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SPANGLISH: LINGUISTIC ABERRATION OR LINGUISTIC HYBRIDIZATION? A LINGUISTIC, CULTURAL, AND LITERARY APPROACH

Abstract

This paper is a review of the linguistic, social, cultural and literary phenomenon known as Spanglish, starting from the different hybrid dialects spoken by the Latino diaspora in the United States and following their evolution towards becoming a language. We do not pretend to offer a definitive answer to the rhetorical question in the title of the essay, but to participate in the debate from a cultural and literary perspective. We start by searching for the basic meaning of the term in both physical and digital sources. In this section we tackle concepts like code-switching, pidgin, creole, dialect and languages. Then we present different academic connotations of the term by authors like Stavans (2003) and Nginios (2011). These concepts allow us to highlight a series of linguistic and cultural elements which are relevant for the debate between those who reject Spanglish as a linguistic aberration and those who think its consolidation as a language is imminent. To support the latter, we present a general literary review of narrative works by Ana Lydia Vega and Junot Díaz, Gloria Anzaldúa's literary essays and Richard Blanco's poetry. At the end we speculate about the future of Spanglish in the short, medium and long term.

Keywords: Spanglish, languages, Latino/a, identity, culture, literature

Si tú quieres to earte un buen bisté
habla inglés, habla inglés
Listen to me que yo hablo inglés
habla inglés, habla inglés
¿Cómo compruebo'so si yo no sé?
habla inglés, habla inglés¹
Pasó en Tampa (2001) Bang Matu

¹ "If you want to eat a good steak / Speak English, speak English / Listen to me, I speak English / Speak English, speak English / How do I make sure if I don't know? / Speak English, speak English". *It Happened in Tampa* (2001), a song by Bang Matu. All the translations are the author's, unless indicated otherwise.

To speak about Spanglish at an ELT Conference nowadays is dangerous. This peculiar way of speaking Spanish and/or English (or both combined!) has produced the most heated debates among scholars in both languages, but mostly among those who study the former. In the best of cases, they see it as a dialect spoken by Latinos and Latinas in the United States; in the worst of cases, however, they judge it as badly-spoken Spanish, a linguistic aberration, a *chupacabras* miscarried by Cervantes' language that must be sacrificed in order to preserve his legacy.

On the other hand, there are scholars who believe Spanglish is an irrefutable demonstration of the dynamic nature of languages, and they even dare to predict that, far from the purist sacrificial invocation of their colleagues, Spanglish is a hybrid cultural, social and linguistic phenomenon that will eventually become a formal language in a not too distant future. Nevertheless, beyond the academic debate, to think that this discussion only pertains to linguists and that the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language has nothing to worry about remains short from seeing the wider picture of the discussion. Leaving the linguistic approach aside, Spanglish has social, cultural and literary implications that further complicate the issue. In this regard, the present paper is a review of Spanglish from a cultural studies approach, starting from its linguistic and social characteristics and then moving on to observe the rich cultural and literary elements that complement its use as a means of communication and identity feature in the United States. Rather than offering a final answer to the rhetorical question in the title of this study, I will participate in the debate from a cultural and a literary perspective.

Spanglish denotations

It is necessary to start by searching for the basic meaning of the term in both physical and digital sources. I propose readers do the following exercise: look up the word *Spanglish* in a dictionary, any dictionary you have at home. If we take for granted that the most obvious evidence is true, that is, Spanglish is a combination of two languages, Spanish and English, it would be logical for the term to appear in dictionaries of both languages, especially if we consider that, according to Manfredi², the first modern registered evidence of Spanglish dates back to 1948: a newspaper column called *Teoría del Espanglish* (Spanglish Theory), published in the *Diario de Puerto Rico* by humorist Salvador Tió. However, for Ilan Stavans, Spanglish history spans back a century and a half only in the United States:

² M. Manfredi, *Creole Spanglish: ¿Dialectos o Lenguas del Caribe?* *Eventos*, VI, Caracas 2010, p. 168.

El primer momento importante es el Tratado de Guadalupe-Hidalgo, en 1848, cuando Estados Unidos compra territorios que hasta entonces habían sido mexicanos y hay 200.000 personas que hablan español y que se convierten en estadounidenses. En seguida hubo textos que mezclaban inglés y español en los periódicos de la región. El segundo momento es la Guerra del 98, cuando España se va de Puerto Rico y entra Estados Unidos. Ahí tenemos los dos territorios desde los que irrumpe el nuevo idioma³.

In spite of this, my experience with dictionaries is very disappointing. The word *Spanglish* does not appear in the *Cambridge International Dictionary of English* (1995). This may be due to the fact that it is a British publishing company, and therefore it does not take into account a phenomenon that does not affect European English. However, I had the same bad luck with the *Webster's New World Dictionary* (2003)⁴ and *The Oxford New Desk Dictionary and Thesaurus of American English* (2009)⁵.

I did a bit better with the search in Spanish. The *VISOR Encyclopedia* (1999)⁶ does not include the word, but the *Illustrated Pequeño Larousse* does include a brief definition: “s.m. (voz inglesa). Variedad lingüística formada a partir de elementos del español y del inglés, que hablan algunos sectores de la población hispana norteamericana”⁷.

When it comes to on-line dictionaries, the definitions are also brief. For instance, *Merriam Webster* defines Spanglish as “Spanish that includes the use of English words” and “Spanish marked by numerous borrowings from English; broadly, any of various combinations of Spanish and English”; *Oxford* on-line, on the other hand, defines it as: “a hybrid language combining words and idioms from both Spanish and English, especially Spanish speech that uses many English words and expressions”⁸. This is an interesting definition because it sees Spanglish as a *hybrid language* and the example it uses to illustrate it (“Martínez switched back and forth from English to Spanish to Spanglish”) introduces a common practice among people who speak two languages: *code switching*.

³ “The first important moment is the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848, when the United States buys some territory that had belonged to Mexico till then, and therefore 200,000 Spanish-speaking people become US Americans. It did not take long for texts mixing English and Spanish to appear in the newspapers of the region. The second moment is the War of 98, when Spain leaves Puerto Rico and the United States takes over. There we have the two territories where the new language will rise”. S. González, *Ilan Stavans: ‘El ‘Spanglish’ Es como el Jazz’*, March 31 2015, <http://www.elmundo.es/cultura/2015/03/31/55195e0022601dc1168b4571.html> [access April 5, 2015].

⁴ M. Agnes, ed., *Webster's New World Dictionary*, 4th ed., New York 2003.

⁵ *The Oxford New Desk Dictionary and Thesaurus*, 3rd ed., New York 2009.

⁶ *Enciclopedia VISOR*, Buenos Aires 1999.

⁷ “N.m. (English word). Linguistic variation formed from Spanish and English elements that is spoken by some members of the Hispanic population in the United States”. T. García, ed., *El Pequeño Larousse Ilustrado*, 18th ed., Mexico 2012, p. 943.

⁸ *Oxford Dictionaries* (n-d), “Spanglish”, http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/es/definicion/ingles_americano/Spanglish [access January 28, 2015].

Of course, the digital source that offers more information about Spanglish is Wikipedia. The most famous encyclopedic source in the world today defines it as follows:

Spanglish is formed by the interaction between Spanish, a Romance language, and English, a Germanic language, in the speeches of people who speak both languages or parts of both languages. Spanglish is genetically unrelated to any other language because it is not a language itself, but rather an overlapping and mixing of Spanish and English lexical items and grammar. Spanglish is not a pidgin, because unlike pidgin languages, Spanglish has a linguistic history that is traceable. Spanglish can be a variety of Spanish with heavy usage of English or a variety of English with heavy usage of Spanish. It can either be more related to Spanish or English depending on the circumstances of the individual or people⁹.

Out of these four definitions taken from lexicographic sources we understand then that Spanglish is a sort of Spanish dialect with linguistic and lexical borrowings from English (or is it the other way around?), a hybrid or creolized language that often uses linguistic code switching and can be confused with a pidgin. This raises a new question: are all of these terms synonyms?

In order to answer this question and better circumscribe a definition of Spanglish it is necessary to further define some key terms mentioned above. They are *code-switching*, *pidgin*, creolized language, dialect and official language. To start with, *code-switching* is used to describe a practice by speakers of a language or dialect that involves linguistic borrowings from other languages or dialects. In the specific case of Spanglish, code switching means “moving from one language to another in the same phrase or sentence: ‘Welcome to my casa’”¹⁰. There is no doubt code switching is an important characteristic for Spanglish, but sticking to it alone would mean remaining on the surface of this linguistic, social, cultural and literary phenomenon. Let us now approach other concepts used to define variations of languages or dialects: *pidgin* and *creole*.

Authors like McCrum et al. (1987), Stavans (2003) and Mugglestone (2006) agree when defining *pidgin* as a simplified combination of grammar and vocabulary from two established languages used for communication purposes by speakers of two mutually unintelligible languages. It is believed that the word derives from a mistake made by the Chinese when trying to pronounce the English word *business* and that it dates back to 1793, the time when a British delegation arrived in China and the first com-

⁹ Wikipedia.org (n-d). “Spanglish”, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanglish> [access January 22, 2015].

¹⁰ English: “Welcome to my house”. M. Arado, *Spanglish in the Suburbs: People Are Split on a Trendy, Slangy Blend of Spanish and English*, “Daily Herald” October 17, 2004, <https://www.questia.com/article/1G1-124099482/spanglish-in-the-suburbs-people-are-split-on-a-trendy> [access January 28, 2015].

mercial and linguistic exchanges between English and Chinese people began¹¹. John Thieme offers more details about it in his work *Post-colonial Studies* (2003). In his opinion, in the time of the slave trade and the colonies the world registered the rise of many pidgin dialects in English, French and Portuguese. Although he does not make any reference to Spanish, he does talk about variations of pidgin all over the coastal regions of the Atlantic Ocean, specifically in the African and Caribbean regions that had been colonized.

It is not easy to establish a difference between *pidgin* and *creole* or *creolized language*. Stavans says that creole “boasts a more fully developed syntax and vocabulary than a pidgin because it has become a community’s native tongue”¹². Thieme, on the other hand, approaches the concept from a post-colonial perspective when he says that creolized languages are:

the mother tongues of speakers and lexically more complicated and capable of expressing *all* the linguistic needs of a speech community. The distinction is, however, less clear-cut than this suggests, since pidgins and Creoles characteristically operate on a “post-Creole continuum”, which itself may be seen as a linguistic expression of the flux of hybrid contacts¹³.

To the concepts of *pidgin* and *creole* we must add *dialect* in order to better mark out a definition of Spanglish. According to Thieme, a dialect is a variation or sub-division of an official language, generally used by a group of speakers in a specific region: “unlike creoles and pidgins, dialects are not languages in their own right, though the borderline can be porous [...] and popular usage does not always recognize this distinction”¹⁴. The author adds that dialects have been used in literature to give a comic or satirical effect to a work, as in the case of stereotypical representations of black people in the 19th century American narrative, or in the context of Caribbean plantations, in which, according to Edward Kamau Brathwaite, it denotes linguistic and cultural inferiority¹⁵. Of course, these are definitions from a post-colonial studies perspective, but in general terms a dialect always refers to a variation of a language with which some specific regional communities communicate in many parts of the world. This assumption allows us to highlight the importance of dialect variations in a language, since it is thanks to them that many modern languages that we know today were created with the passing of time; at least that is the case of the romance languages, which include Spanish.

¹¹ L. Mugglestone, ed., *The Oxford History of English*, Oxford 2006, p. 421.

¹² I. Stavans, *Latin Lingo*, 2003, <http://webhost.bridgew.edu/lasociedadlatina/Articles/Latin%20lingo.pdf> [access October 13, 2007].

¹³ J. Thieme, *Post-colonial Studies*, London 2003, p. 210.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 77.

¹⁵ E. K. Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry*, Port of Spain, Trinidad 1984.

Finally, since the concept of *language* is not going to be debated in this research, we can define it using lexicographic sources as “un sistema de signos lingüísticos que usa una comunidad de hablantes para comunicarse”¹⁶. Such an encoded system of signs “está sometido a un proceso de evolución y sujeto a ciertas normas dictadas siempre por las élites sociales y culturales”¹⁷. It is also associated with the “lengua de una nación”¹⁸ and described as the “modo particular de hablar de un grupo o de unas situaciones determinadas”¹⁹. Having defined the key concepts, next we will try to circumscribe the term Spanglish to one of them.

Spanglish connotations

Many scholars have approached Spanglish with definitions that reveal social and cultural characteristics that turn it into an identity trace closely linked to the different Latino communities which live in the United States. Ilan Stavans, for instance, defines it as “a jazzy hybrid language, part English and part Spanish, that is audible almost everywhere in the United States today”²⁰. In a recent interview in Spanish the author develops this music analogy further:

el ‘spanglish’ es como el jazz, que también es aleatorio y arbitrario si quieren. Se improvisa, no se escribe y es inestable, pero esa también es su belleza. [...] El jazz tampoco tiene normas ni partitura, se toca y se graba. Y el ‘spanglish’, igual que hizo el jazz, está haciendo el viaje desde la periferia hasta el centro de la cultura²¹.

According to Stavans, at the beginning Spanglish was a pidgin, but nowadays its production involves not only inserting phonemes and morphemes, but identities as well. It also shows interesting signs of a development regarding more formal rules thanks to its use as a language that is spoken all along the United States, and the fact that every time more people write texts in Spanglish, enough reasons for it not to be seen as a cultural element that is exclusive of the Latin-American community, “a hot Latino

¹⁶ “A system of linguistic signs used by a speech community to communicate”. T. Garcia, *op. cit.*, p. 544.

¹⁷ “Is submitted to an evolution process and subject to certain rules that are always dictated by the social and cultural elites”. *Enciclopedia VISOR, op. cit.*, vol. 15, *lengua*.

¹⁸ “A nation’s tongue”.

¹⁹ “Particular speech of a group of people or determined situations”. *Enciclopedia VISOR, op. cit.*, vol. 13, *idioma*.

²⁰ I. Stavans, *op. cit.* par.1.

²¹ “‘Spanglish’ is like jazz, which is also random and arbitrary, if you like. It is improvised, it isn’t written and it’s unstable, but that is also its beauty. [...] Jazz doesn’t have rules or scores, either; it’s played and recorded. And ‘Spanglish’, like jazz, is making its journey from the periphery to the center of culture”. S. Gonzalez, *op. cit.*, par. 5.

property”²², but as “the poetry of the people”²³. In his opinion, the rise of Spanglish is an extraordinary opportunity to understand how languages are generally formed: its causes and its possible development.

On the other hand, Rosa-Triantafilian Nginios defines Spanglish as a language which is changing constantly thanks to the ways speakers use it. The author takes a social and cultural standpoint when she says that “el spanglish nace cuando un grupo de hablantes se ‘resiste’ de alguna manera a la asimilación completa; sin olvidar que no es una ‘etnia’ monolítica, sino que presenta diferentes porcentajes por países”²⁴.

In Nginios’ opinion, Spanglish is a dynamic linguistic phenomenon that involves all the levels of the system: phonetics, morpho-syntax, semantics and vocabulary. Regarding its characteristics, she adds that Spanglish feeds from English borrowings that can be classified following the kind of adaptation made: there can be a phonological adaptation of an English word that is hard to pronounce, like *yarda* (yard) or *güisqui* (whiskey); there can be a morphological adaptation, like in *troquero* (camionero, truck driver) or *guáchate* (ten cuidado, watch out); there can be a semantic amplification when a new meaning is given to a word that already exists in Spanish, like saying *aplicación* (application) for *solicitud*, *atender* (to attend) for *asistir*, or *soportar* (to support) for *apoyar*. Sometimes new words are created to differentiate ambiguous concepts, like using *troca* (truck) instead of *camión* in México, where it has another meaning (buses used for public transportation)²⁵. Syntactic transfer of English idioms and expressions into Spanish are also registered, like the already famous *¡llámame patrás!* (call me back!) or *pagar patrás* (saldar una deuda, pay back). Another characteristic described by the author is code switching (defined above), which can be applied to nouns, noun phrases, verbal phrases, subordinate or coordinate clauses, or idioms. We must always take into account that word transfer from one language into another is not arbitrary, and that the reference language is always the one where the verb is conjugated²⁶.

These are just a few examples of how Spanglish involves different strategies that are common in the dynamic use and effective evolution of a language. However, many scholars are against using and studying Spanglish for different reasons. Ilan Stavans (2003) says that some language experts consider a real language should be capable of

²² I. Stavans, *op. cit.*, par. 7.

²³ J. Everett, *Spanglish: A Review*, 2004, <http://www.geocities.com/tonguetiedzine/articles/2janfebmar04.html> [access October 15, 2007], par. 2.

²⁴ “Spanglish comes to life when a group of speakers somehow ‘resists’ total assimilation; we must not forget that this is not a monolithic ‘ethnic’ group, but that it includes different countries”. R. Nginios, *Sobre el Spanglish en los Estados Unidos* 2011, <http://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/3415421.pdf> [accessed June 7, 2015], p. 121.

²⁵ J. Lipski, *La lengua española en los Estados Unidos: avanza a la vez que retrocede*, “Revista Española de Lingüística” 2003, no 33, pp. 231-260 qtd. in Nginios, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

²⁶ R. Nginios, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

expressing complex emotions and be understood by a large number of speakers. In the specific case of Spanglish, its use is limited almost exclusively to the main urban areas in the United States, it is oral and emotional, and restricted to an intimate and informal context, like the house, the church or the neighborhood. For higher-register communication, both oral and written, and official, educational, health and institutional needs, English and, to a lesser extent, Spanish are mostly used.

Stavans adds that other scholars criticize the fact that no academy supports Spanglish, and its lack of reference and agreement tools. English and Spanish, instead, boast great support from the academy; the latter even has a Royal Spanish Language Academy which studies, rules and endorses the proper use of the language regarding its linguistic aspects. This leads to another weakness of Spanglish: a lack of standardization. Indeed, there is not just one Spanglish but many, which represents a great obstacle for its study. It is not the same to approach the Spanglish spoken in a city like New York, or the ones used in states like California, Texas or Florida, or even the one spoken in the “Free Associated State” of Puerto Rico.

Then there is the so-called *Junk Spanish*, a kind of Spanglish used by English-speaking Americans who do not speak Spanish well and, therefore, create funny words or expressions with a Spanish-looking morphology, but they do not correspond to any structure in the Spanish language, for example, expressions like *no problemo*, meaning “don’t worry, no problem”, or *hasta la vista, baby* (so long baby) included in the film *Terminator 2* (1991) and still very popular among young people in the United States and the world. It also involves the stereotypical association of Spanish with words like *nada*, *adiós*, *macho* and *cucaracha*²⁷. According to Nginios, “este *Junk Spanish* refuerza la visión peyorativa que se tiene del *spanglish*”²⁸.

Other authors’ arguments are less academic and more loaded with value judgment against Spanglish. Nginios points out that for purists “es sinónimo de pérdida de la lengua española y de la cultura hispánica”²⁹, and that it even represents a serious threat to the progress of Latino communities in the United States. Stavans speaks of critics who relate the existence of Spanglish with the *pereza* (laziness) of its users, or suggest that the English linguistic limitations registered by many Latinos is a consequence of the bilingual education policy implemented by the State. To such arguments Nieto responds the following:

²⁷ “Nothing, goodbye, male, cockroach”.

²⁸ “Junk Spanish reinforces the negative vision people have of Spanglish”. R. Nginios, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

²⁹ “It is synonymous with a loss of the Spanish language and Hispanic culture”. R. Nginios, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

Often, bilingual education has been blamed for the lack of academic skills and educational opportunities of minority language students. However, those shortfalls are mainly a result of socio-economic structures of schools and in our society. Exploring the existing research literature makes it clear that the current negative vision of bilingual education is a response more to highly politicized questions about preserving the American ethnic identity and the whitewashing cultural melting pot than to empirical facts³⁰.

Perissinotto also reacts in front of such criticism against Spanglish when he says that the use of this colloquial language is not due to *pereza*, or a lack of loyalty towards the country where they live, but to the fact that “millones de hispanohablantes no se han dado cuenta todavía de su poder político y cultural”³¹. However, the increasing use of Spanglish in mass media like the radio, television, printed press and, especially, the internet is setting the stage for its standardization.

Other scholars who defend the study of Spanglish say its establishment as a language is imminent, and that there are obvious signs that formal rules are in progress to provide it with coherence and more uniformity. Some even consider it an advantage to speak Spanglish. Stavans, for instance, speaks of the Latino population that lives in the United States as a trilingual community: “they speak Spanish and English – and they also speak Spanglish. This is especially so for members of the younger urban generation”³². It is also worth noticing that Spanglish is not displaced as Latinos improve their English skills, therefore there must be other reasons for it to continue on the rise. For many Latinos who live in the United States “Spanglish is more than a tongue and a marketing tool – it’s a political stand and an ID card”³³. To this Stavans adds, “hoy tenemos novelas, mucha poesía, series de televisión, empezamos a tener atención académica e intelectual. Y, sobre todo, tenemos la música, que es el gran vehículo evangélico del ‘spanglish’”³⁴.

Indisputable proof that Spanglish is steadily headed towards becoming a language – besides the number of speakers, its presence in mass media, and a possible standardi-

³⁰ D. Nieto, *A Brief History of Bilingual Education in the United States*, 2009, http://www.urbanedjournal.org/sites/urbanedjournal.org/files/pdf_archive/61-72--Nieto.pdf [access June 7, 2015], p. 68.

³¹ “Millions of Spanish-speaking people have not yet realized their political and cultural power”. G. Perissinotto, *Hacia una norma colectiva para el español de los Estados Unidos de Norteamérica*, [in:] *El español en América: aspectos teóricos, particularidades, contactos*, V. Noll, K. Zimmermann and I. Neumann-Holzschuh, eds., Madrid/Frankfurt 2005, pp. 113-131, qtd. in Nginios, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

³² I. Stavans, *op. cit.*, par. 5.

³³ *Ibidem*, par. 13.

³⁴ “Today we have narrative, a lot of poetry, TV shows, we start to get academic and intellectual attention, and, above all, we have music, which is Spanglish greatest dissemination tool”. S. Gonzalez, *op. cit.*, par. 4.

zation – is precisely its growing use in different literary genres thanks to the works of young Latino writers, poets and musicians.

Spanglish literature

The use of Spanish and English code-switching is not new in English literature. As early as the 17th century William Shakespeare himself made Hamlet, one of his most famous and up-to-date tragic characters, pronounce the following phrase “miching *malicho*; it means mischief” (II, ii, 129), which means nothing but *muy malhecho* in Spanish. It is then explained in English for those who may not have understood (Would it be a precedent for *junk Spanish*?). Then there is the more systematic use of Spanish words and phrases done by Ernest Hemingway in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), a novel about the Spanish Civil War. Just like these writers resorted to Spanish to add exoticism or verisimilitude to their works, Ilan Stavans did an interesting exercise: translating into Spanglish the first chapter of *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha* (1605), the canonic Spanish novel written by Miguel de Cervantes. Here is an extract taken from the beginning:

In un placete de La Mancha of which nombre no quiero remembrearme, vivía, not so long ago, uno de esos gentlemen who always tienen una lanza in the rack, una buckler antigua, a skinny caballo y un grayhound para el chase. A cazuela with más beef than mutón, carne choppeada para la dinner, un omelet pa’los Sábados, lenteil pa’los Viernes, y algún pigeon como delicacy especial pa’los Domingos, consumían tres cuarers de su income³⁵.

Of course, besides being an amusing translation challenge from Spanish into Spanglish, the fragment does not correspond with any of the different actual varieties of Spanglish spoken spontaneously by Latinos in the United States; some scholars even consider Stavans’s version only reinforces negative stereotypes about the hybrid language. We think, however, that the text contributes to the documentation and standardization that Spanglish has been experiencing lately thanks to irreverent writers who, from a literary perspective, have appropriated code-switching in order to construct their identity through their creative writings. Next, I briefly analyse some works that include Spanglish as part of their narrative and poetic structure in genres like the short story, the novel and poetry.

³⁵ “Somewhere in La Mancha, in a place whose name I do not care to remember, a gentleman lived not long ago, one of those who has a lance and ancient shield on a shelf and keeps a skinny nag and a greyhound for racing. An occasional stew, beef more often than lamb, hash most nights, eggs and abstinence on Saturdays, lentils on Fridays, sometimes squab as a treat on Sundays – these consumed three-fourths of his income”. M. de Cervantes, *Don Quixote: A New Translation*, trans. E. Grossman, New York 2005, p. 36 qtd. in Nginios, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

First, we have the short story *Pollito chicken* (1981) by Puerto Rican writer Ana Lydia Vega. It is a precedent for Stavans's translation of *Don Quixote* because it is written systematically and completely in Spanglish, but with very few equivalences in the actual use of the hybrid language in the United States or Puerto Rico. It presents the story of Suzie Bermiúdez, a female character who belongs to the so-called *Nuyorrican* community, that is, Puerto Rican people who make a living in New York City. Suzie has an identity crisis that is unveiled as the story develops. At the beginning the character confesses she “prefería mil veces perder un fabuloso job antes que poner Puerto Rican en las aplicaciones de trabajo y morir de hambre por no coger el Welfare o los food stamps como todos esos lazy, dirty, no-good bums que eran sus compatriotas”³⁶. However, although she rejects negative and stereotypical features associated with her homeland, she goes to San Juan for a vacation. Once there, instead of meeting a “straight All-American, Republican, church going” man with a “rosto pecoso”³⁷ and “rubicundo crew-cut”³⁸, she ends up having an affair with a “native specimen” with a “tarzánico pecho”³⁹ and a “virile baritone voz”⁴⁰. The bartender from the Hotel Conquistador where she stayed helped her discover, in her intimacy, some features of Puerto Rican identity she had bottled up for a long time. Here is the end of the story:

Esa misma noche, el bartender confesó a sus buddies hangueadores de lobby que:

– La tipa del 306 no se sabe si es gringa o pueltorra, bródel. Pide room service en inglés legal pero, cuando la pongo a gozal, abre la boca a grial en boricua.

– Y ¿qué dice?

Entonces el admirado mamitólogo narró cómo, en el preciso instante en que las platinum-frosted fingernails se incrustaban passionately en su afro, desde los skyscrapers inalcanzables de un intra-uterine orgasm, los half-opened lips de Suzie Bermiúdez producían el sonoro mugido ancestral de:

–¡VIVA PUELTO RICO LIBREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!⁴¹.

³⁶ “Would prefer a thousand times to lose a fabulous job before writing Puerto Rican in the job applications, and to starve to death before choosing Welfare or food stamps like all those lazy, dirty, no-good bums who also came from her homeland”. A. L. Vega, *Pollito Chicken*, [in:] *eadem*, *Virgenes y Mártires*. Río Piedras, Puerto Rico 1981, p. 73.

³⁷ “Freckled face”.

³⁸ “Reddish crew-cut”. A. L. Vega, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

³⁹ “Tarzan-like chest”.

⁴⁰ “Virile baritone voice”.

⁴¹ “That night the bartender confessed to his buddies who hang out around the lobby that ‘The chick in Room 306, I don’t know whether she’s American or Puerto Rican, brother. She asks for room service in English, but when I give her pleasure, she opens her mouth and screams in Puerto Rican Spanish.’

‘And what does she say?’

Then the admired womanizer narrated how, right when the platinum-frosted fingernails were passionately introduced in his afro, from the unreachable skyscrapers of an intra-uterine orgasm, Suzie Bermiúdez’ half-opened lips produced this roaring ancestral sound:

‘ALL HAIL PUERTO RICO FREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!’”. A. L. Vega, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

Another significant code-switching practice is the one applied by Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlines/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). Throughout her work, the lesbian, feminist Chicana presents the border as an extended metaphor, while using the term *betweenness* to explain how the life of Latinos and Latinas in the United States always takes place in between two or more countries, cultures and languages; this does not mean, however, that they feel comfortable with such an experience. In itself, the work is an example of hybridity, since it combines genres like narrative, poetry, literary and linguistic essay while alternating languages like Spanish, English, Spanglish and Mexican Indian dialects with an approach that is mainly biographical, ethnic, cultural, revisionist and archetypal. In general terms, Anzaldúa tells stories from her childhood and about the culture of her people by combining real facts and elements of fiction. In *How to Tame a Wild Tongue* she writes about an argument she had with her mother regarding the way she spoke English: “I want you to speak English. *Pa’ hallar buen trabajo tienes que saber hablar el inglés bien. Qué vale toda tu educación si todavía hablas inglés con un ‘accent’*,” my mother would say, mortified that I spoke English like a Mexican⁴². As you can read in this extract, while her mother sees a marked Latino accent as a problem and, therefore, something you must get rid of, Anzaldúa considers the accent as a key identity feature when defining her specificity as a hybrid Chicana. In front of the dominating American culture, the writer also uses code-switching to make a political and apocalyptic statement:

We know what it is to live under the hammer blow of the dominant *norteamericano* culture. But more than we count the blows, we count the days the weeks the years the centuries the aeons until the white laws and commerce and customs will rot in the deserts they’ve created, lie bleached. *Humildes* yet proud, *quietos* yet wild, *nosotros los mexicanos-Chicanos* will walk by the crumbling ashes as we go about our business. [...] We, the *mestizas* and *mestizos*, will remain⁴³.

A third narrative example is the kind of Spanglish used in the novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), written by Dominican-American writer Junot Díaz. It received the Best Fiction Work Pulitzer Prize in 2008, among other literary awards. It tells the story of Oscar Wao, a young, black, nerdy and virgin Dominican man who has to go through a series of misadventures in order to reach his most important goals before he dies: to find the love of his life and to lose his virginity. Even the name of the character

⁴² “I want you to speak English. *To find a good job, you must speak English well. What good is there in all your education if you still speak English with an ‘accent’*,” my mother would say, mortified that I spoke English like a Mexican.” G. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, San Francisco 1987, p. 36.

⁴³ “Humble yet proud, quiet yet wild, we the Mexican-Chicanos will walk by the crumbling ashes as we go about our business. [...] We, the hybrid women and men, will remain.” G. Anzaldúa, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

is a distortion of the name *Oscar Wilde* that other young men use to mock him because he likes to write. Technically, the novel is written in English. However, from a structural point of view, something that calls the English reader's attention is the amount of Spanish words that appear along the text without a corresponding footnote translation, or without quotation marks or italics, which is a regular editorial practice when including foreign words within a text in the native language, in this case, in English. Such a bold, formal decision in the use of linguistic code-switching makes the reading more difficult for those who do not speak Spanish, but it definitely *naturalizes* the text by inserting it in a more effective way in the context that produced it in the first place: the hybrid society of the Dominican diaspora and, to a greater extent, of all Latinos in the United States. I include below some examples of the powerful bilingual images achieved by Díaz using code-switching to write in Spanglish along the novel:

“Hijo, you're the most buenmozo man I know!”⁴⁴

“You think you're someone but you ain't nada” (60).

“Yes, you can pick me up at the park at tal-and-tal time” (93).

“Hey, Dionisio, isn't that the girl que te dio una pela last week?” (118).

The regime would have been the world's first culocracy (217).

“Your own fucking neighbours could acabar con you” (226).

A final example of the use of Spanglish in literature comes from two poems by Richard Blanco, a Cuban-American poet born in Spain. He was the first immigrant, Latino and openly homosexual poet to write and read the inaugural poem for an American president, specifically for President Barak Obama's second period in 2013. In his poetry Blanco explores his cultural identity through his Cuban inheritance, his family's exile, his memories and his experience as a homosexual who makes part of the Cuban-American culture. The following fragments from two poems included in *Looking for the Gulf Motel* (2012) show how the poet uses code-switching:

Papá refused to bet on any of the Misses
because Americanas all have skinny butts,
he complained. There's nothing like a big
culo cubano. Everyone agreed—es verdad—
except for me and my little cousin Julito⁴⁵

I don't ask how she survived her exilio:
Ten years without her mother, twenty
As a widow. Did she grow to love snow
Those years in New York before Miami

⁴⁴ J. Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. New York 2007, p. 24. The following quotations are from the same edition, the page number is given.

⁴⁵ R. Blanco, *Betting on America*, [in:] *idem*, *Looking for the Gulf Motel*, Pittsburgh 2012, p. 10.

And how will I survive winters here with
out her cooking? Will I ever learn?

But she answers every question when
she raises the spoon to my mouth saying,
*Taste it mi'jo, there's no recipe, just taste.*⁴⁶

The future of Spanglish

After our linguistic, social, cultural and literary review of Spanglish and its use, a question remains unanswered: What is Spanglish, after all? Scholars still do not agree about it, but if we want to project into the future and speculate about the stage it is at, first it is worth taking a look at the past to review the evolution of Latin into the Romance languages we know today. In 476 AD, after the fall of the Roman Empire, the language spoken by the conquered European peoples divided into two main branches: on the one hand, *Classical Latin*, spoken by some noble men and church members, senators, philosophers, theologians, speakers and writers. On the other hand, *Vulgar Latin*, spoken by soldiers, farmers, the merchant class, secular scholars and most of the people from the conquered lands. After the fall of the empire, Classical Latin became the official language of the Catholic Church and academic fields like law, philosophy and medicine, while Vulgar Latin divided and evolved into several Romance languages: Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese and Rumanian.

In this sense, many things run parallel with the evolution of Romance languages, the road Spanish has covered so far, and a cooking recipe. Indeed, we could explain the evolution of Spanglish with the metaphor of a cooking recipe that includes several ingredients and steps we must follow in order to “cook” a sophisticated national dish. Let us see how it works: for Spanglish to become a language, it first needs a speaking community which communicates with it, at least orally. This already exists. Then there must be new generations of speakers who see Spanglish as an integral part of their culture and the context in which they function, and not as a badly-spoken language. This is also a fact. After that, transmission and dissemination must go from orality to paper through the production and reproduction of written texts that, at the same time, will promote reading and writing in Spanglish, not only among the members of the same Latino community in the United States, but also among the groups with whom they share common spaces like work, school, the marketplace and other public spaces. This is already documented history. At this level, Spanglish must also call the attention of formal academic institutions, which will make room for it in their Language Departments, or Cultural Studies, ethnic and linguistic lines of research which will

⁴⁶ R. Blanco, *Cooking with Mamá in Maine*, [in:] *idem*, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

develop approaches and empirical research about the hybrid language. This is also happening already. It may seem shallow, but it is also important for Spanglish to include some representative, public figures from key areas of pop culture, like sports, music, the cinema industry, etc., among its users, because that way they will become conscious or unconscious references of Spanglish and will use the mass media to exert some influence on those who do not speak it, whether they are Latinos or not. Needless to say, this is also a reality nowadays. But Spanglish not only has to exert its influence on pop culture's mass media, but also on the established, intellectual and cultural circles, for which there is already literature, music and cinema, as well as translations, awards and even the creation of a Spanglish canon that includes the most representative authors and works in the hybrid language. In this regard, we have included in this paper some literary examples.

Then, what else does it take for Spanglish to finally become a main dish in the modern languages menu? First of all, it needs the rigor and formality of the linguistic sign. For the standardization of Spanglish to take place, first there must be pragmatic studies that will evolve into the development of morphological, syntactic and lexicographic rules. The result of this will eventually be a standard descriptive and/or normative Spanglish grammar to guide the way people speak this hybrid language in the main urban areas of the United States. This is one of the steps that is still at its very initial stage, therefore it is very difficult to agree on the different criteria to be taken into account when it comes to conducting research on the Spanglish spoken in California, Florida, New York, Puerto Rico or Texas; or on the Chicano culture and literature that exists at the Mexican border; or on the influence of American English in the use of code-switching in Spanish-speaking countries like Mexico, the Dominican Republic, or even Venezuela. Another important ingredient for Spanglish to become a formal language would be the existence of a nation that takes it up as its official language. Right now, besides a limited number of urban areas in the United States with a significant Latino population⁴⁷, there is no "nation"⁴⁸ to claim Spanglish as its official language, as it was the case with the mix of French and African dialects that became the Haitian creole that is now an official language, or the case of Papiamentu, the official language in Aruba and Curacao, which is also the product of a language mix that includes Spanish, English, Portuguese and Dutch.

⁴⁷ For more statistic details on the Latino population regarding states, percentages, etc. see R. Nginios, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-120.

⁴⁸ Globalization, mass migration and the new diasporas have brought into question the concept of nation nowadays. However, our study focuses on the linguistic, social, cultural and literary phenomenon of Spanglish, which occupies a very important space in the multicultural US context, but is never mentioned officially in any geographic context defined as *nation*. That is why we do not discuss the concept extensively here.

Conclusions

Before we conclude this study, it is important to offer some final thoughts. First of all, in front of the growing use of Spanglish in the United States and its dissemination around the world through American cultural industries, those of us who study languages should not imitate the reaction of Europe's Middle-Age elite or high culture regarding the rise of different Vulgar Latin dialects, since they eventually became the official languages of several nations that would be powerful cultural, political and religious centers in the modern world, like Spain, France and Portugal, not to mention the case of modern English, which is the evolution of a mix of Germanic and Scandinavian languages with the Roman Latin, the Norman French and the Florentine Italian; it eventually crystallized in English Renaissance literature thanks to playwrights like William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe and all the drama and poetry written during the Tudor dynasty, especially during the Elizabethan Period. Therefore, the dynamic process Spanish and English are going through for Spanglish to become a reality, including linguistic borrowings, syntactic transfers and code-switching, do not represent a real threat for these languages, but a middle point for the bilingualism or trilingualism Ilan Stavans talks about.

Furthermore, instead of complaining about what Spanglish is doing to two "adult" languages like Spanish and English, scholars should be celebrating the obvious fact that we are in front of an "adolescent" language which is growing to become an adult language as well. After all, how often do we have the chance to study a language in the making from direct sources and users?

Finally, to the question on which would be the ideal nation for Spanglish to establish as an official language, I would have answered Puerto Rico, but its social and cultural reality, as well as the results of the most recent referendum about its political status in 2012, in which most of the participants voted in favor of turning the Caribbean island into an official American state, suggest we must forget about this possibility. In any case, probably the question is irrelevant when the global village of the 90s has turned into a virtual metropolis inhabited by migrant citizens who are constantly moving, and the concept of diaspora questions the traditional concept of the nation-state. In this context, probably Spanglish is just one of the many new languages spoken without restrictions in the new virtual metropolis.