they refer to geographic or cultural elements which would have been improbable in that tongue. The aim is that the Spanish text keep the humor, tone and nuances of the original.]

Gascón “defamiliarizes”<sup>22</sup> the surface language, Spanish, by including words in English. In general, he swaps Spanish and English, which is mimetically appropriate in most cases. For example, in the source text, the narrator uses the vocative “mami” twice to refer to his girlfriend. In order to preserve the linguistic tension, Gascón’s strategy for translating “mami” was the vocative “baby,” which is also used by the narrator. Gascón translated the narrator addressing his girlfriend, “It’s because I love you, mami” (Díaz, 2012b, pp. 5-6), as “Porque te quiero, baby” (Díaz, 2009b, p. 49). When the narrator asks his girlfriend “So, how about we kick it, mami?” (Díaz, 2012b, p. 13),

21. Many of Díaz’s Dominican friends, as well as Cuban translator María Teresa Ortega, Moira Pujols, the Dominican-born editor of *Contratiempo*, a literary magazine dedicated to Spanish-language literature, and Obejas’s mother, a retired Spanish-language teacher, read and revised drafts of her translation in order to achieve this effect.

22. This term was introduced by the Formalist critic Victor Shklovsky. In his early essay “Art as Device” (1917), he emphasized that the deformation of reality, “making strange” or “defamiliarization” (*ostranenie*), was central to all art (Hyde, 2006, p. 93).

in Gascón's version, he says: "¿Qué te parece si nos lo montamos, baby?" (Díaz, 2009b, p. 65). In the instances in which the narrator used the word "baby," Gascón decided to keep the word in his translation, thus contributing to emulate the effect of linguistic duality in the source text. For instance, when Magda asks Yuniór about his sexual encounter with his lover, he answers: "To be honest, baby, it was lousy" (Díaz, 2012b, p. 6), which Gascón renders as "Para ser sincero, baby, era regular" (Díaz, 2009b, p. 50). Obejas kept the word "mami" when it appeared in the source text and also kept the English vocative "baby": "Porque te quiero, mami" (Díaz, 2013a p. 17), "¿Qué me dices, mami? (*ibid.* p. 24), "Para ser sincero, baby, fue fatal" (*ibid.* p. 18) .

In other cases, Gascón leaves the same or almost the same words in English untranslated in the Spanish version, to compensate for the loss of linguistic tension. For instance, when Magda finds out that Yuniór has cheated on her, "she sat down on the curb and started hyperventilating. Oh, God, she wailed. Oh, my God" (Díaz, 2012b, p. 4). Gascón keeps Magda's exclamation in English: "se sentó en la acera y empezó a hiperventilar: 'Oh, God', gemía, 'Oh, God'" (Díaz, 2009b, p. 46). Obejas, by contrast, translates it into Spanish: "se sentó en la acera y empezó a hiperventilar. Oh, Dios, chilló. Oh, Dios" (Díaz, 2013a, p. 16).

Unlike Gascón, Obejas does not invert Spanish and English; she generally keeps in her version the same words in Spanish as used by Díaz. Instead, she resorts to compensation in kind and leaves words in English in places where there is no Spanish in the source text. For example, Yuniór describes Magda by saying that: "She's the nerd every librarian in town knows" (Díaz, 2012b, p. 5). In Obejas's version, the word "nerd" is left untranslated: "Ella es la nerd que conocen todas las bibliotecarias del pueblo" (Díaz, 2013a, p. 17). This version contrasts starkly with Gascón's translation, which includes the word "empollona," typically used in Peninsular Spanish, instead: "Ella es la empollona que conocen todos los bibliotecarios de la ciudad" (Díaz, 2009b, p. 48).

A similar divergence is observed when comparing the translations of Yuniór's description of Magda's behaviour when they first started dating: "back when we first started dating, she said she wouldn't sleep with me until we'd been together at least a month, and homegirl stuck to it" (Díaz, 2012b, p. 6). Whereas Obejas's version maintains the word "homegirl" in English: "Cuando empezamos a

salir, dijo que no se iba a acostar conmigo hasta que estuviéramos juntos por lo menos un mes, y la homegirl no se echó pa atrás” (Díaz, 2013a, p. 18), Gascón’s version translates it as “colega,” a term that is typically used in Spain: “cuando empezamos a vernos, dijo que no se acostaría conmigo hasta que hubiéramos salido durante por lo menos un mes, y la colega lo cumplió” (Díaz, 2009b, p. 49).

In some cases, the English words included by Obejas are different from the ones in the source text. For example,

“Me and Magda were on an upswing” (Díaz, 2012b, p. 3)

“Magda y yo habíamos recuperado nuestro flow” (Díaz, 2013a, p. 15)

“Magda y yo estábamos mejorando” (Díaz, 2009b, p. 44).

In addition, as in her translation of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, she resorts to anglicisms, which are typical of the speech of Latinos in the United States, to convey linguistic clash in her translation and to compensate for the loss of code-switching. For example, Magda, the narrator’s girlfriend, found out about his infidelity “because homegirl wrote her a fucking *letter*” (Díaz, 2012b, p. 3; italics in the original). In Obejas’s version: “Magda solo se enteró porque una amiguita suya le mandó una *fokin* carta” (Díaz, 2013a, p. 15; my italics).<sup>23</sup> She simplifies the spelling of the word “fucking” to imitate its colloquial pronunciation: “fokin.” When the narrator describes the activities he shared with Magda, he explains how their relationship had improved: “She was coming over to my place and instead of us hanging with my knucklehead boys—me smoking, her bored out of her skull—we were seeing movies” (Díaz, 2012b, p. 3). Obejas’s translation includes an anglicism: “Ella venía a mi apartamento y en lugar de *hanguear* —yo fumando, ella aburridísima— íbamos al cine” (Díaz, 2013a, p. 3; my italics).

In her translation, Obejas includes words commonly used in the Dominican Republic that derive from English. For instance, Yuniór confesses that he loves going back home to Santo Domingo: “Love the fact that I’m the only nigger on board without a Cuban link or a flapjack of makeup on my face” (Díaz, 2012b, p. 9). Although it is not exactly the same as a flapjack, and the humorous allusion to “pancake” makeup<sup>24</sup> is absent in the Spanish version, Obejas chooses

23. Obejas omits the italics which appear in the source text (Díaz, 2012b, p. 3) to imitate the typical emphasis of orality that Díaz seeks to convey.

24. “thick makeup worn especially by actors” (*Merriam Webster*, 2019, n.p.).

to introduce a culturally specific word, that is, “yaniqueque.” She makes the most of the linguistic cross fertilization between English and Spanish, which is especially prevalent in the Caribbean, and translates: “Me encanta que soy la única persona en el avión sin una conexión cubana o sin un yaniqueque de maquillaje en la cara” (Díaz, 2013a, p. 20). The word “yaniqueque,” derived from the English “johnnycake,” refers to a cornmeal flatbread. Gascón uses the word “pastel,” a more generic, less culturally marked term to translate “flapjack”: “Me encanta ser el único *nigger* en el avión sin vínculos con Cuba o un pastel de maquillaje en la cara” (Díaz, 2009b, p. 56). He also opted to maintain the culturally loaded English word “nigger” in his version, adding a long explanatory footnote<sup>25</sup> to justify the inclusion of this derogatory term which has no Spanish equivalent.<sup>26</sup> Gascón includes footnotes to explain several other words in his version of these stories.<sup>27</sup> In this sense, his translation is different from Obejas’s. Unlike the Vintage edition of her translation of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, which includes 115 footnotes,<sup>28</sup> there are no footnotes in her translation of *This is How You Lose Her*.

As regards diatopical varieties of Spanish, it is worth noting that the variety used by Gascón may often be disconcerting for Latin American readers because there are many traces of Peninsular Spanish. For example, Yunior believes Magda considers him “a typical Dominican man: a sucio, an asshole” (Díaz, 2012b, p. 3). In Gascón’s version, it reads: “un típico hombre dominicano: un dirty

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25. “*Nigger* es un término peyorativo que designa a la gente de raza negra. Es una de las palabras más ofensivas del inglés. A veces, en argot, también lo utilizan negros para referirse a otros negros. En esos casos, el término tiene un matiz familiar y de reivindicación política; en ocasiones sirve para criticar un comportamiento negativo. En castellano no hay una palabra equivalente” [*Nigger* is a pejorative term that designates black people. It is one of the most offensive words in English. Black people sometimes use it in slang to refer to other black people. In those cases, the term has a familiar nuance and a political vindication. It can also be used to criticize negative behavior. There is no equivalent word in Spanish.] (2009b, pp. 13-14).

26. It is surprising that Gascón is not consistent in the translation of this problematic term. In the same story, when Yunior explains his disdain for one of Nilda’s ex-boyfriends he says: “I hated this nigger with a passion” (2012a, p. 32). In Gascón’s version, it reads: “Yo odiaba a ese negro apasionadamente” (2009b, p. 17).

27. Some other culturally specific terms which are explained are “dougla” (Díaz, 2009b, p. 15), “coco pañol” (*ibid.*), and in the story “Nilda”, “Sandy Hook” (*ibid.* p. 71), “Quisqueya Heights” (*ibid.*, p. 72).

28. They are set off from the author’s footnotes by square brackets.

bastard, un gilipollas” (Díaz, 2009b, p. 43). The Spanish expression “a sucio” was changed to the English “dirty bastard.” Obejas simply homogenizes the text in this sentence and translates into Spanish: “Ella me considera el típico dominicano: un sucio, un perro” (Díaz, 2013a, p. 15). Gascón’s emulation of the code-switching of this bi-cultural narrator is realistic in that it manages to capture both the linguistic tension of the source text and its colloquial tone. However, the translation of “asshole” as “gilipollas,” together with the many other traces of Peninsular Spanish, may be deemed mimetically incongruous. Although, as it has been stated previously, many Latinos in the United States do employ words from different varieties of Spanish, the prevalence of words which are typical of Peninsular Spanish may be misleading in terms of the characterization of the Latino narrator Yunior. In fact, in one instance, Gascón even changes the Spanish word used by Díaz: the source text includes “chocha,” used in the Caribbean to refer to female genitalia, which Gascón replaces with “coño,” an equivalent typical of Peninsular Spanish.

As regards the variety of Spanish, Obejas’s version has a distinct Caribbean flavour.<sup>29</sup> In their article about the translation of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Boyden and Goethals claim that she substitutes interlinguistic Spanish-English variation with intralinguistic variation through the insertion of Caribbean terms (2011, pp. 30-32). The same may be said of her translation of the stories in *This is How You Lose Her*. When Yunior and Magda break up for some time, his friends advise him not to worry: “My boys were like, Fuck her, don’t sweat that bitch” (Díaz, 2012b, p. 7). In Obejas’s translation: “mis panas me decían pal carajo con ella, no pierdas tiempo con esa jeva” (Díaz, 2013a, p. 18). Díaz himself uses the word “jeva,” which is typically used in the Caribbean, in other parts of this story and other stories of this collection. The word “pana” is another typically Caribbean word used to refer to a friend. In Gascón’s translation, he maintains the informality of the register, but, as seen

29. In a review of Obejas’s translation, Matías Cappelli praises her work by stating about Díaz’s stories: “sus textos traducidos se disfrutan, se leen de a raptos, con fruición; sus historias atrapan; la voz de sus narradores, zumbona y dulce, cautiva, tiene gracia, y además pinta un mundo marginal, de inmigrantes dominicanos y caribeños en las grandes urbes norteamericanas” [his translated texts are enjoyed, they are read in rapture, with delight; his stories are gripping; the playful and sweet voices of his narrators are captivating and funny and they also depict a marginal world, of Dominican and Caribbean immigrants in American metropolitan cities]” (2013, n.p.).

in previous examples, uses words that are more typical of Peninsular Spanish than Caribbean Spanish: “Mis colegas me decían: ‘Que le den por culo, no sufras por esa zorra’” (Díaz, 2009b, p. 51).

## 6. “Otravida, Otravez”

Unlike the rest of the stories in *This is How You Lose Her*, “Otravida, Otravez”<sup>30</sup> is narrated from the point of view of Yasmin, a Latina immigrant who works in the laundry room of a hospital. It is another version of the story told in “Negocios,” published in Díaz’s first story collection, *Drown*, which is narrated by Ramón, Yuniór’s father and Yasmín’s lover. This is the only story in *This is How You Lose Her* not narrated by Yuniór. In an interview, Díaz explained:

This is a second iteration of the story, told from the point of view of the woman whom his father almost leaves the family for. He keeps the father’s name, but changes everything around, because this way it’s hard to tell which story is true. Yuniór is so not about truth. [...] If I ever write my next book in this series, Yuniór will tell that story again. For those of us who grew up in immigrant families, the foundational story takes on this luminous glow. It takes on its own authority, except it’s completely fictitious, because, if you pay attention, the story doesn’t ever cohere. There’s always stuff that doesn’t come together. People always switch their narratives. (2016b, n.p.)

Díaz considers that this story is Yuniór’s family’s “foundational myth” (*ibid.*) and is thus inconsistent and full of creativity.

Spanish appears in the story’s title, but it is not “standard” Spanish: Díaz joins four distinct words—“otra,” “vida,” “otra,” “vez”—in the two words that make up the story’s title “Otravida, Otravez.” This seeks to imitate orality, and creates a defamiliarizing effect for the readers of Díaz’s text from the very beginning. Whereas Gascón’s translation maintains this defamiliarization and keeps the two-word title, Obejas normalizes it, and the title of her version is “Otra vida, otra vez,” in standard Spanish.

As regards the words in Spanish that appear in the source text, Obejas maintains most of them in her version. For his part, Gascón,

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30. This story was first published on 21 June 1999 in *The New Yorker*. As in the case of “The Sun, the Stars, the Moon,” some minor changes were made to the version that appears in *This is How You Lose Her*. For example, Díaz has inserted a few more words in Spanish throughout the text. The names of some characters have also been changed: the narrator’s boyfriend is called Ramón instead of Tavito, and his wife, whom he abandoned in the Dominican Republic, is called Virta instead of Aurora.

as explained in his translator's note, generally inverts languages and includes words in English where words in Spanish appear in the source text. This allows him to maintain linguistic tension in the same place of the text in his translation. Consequently, in his translation of this story, Gascón puts many English words into the mouth of the first-person narrator.

Yasmin is an immigrant with very limited command of the English language at the time of her arrival in the United States, when she was twenty-three years old. When she narrates the story, she is "twenty-eight, five years here, as a veteran, a rock" (Díaz, 2012b, p. 55), but her command of the language does not seem to have improved much. Sometime earlier, her friend Ana Iris had taken a picture of her to send to her family and Yasmín describes the picture in this way: "I'm pretending to read, even though the book is in English" (*ibid.*, p. 62). When the story takes place, the narrator reveals her English is still limited when she explains: "That night Ana Iris and I go to a movie. We cannot understand the English but we both like the new theater's clean rugs" (*ibid.*, p. 70).

This is why Gascón's strategy to preserve linguistic simultaneity, in general, does not seem as effective in this case as it was in his version of "The Sun, the Stars, the Moon." For example, soon after the narrator's arrival, she remembers that:

When I myself had extra [money] I went to the phones and called my mother just so I could hear the voices of the people in my barrio as they passed the phone from hand to hand, like I was good luck. (Díaz, 2012b, p. 61)

Cuando yo tenía dinero extra iba al teléfono y llamaba a mi madre, sólo para oír las voces de la gente de mi barrio mientras se pasaban el teléfono unos a otros, como si yo diera good luck. (Díaz, 2009b, pp. 115-116)

Perhaps Gascón considers that she is narrating her story from her present point of view, and her command of the language has improved, or perhaps he believes she is simply repeating an expression she overheard, which might explain the inclusion of English words in her narration.

This strategy does seem appropriate when, in the source text, the narrator refers to the fact that she cannot perceive a difference in the attitude of English speakers: "The blancos will call your mother a puta in the same voice they greet you with" (Díaz, 2012b, p. 64). In Gascón's version, it reads: "Los blanquitos llaman bitch a tu madre

con la misma voz que te dicen good morning” (Díaz, 2009b, p. 122). Since the narrator is referring to the voice of “white people,” using English words seems mimetically plausible.

In her translation of this story, Obejas also resorts to compensation in kind and adds words in English in places where there is no Spanish in the source text in order to preserve, to some extent, its linguistic tension. However, Obejas uses this strategy in very few cases, much less frequently than in her Spanish version of “The Sun, the Moon, the Stars.” For instance, one day the narrator’s co-worker “Samantha comes in sick with the flu” (Díaz, 2012b, p. 69). Obejas’s version reads: “Samantha llega al trabajo enferma, con el flu” (Díaz, 2013a, p. 77). It would seem appropriate that English appears less in a story narrated by an immigrant who is struggling with the language. The narrator possibly overheard the word “flu” at her workplace, and perhaps not knowing to what disease it refers, simply repeats the word used by her co-workers. Obejas’s translation also evinces the attempt to create a Caribbean voice for this narrator in her word choice. It includes expressions such as “Regresamos del cine caminando *junticas*” (Díaz, 2013a, p. 79; my italics), “Él casi deja la *vaina* dos veces” (*ibid.*; my italics), and “Ya tienes la *bemba* demasiado grande” (*ibid.*; my italics). The Spanish-speaking readership can easily contextualize this narrator through her distinctive Caribbean word choices.

## **Conclusion**

Junot Díaz holds a prominent place among Latino writers, since he has been widely acclaimed by critics and readers. This central place in the field of Latino literature has enabled him to be assertive about the importance of rejecting the myth of linguistic purity in his work through linguistic simultaneity. This stylistic device is central to the expression of his characters’ Latino cultural identity. The reassertion of this identity is important for Díaz, as for many other Latino writers, not only in terms of the themes he addresses, but also of the language he uses in so doing. Undermining the prevalent monolingualism of American culture is just as much an artistic statement as a political one, since it expands the possibilities for creativity by bringing the broad spectrum of Latino Spanish into his texts as an additional mode of expression.

Díaz is vocal about the importance of not “othering” the Spanish he includes in his fiction by offering typographic or explanatory



assistance for a monolingual English-speaking audience. The degree of recognition achieved by this writer and his work has, in turn, contributed to validate this strategy, which was often resisted by editors in the past.

In her 2007 article “In the Contact Zone: Code-Switching Strategies by Latino/a Writers,” Lourdes Torres predicted: “[i]f radical bilingual literary texts prove to be viable in the marketplace, it is conceivable that in the coming years Spanish will appropriate more and more textual space in Latino/a fiction published by mainstream presses” (2007, p. 92). The commercial success of Junot Díaz’s works suggests this may be happening. His success has contributed to pave the way for an increased acceptance of multilingual texts.

By the same token, the dissemination of these works into other cultures may provide further legitimization of writing strategies. The translations analyzed here suggest a more positive reception of multilingualism in translations into Spanish. A comparison of the translations of the stories in *This is How You Lose Her* to translations of Díaz’s first short story collection, *Drown*, reveals a greater interest in recreating linguistic simultaneity for Spanish-speaking readers of Díaz’s more recent texts. Díaz’s vehement stance against the standardization and homogenization of language is mirrored in both of the translations examined.

Although the translation of code-switching poses a challenge to translators, at the same time, it opens up possibilities of approaching this task creatively. It calls for new paradigms of translation that go beyond the idea of transposing one closed linguistic system into another. This is even more difficult when translating a text into one of the languages that is embedded in the source text, as the example of translating Díaz’s work for a Spanish-speaking readership has shown.

Both Gascón and Obejas acknowledge that linguistic simultaneity is one of the essential features of Díaz’s prose and, thus, seek to preserve it in their translations. However, their strategies differ. Gascón generally compensates in place, whereas Obejas mainly compensates in kind. Resorting to compensation in place, that is, using English words where Spanish words appear in the source text, sometimes creates unrealistic voices for the characters in Gascón’s version. Another feature that may seem mimetically incongruous is the variety of Spanish that predominates in Gascón’s translation. Even though the Spanish used by Latinos is characterized by welcoming

different varieties, Peninsular Spanish is relatively rare. Thus, the voices of the characters may be disconcerting for some readers and may affect the characterization that is built through the narrator's voice. Obejas predominantly compensates in kind, taking more liberties to place English words and anglicisms in different parts of the text. The distinct Caribbean flavour of the Spanish she employs in this translation is similar to the variety she used in her previous translation of Díaz's novel, which was generally well received by critics and readers alike. Her translations differ from previous translations of Díaz's fiction, which were carried out by Spanish publishing houses that often tended to push for a more Iberian diction.

The translations by Obejas and Gascón, which include a greater degree of linguistic tension than the short stories in *Drown*, are possible thanks to both translators' acknowledgment of this distinctive feature, their creative strategies in preserving it in their versions, as well as the increasing openness of publishing houses whose editorial policies are welcoming these kinds of works. In addition, there seems to be a growing consensus that readers of translations, just like readers of the source texts, are willing to put up with a certain degree of indecipherability, since it is a characteristic of Díaz's prose. These changes also bespeak of larger cultural attitudes and politics which are redefining literatures in the context of the "multilingual turn."

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