

# "The foreigner is invading the native"

Looking at the Translations of Border-Bending Texts

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### Abstract

This study looks at the translations of *border-bending texts*, a term coined by this author to refer to texts that use two languages (within the same text) to interrogate a relationship between cultures. Junot Díaz, Julia Alvarez and Giannina Braschi belong to a group of authors in the United States who are writing a literary space for their culture within the often hegemonic dominance of North American culture. Their work is generally written in both North American English and Latin American Spanish. This study analyzes the textual relationship created between English and Spanish in the source texts and investigates how this relationship is recreated in the translations of these *border-bending texts*. The focus of the analysis is on the role played by the Spanish words and phrases, and whether a non-Spanish speaker would understand them as they appear in the text. Of particular interest is also how the bilingual speakers/narrators/characters in these works relate to their two languages. The study concludes that even if the approach behind the translation seems to have been oriented toward preserving the relationship between English and Spanish in the source text, using Swedish as an intermediary to describe this relationship results in a marked decrease of tension within the target text. This presents a potential problem for the post-colonial perspective on translation, because it seems a close adherence to the structure and linguistic content of a source text in this case yields a tamer target text, more likely to be acceptable to the target audience. In the conclusion, it is suggested that the idea of source text oriented versus target text-oriented strategies for translation may need to be further nuanced in order to aid in the translation of *border-bending texts*, and that Toury's adequacy-acceptability spectrum used together with post-colonial perspectives on translation might serve as a starting point for such an approach.

#### Keywords

översättningsvetenskap litteratur postkolonialism översättningsanalys  
translation studies literature post-colonialism translation analysis

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# 1 Introduction

The title of this study is taken from Giannina Braschi's "Foreign Speaking English" (2008, p. 2). This essay describes the position of an immigrant to a new culture who is also learning a new language, and the many cultural negotiations that follow, and it challenges the idea that native speakers of a native language are somehow superior. Authors like Assia Djebar, Joseph Conrad and Salman Rushdie and many others write [or wrote] in their second or third language, and explore themes of cultural conflict and belonging (Rushdie 1991; Conrad 1993; Djebar 1994). Their work and the work of many other authors stand at intersecting points of at least two cultures (Prasad 1999, p. 41), and serve as an incitement for continuing to develop ways of looking at literature as products of many cultures or nations. For instance, a number of authors living in the United States with roots in Latin America are writing works that combine English and Spanish elements (Stavans 2003, p. 134), simultaneously challenging the idea of an English language that can resist foreign elements and also making a space for a "Spanglish" counter-culture effort. The tendency to simplify the literature written by these authors as "minority literature" or "immigrant literature" simultaneously ignores the differences among them, both in writing styles and subject matter, and firmly places them outside of the canon. As the Dominican-American writer Junot Díaz puts it, when asked if he is an immigrant author, "any definition that attempts to be all-encompassing, I reject, even if it actually applies to me."<sup>1</sup>

Ironically, this study will place the novel he wrote and two texts by two other authors in the category I will define as *border-bending texts* (for further discussion and definition of the term, see below and section 4.1.3). This classification is an attempt to acknowledge the purposeful subversive nature of these texts and to avoid simplifying their concerns. Their common denominator is the relationship they create between English and Spanish, done in a more or less conscious effort to engage with the issue of belonging to more than one culture and more than one language. The authors in this study, Junot Díaz, Julia Alvarez and Giannina Braschi generally write in both North American English and Latin American Spanish (the two first authors are Dominican-American and Braschi is from Puerto Rico).

Translating texts like these ones is necessary, because today's increasingly complicated multicultural society sorely needs inventive literary presentations of how people relate to and use their bilingualism. These same translations are also very difficult, because the texts contain immensely complex relationships between languages and cultures. In her study of metalinguistic

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<sup>1</sup> Junot Díaz, Author Presentation and Discussion, *International Writer's Stage*, Kulturhuset, Stockholm, March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

references in a Spanish/English corpus, Callahan finds that the code-switching content (in this case, the Spanish words and phrases) refers to a multitude of categories, including “heritage language loss or maintenance, motivations for the acquisition of English or of Spanish, attitudes toward the speakers of each language and toward its different varieties, and beliefs concerning who may use which languages and for what purpose (2001, p. 417).” Because these references are in another language than the main body of the text, but are nonetheless important to the content of said text, they present quite the conundrum for the translator. In their article on translated hispanisms, Ruano and Vidal Claramonte (2004, p. 88) define the translator’s problem as follows:

how to preserve *difference* without imprisoning it in the dangerous jail of “the different”; how to recreate the inherent subversion of this writing without fostering wholesale rejection; how to invent unique expressions of identity anew.

This study focuses on the results of literary translations of these types of authors, who have made considerable choices about what kind of cultural or linguistic content they can transmit to the reader and who are very purposeful about what kind of tension they introduce between the two languages in their text. It is important to investigate what happens when a third language (the target language of the translation) is added to this very deliberately complicated mix.

## 1.2 Aims

The motivation behind this study was the translating problem that these texts represent, that is, how a translator can recreate a text written in two languages in a third language, while retaining the subversive content of the original. Needless to say, it makes for a complicated translation process, but today’s literature is increasingly multicultural and even multilingual, and simply not translating these kinds of works because they are too complex is not an option. My own translation of the poem “Bilingual Sestina” (*Post Scriptum* 2005), which is a part of this study, was an attempt to stay as close to the language of the original text as possible. This study looks at the relationship between English and Spanish in the source text of this poem and compares it to the way it works in the target text. It also analyzes the relationship between English and Spanish in the source texts and target texts of two other works, both containing a mix of English and Spanish, the novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (Díaz 2007) and of the literary nonfiction essay “Foreign Speaking English” (Braschi 1994).

## 1.3 Research Questions

In order to look at these three border-bending texts and their translations, I have chosen to focus on the way the interplay between English and Spanish works in these texts, as this would be a relevant concern for a translator attempting to translate a text of this type into a third language. The manner in which English works with Spanish in the text or vice versa, and the resulting tension between the languages, has thematic implications for the text and a crucial impact on the literary language that a translation would need to recreate. More precisely, this means looking at what kind of relationship the author creates between the two languages—if the majority of a literary work is written in English but also contains Spanish words or phrases, what role does Spanish play? Where are the Spanish words and phrases used? Are they used in such a way that a non-Spanish speaker would understand them? How do the bilingual speakers/narrators/characters in these works relate to their two languages? Following that, how does the relationship between the two languages appear in the translations, as exemplified by the noted features in the source texts? Were these translations accomplished using a very source-text oriented approach, or did these translators choose an approach that was more target culture and target language oriented? Essentially, the attempt to transfer texts written in two languages that purposefully create some kind of relationship between them, a relationship that is rooted in one or more cultures, into a third language and a third culture will involve several sets of complications.

### 1.3.1 Basis of the Study

Part of my impetus for creating this study was that, as Ruano and Vidal Claramonte (2004, p. 83) point out, there is a wide range of literature written about North American bilingual writers. Examples include Carroll's analysis of the Spanish affect in Braschi's *Yo-Yo Boing*, wherein she looks at how Braschi's novel interrogates the relationship that the bilingual narrator has to either of her two languages (2006) and Wall's reading of Alvarez's poem "Bilingual Sestina" as a narrative about the constant choice bilinguals face between two languages, and how this narrator needs both her languages to describe the world correctly (2003, p. 138). There are also many autobiographical narratives about the experience of living with bilingualism and being a writer, and the cultural conflicts and complications that this can bring (Alvarez 1999; Huston 2003).

However, as Ruano and Vidal Claramonte (*ibid*) also point out, there is much less written "from the point of view of the translations" and what little I have found tends to discuss translations into one of the two languages that were already in the source text. There is Mezei's take on the translation of "Speak White," the well-known bilingual Canadian poem that challenges the dominance of the English language and culture in Canada and in global affairs. Mezei posits that a so-called poetic translation of this poem that works to produce target text reader responses that

resemble source text reader responses by looking for analogous expressions in English, actually reproduces Lalonde's purposeful shifts in tone (Mezei 1998, p. 241). Maier, a translator, speaks of her initial surprise when Castillo, the female Chicana poet she was translating, did not agree with Maier's initial assumption that the category of woman was one that they could find common ground in. For Castillo, the most important aspect of her identity as far as her writing went, was that she was a Chicana (Maier 1998, p. 104).

I have not found any discussion of translations of these types of texts into a language that is not one of the two already in the source text. Accordingly, this study looks at the translations of this kind of texts into Swedish and represents an attempt to begin to fill this void.

## 1.4 Definitions of Central Terms

### 1.4.1 Culture, Source Culture, Target Culture

When looking at the source texts of this study and their translations, it is crucial to conceptualize culture as multifaceted and complex in order to avoid simplifying the texts and their concerns. In his study of the workings of language crossing among British adolescents, the linguist Rampton (1995, p. 8) defines culture as "complicated and often contradictory patterns of solidarity and opposition across *a range* of category memberships" as opposed to "a set of discrete, homogenous and fairly static ethnic essences, and these ethnic essences are regarded as servicing as the central influence in shaping a person's character." Thus, the simple definitions of the source cultures here as Puerto Rican (Braschi), Dominican-American (Diaz and Alvarez) and mainstream United States, (which despite the area's inherent multiplicity tends to be defined as white and middle class) and the target culture as mainstream Swedish (also commonly defined as white and middle class), this study has to work with the understanding of culture as something more complex than its typical definition. The types of texts in this study exemplify the question of Homi Bhabha (2004, p. 2), "How are subjects formed 'in-between', or in excess of, the sum of the 'parts' of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender, etc.?)"

### 1.4.2 Border-Bending Texts

Despite the existence of numerous definitions for texts written in two languages and definitions for works that consciously engage with a cultural conflict, I chose to define my own term. This is because these concepts either do not cover the texts included in this study or do not pinpoint some of the aspects that I am most interested in focusing on. Therefore, I have taken aspects from various terms and concepts and combined them into one that works for border-bending texts.



In order to avoid too broad of a concept, I needed to narrow my focus more closely than simply discussing post-colonial authors. Post-colonial authors generally include all writers that are writing from a post-colonial perspective, which is a very broad definition indeed. It can include authors who are placing themselves in that context (for instance, choosing to write according to post-colonial theoretical perspectives), as well as authors who are placed in this category through circumstances (e.g. immigrant authors, who write about the concerns of their cultural group, and who might be defined by media as some variation of 'minority' writers) (Simon 1999, p. 59-61). However, it is certainly true that border-bending texts are a type of post-colonial texts, by virtue of the shared concern for cultural complexities.

Bilingual texts, which is perhaps the most intuitive term for the general category of the texts in this study, are defined as works translated from the source language into the target language by the author of the source text (Hokenson & Munson 2007, p. 1). This directly excludes the texts in this study, which are written in both English and Spanish.

Given that the analysis would be looking at source texts written in two languages and target texts that were handling three languages, it was important to avoid ambiguity in the terminology. Therefore, terms that involve the word "translation" in any way were avoided, even if thinking of the Spanish content as "translated hispanicisms" or the works in which this content exists as translated fictions (Ruano & Vidal Claramonte 2004, p. 81) is useful as a metaphor for the ongoing explanation of their cultural context that these authors might be forced into or engage in voluntarily in their texts. It is indeed important to question the "assumption that a text is a translation also implies that there are accountable relationships which tie it to its *assumed original*" (Toury 1995, p. 35, emphasis mine), and Ruano and Vidal Claramonte present a fascinating discussion concerning the translation of these works into either English or Spanish. They do not, however, define "translated fictions" beyond alluding to the idea that these writers are translating themselves, and for my purposes, it is crucial to differentiate between literary translation and the writing of these authors, because this study looks at translations of the source texts they have written. I concur with Tymoczko's (1999, p. 20) idea that the act of literary translation should be seen as analogous to the writings of minority authors, not as the same thing, because there are several important differences between the two disciplines (further discussed in section 4.2.1). When we use the term "translated fiction" for texts written by these authors, it might only mean that they are translating themselves for the readers; by default, however, we imply that the text they are presenting is not an original. Thus, this term and "translated hispanicisms," (which covers the actual Spanish words or phrases in the texts) do not apply to my focus here, which is, specifically, the relationship between the two languages in the text and how it works, on both linguistic and a thematic level.

The most useful analytic perspective that I have come across is Simon's (1999, p. 59-61) *border writing*, which discusses texts that "use interlinguistic exchange as theme or method and place translation at the heart of their creative work." Her focus is on writing "in the contact zone" where

writers can, for instance, use translation as a literary device, troubling the idea of source texts and target texts by having portions of their text be a “translated” version of an earlier story, for instance. Thus, Simon’s concept is focused on the active use of literary translation; the use of two languages by the types of writers in this study does not necessarily match Simon’s concept. However, the idea of the “contact zone” is reminiscent of Bhabha’s in-between, and very applicable here.

Consequently, I think of *border-bending texts* as a variation of border writing. Half of the term comes from the use of “border” as both a literal border between nations and a metaphoric border that can be created between people within cultures. “Bending” is used in the same way it is used in the concept of gender bending from Gender Studies (c.f. Layton 2004, p. viii for a more comprehensive explanation) where it is intended to refer to individuals who bend and budge gender norms.

Lastly, I would like to pinpoint one aspect of border-bending texts that concerns the inherent conflict or difficulty they contain. According to Mezei (1998, p. 23), French-Canadian authors have often used English phrases or expressions in order to make political points. While the use of the Spanish expressions in the texts of this study may not be as explicitly political as those in “Speak White,” they are used for a reason.

Border-bending texts, then, are texts that cannot be located entirely within the literature of one culture (as they are traditionally defined) or one language. But the dislocation is not an accident or a failure to fit in; rather, it is done with a purpose. The texts discussed in this study incorporate words from one of the source languages into the other; they also borrow grammatical structures and idiomatic expressions between the languages, and, depending on the subject matter, they might contain some kind of explicit references to their bilingual status. An essential component of these texts is a creation of a particular relationship between English and Spanish, and it is that relationship that I am looking at in the translations. It is also crucial to remember that these literary works all occupy a space between cultures, but that this space is different for all of them, as is the way they use it.

## 2 Disposition

In order to represent these complex texts and their translations fairly, this study relies on a diverse theoretical background and a number of key terms. The central terms used in the study are introduced in chapter 1, after which, in chapter 3, the theoretical background of the study is presented, which rests on three tenets. First, literary uses of Spanglish relate to post-colonial ideas about the similarities between the strategies used by post-colonial authors and the strategies used by

translators. Second, translations can relate to or be affected by their target language and/or their target culture. Finally, there is a post-colonial perspective concerning the strategies translators use when translating texts that contain complex cultural references or relationships between languages. Within these sections, mainly the last two, I will briefly engage with the conflict between descriptive and prescriptive theories of translation. In chapter 4, I will present the materials of the study, and then I will outline the method of analysis that was used. In chapter 6 I will present the results of the analysis. Finally, chapter 7 contains the discussion of the analysis and chapter 8 contains possible conclusions that can be drawn from these results.

## 3 Theory

### 3.1 Central Theory

#### 3.1.1 Spanglish and Literature in the In-Between

As described here, border-bending literature is literature that uses more than one language and creates a relationship between these languages in order to accomplish a certain kind of literary and thematic effect. The previously explained point Simon makes about border writing, that writers “use interlinguistic exchange as theme or method,” is a useful concept for thinking about border-bending texts. For instance, the texts in this study are written in the contact zone of English and Spanish, which associates them with a language blend that is often referred to as Spanglish. This language variant has been “traditionally characterized [by linguists] as a non-standard dialect of English, labeled Chicano English (ChE)” and contains “loanwords from English,” “loan senses attached to traditional Spanish words (such as *asistir* to assist),” calques, and code-switching (Cañas 2001, p. 211). As a literary language, it can be described as follows.

This is certainly true of many authors of Latin American descent based in America, who, as is well known, use a special hybrid language, halfway *between* the strong and the weak, *between* the language of power (English) and that of their—in this case minor—Hispanic culture, to the affirmation of which they want to contribute (Ruano and Vidal Claramonte 2004, p. 83).

This description of Spanglish as a “hybrid language” has obvious merit, because it acknowledges that both languages comprising Spanglish are equally influential: Ruano and Vidal Claramonte do not define the blend of languages as simply “borrowing” Spanish words and phrases.<sup>2</sup> Ruano and

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<sup>2</sup> There is, however, an issue with labeling the *cultures* as Hispanic, because that defines them as sourced from Spain.

Vidal Claramonte (2004, p. 83-5) also point out that many of these authors have to “translate” themselves as part of their continuing to live and work in “situations of *in-betweenness*, crossculturalism and hybridation.” This is a useful concept (and an oft-used analogy: for instance, see Adejunmobi 1998), because it points to the difference between an author who can assume that his or her primary readership will understand the majority of the cultural concepts that are inherent in the literary work, as well as the words that are used in the writing, and an author whose readers might be mostly or completely unfamiliar with a large part of the cultural context that informs the author’s perspective, and who may not understand some of the expressions he or she uses. Callahan (2001, p. 18) calls it code-switching (relating it directly to bilingual language users that switch back and forth between languages), and points out that the expressions used almost always concern different areas of language use, which along with Mezei’s (1998, p. 236) assertion that the code-switching of “Speak White” expresses the traditional linguistic “subordination” of the French-speakers of Quebec, suggests that bringing expressions from Spanish into English in a literary text tends to be done deliberately. Additionally, the complications that Spanish (the language likely to be incomprehensible to the readers) and the unfamiliar cultural context has a lower status than English and mainstream American culture in the United States, make it clear that these authors are negotiating extremely complicated territory.

Looking at post-colonial texts, the umbrella category for border-bending texts, the way they negotiate the power imbalances between languages or cultures in their texts often resemble strategies used by literary translators to explain unfamiliar cultural concepts to the target audience. The process of combining the two languages and the two cultures into a coherent text is, as Tymoczko (1999, p. 20) argues, in many ways analogous to interlingual literary translation. Much like a translator does, a post-colonial writer “chooses which cultural elements to attempt to transpose to the receiving audience” (1999, p. 21). This is even more difficult for the authors in this particular study, given that they are transposing a culture for a target audience with whom they share some cultural context. Therefore, the discrepancy between “their” culture and the culture of their readers is not quite as clear-cut as it might appear in Tymoczko’s argument, but the strategies she goes on to discuss are quite relevant to the idea of border-bending writing.

These writers must “of necessity simplify the cultural fields they write about,” which means they “pick aspects of home-culture to convey and to emphasize, particularly if the intended audience includes as a significant component international or dominant-culture readers” (Tymoczko 1999, p. 23-4). These strategies are also of course relevant to translators, such as when either of the two is

faced, for example, with a myth, custom or economic condition presupposed by a text, but not located explicitly in it. If such implicit information is to be made accessible to the receiving audience, it must be presented either through explicit translation or to paratextual devices (Tymoczko 1999, p. 27).

In short, the problem lies in determining when the content should be explained, and when it should be left a mystery to those readers who lack the cultural and/or linguistic competence to take in all the aspects of the text.<sup>3</sup>

### 3.1.2 Target Texts and Target Cultures: Adjusting for Audience Expectations

Bassnett and Trivedi suggest that “for a translation to survive, it has to cross the boundaries between cultures and enter the literature into which it has been translated” (1999, p. 8). How this process occurs and what is required for a translation to be accepted by its target culture has been discussed extensively throughout the history of translation studies (for instance, see Nida 2004 or Toury 1995); naturally I do not claim to be covering the entirety of that debate here. But the concept of equivalence, of what counts as a successful translation or target text, is important to consider for this study, because the final version of the translation is invariably affected by the kind of equivalence demanded by the audience or by the translator’s own chosen strategy.

What Bassnett and Trivedi call “cross[ing] the boundaries between cultures” (1999, p. 8) essentially refers to how a translation is accepted into the target literature. This crossing will result in shifts between the source text and the target text, and the main problem that has occupied theorists and translators concerned with equivalence was what the translator could or should preserve. Nida’s (2004, p. 156) distinction between formal and dynamic equivalence expresses a difference in translating approaches. The first is as close an adherence to the “form and content” of the original text as possible, while the second is a desire that a reader of the target text has as close an experience as possible to a reader of the original text (the principle of equivalent effect). The second case, evidently, can entail an adjustment of certain aspects of the original in order for it to, as Bassnett and Trivedi put it, “enter the literature into which it has been translated.” The issue then becomes what exactly the translator changes when transferring the source text to a new language, and why the translator makes these changes.

The personal norms of a translator, formed in relation to the society he or she works in, invariably affects his or her translation choices. “Becoming a translator within a cultural environment” necessitates “the acquisition of a set of norms for determining the suitability of that kind of behavior” (Toury 1995, p. 53). It is important to clarify that this set of norms does not necessarily work “normatively.” In other words, a translator might work with a set of norms that dictate going against certain prevalent literary tendencies in his or her home country, and *operational norms*, which control the decisions made during the translation process and “govern—

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<sup>3</sup> Similar concerns sometimes face African authors writing in European languages. For an analysis of this, see Adejunmobi 1998.

directly or indirectly—the relationships as well that would obtain between the target and source texts” (Toury 1995, p. 58).

According to Toury (1995, p. 60-1), the different types of norms determine whether the equivalence of the translation in question falls closer to acceptability (target language orientation) or adequacy (source language orientation). Accordingly, Lefevere (2004, p. 243, -9) points out that translations often make more explicit or adjust that which is foreign to the system receiving the translation, for instance, ideological content that does not fit into the target culture often becomes explained away and/or adjusted to match the values of the target culture. This is related to target audience concerns: if the target text is less foreign, then the readers are less likely to react to things they cannot parse.

Working translators do often refer to a need to fulfill their audience’s expectations or to create a translation that ‘works.’ In his analysis of his own translation strategies, translator Balcom (2006, p. 128) places himself at the acceptability end of Toury’s spectrum for norms of translators (albeit without explicitly referring to Toury). Balcom claims it is impossible for him to avoid certain target language demands, such as when he felt the need to standardize the language in a literary text so that it would not bother the reader. This demonstrates the desire to create a text that “works” for the readers in the target culture. As well as confirming Toury’s ideas about norms, this also adheres to Nida’s concept of “equivalent effect.” It is relevant to point out that John Balcom is an American translator, and thus belongs to a “stronger” literary system. According to Even-Zohar (2004, p. 201), stronger literary systems “have the option to adopt novelties from some periphery within their own indigenous borders,” and thus translated literature is likely to conform more to already accepted literary norms, because new influences are coming from within the national literature itself. This has potential implications for translations of texts that do not fit into existing literary tropes or norms, or texts coming out of a traditionally disempowered culture.

### 3.1.3 Post-Colonial Perspective on Translating Minority Narratives

When translating border-bending texts or other texts written by post-colonial authors, which are often consciously written ‘against’ a majority perspective, the question of how to retain what is particular about the source text becomes even more important than it is otherwise. But, as already demonstrated, it is very difficult to transpose such a complex text. According to Derrida (2004, p. 429), a translator cannot hope to achieve a translation that actually transfers the entirety of the source text into the target language.

It is necessary either to resign oneself to losing the effect, the economy, the strategy (and this loss can be enormous) or to add a gloss, of the translator’s note sort, which always, even in the best of cases, the case of the greatest relevance, confesses the impotence or failure of the translation (2004, p. 429).

Derrida mean that a translation that conveys everything contained within the source text to a reader in the target culture, and that enables the reader to understand every nuance of the original text as if it were a text from his or her own culture is, if not impossible, at least highly improbable. Therefore, the translator must make choices about what to keep and what to explain, and Derrida seems to believe this weakens the effect of the text, which inevitably leads to a loss of power over the reader.

According to the post-colonial perspective on translation, the translator's choices should always be made with the aim of safeguarding the texts of post-colonial authors against further colonial impositions (particularly when they are translated into Western languages) (Spivak 2004, p. 371-3). As Bassnett and Trivedi (1999, p. 17) opine, "translation has been at the heart of the colonial encounter, and has been used in all kinds of ways to establish and perpetuate the superiority of some cultures over others." The reclaiming of translation for post-colonialism is an exemplification of the post-colonial way of taking back concepts and disciplines that have been used to oppress or rewrite and using them for their own purposes, to retell history or remake literature from their point of view.

It therefore follows, as was also evident in the previously outlined arguments made by Spivak and Venuti, that the post-colonial perspectives on translation are usually fairly prescriptive, due to their protectiveness toward the texts and their distrust of principles like that of "equivalent effect." This entails supporting similar source text oriented translation strategies as those implied in Venuti's (2004, p. 482-3) opposition to domesticated translations and Spivak's disdain for the so-called *translatese* (2004, p. 371-3) that minority authors are translated into when the issues they present are seen as the only point of interest for Western audiences; Spivak (2004, p. 371-3) calls her favored strategy a "surrender" to the source text. She asserts that it should not take longer to complete the actual translation work if the translator is thoroughly informed about the source text and culture (she does, however, concede that the preparatory work takes longer if one follows this strategy). Similarly, Appiah (2004, p. 399) wants an "academic" translation that "locate[s] the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context." He strives for translations that can be used for literary studies, which is his primary reason for wanting to preserve as much of the original context as possible. This defines his ideal target audience as academics, which has both positive and negative implications. There is a history and a persistent tendency of undervaluing minority literature, even though work has been done to improve the diversity of university literary studies<sup>4</sup>. Translations that retain the full cultural and linguistic context of minority literature (c.f. the way every aspect of a

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<sup>4</sup> For a recent example of the continuing tendency to define the canon as white, Western and 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century male writers (which is certainly not limited to academia), see The Guardian's list of must-read literature (2009), which as Ingrid Elam (2009) pointed out in *Dagens Nyheter* is anything but diverse.

Shakespeare text is explained in notes) are certainly a valid goal. It could, however, limit the audience of the writers in question, because the value of a more mainstream translation is its accessibility to the general public.

When translating minority literature or post-colonial literature there is inevitable tension when attempting to handle “features of source culture ...unfamiliar to [the] receiving audience” (Tymoczko 1999, p. 23), results in an inevitable push-and-pull between the audience and the original text. It is also clear that a

literary translator is *de facto* concerned with differences not just in language (transposing word for word, mechanically), but with the same range of cultural factors that a writer must address when writing to a receiving audience composed partially or primarily of people from a different culture (Tymoczko 1999, p. 21).

When translating post-colonial texts, therefore, one faces this range of complex cultural and linguistic differences, and one may also be dealing with the desire to make the translation accessible, to get the story out there, so to speak. The meaning of accessible might vary widely, depending on the genre of the work and its intended audience and the choice of what to focus on could mean that different aspects of the source text will be transposed to the target text. Poetry, for instance, affords an opportunity to focus on formal content and therefore preserve a linguistic tension present in the original, whereas a more mainstream novel might put different demands on the translator. In either case, preserving the full range of linguistic and cultural difference that exist in the original would be both very difficult and offer potential problematic implications.

Making sure the language of a translation of a border-bending text sounds “different” could represent as much of an exoticization of minority authors as the aforementioned “translateese” does. The focus on the foreignness of these texts is prevalent among dominant theorists like Venuti (2004, p. 282-3), who decries the historically prevalent tendencies of translators to diminish the differences of an unfamiliar source culture for the target culture, and to add new “differences” that belong to the target culture. He views this as domesticating the foreign text, and he sees this strategy as a lessening of the source text to conform to the values and ideas that exist in the target culture. His preferred strategy is foreignization, the diametric opposite of domestication, which entails staying very close to the source text. Ruano and Vidal Claramonte (2004, p. 96) offers a crucial critique of Venuti’s dichotomy; they argue for more nuanced models that acknowledge that “marking the difference is not always an invitation to cross-cultural awareness, as it may result in the (re)construction of barriers” or a reaffirmation of the norm. Thus, while considering the audience does not necessarily have to be about completely giving in to its (assumed) demands, the drive to create a text that will be appreciated by readers can take the shape of staying close to the source or of a way to make them understand the content. Additionally, Mezei (1998, p. 241) suggests that the translation of “Speak White” that strayed the furthest from the source text and made poetical adjustments, actually created a more subversive target text than the more source-text



oriented translation. The former “foregrounded” the sarcastic tone switches of Lalonde’s original, which served to make the translation challenging to its English-speaking readers.

When thinking about the audience, a translator also has to consider how he or she is defining the audience, and whether this audience is similar to the one intended for the source text. The default audience when translating into a Western culture tends to be to think of a literary audience as white and middle class, which could certainly be problematic when translating border-bending texts or other kinds of post-colonial literature. For instance, people reading any of the translated texts in this study could have a background similar to that depicted in either of the texts, they could know Spanish but not English, or they could simply know what it is like to know Swedish and another language that is generally given lesser status. It is important to remember that the texts use two languages together with intent.

## 4 Materials

The materials chosen for this study are the following three different border-bending works and their translations. Because the scope of this study was necessarily limited by time constraints, I wanted to select materials that came from different genres, in order to achieve a spread of possible translation solutions. Accordingly, I chose a poem, a novel, and a short literary nonfiction piece. They were selected based on several criteria. First, Díaz and Alvarez are both Dominican-American and Braschi is Puerto Rican, which meant I could concentrate the study on source texts that use English and Spanish and that the texts come out of somewhat similar source cultures. Additionally, the fact that the three texts by these authors are all translated into Swedish meant they share a target culture as well. The combination of these aspects led me to select Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* over Jonas Hassem Khemiri’s *Montecore*, a novel that I intend to return to for future research. In the case of this study, however, my focus on source texts whose source cultures were similar if not overlapping, and whose target texts had the same target culture, enabled me to gain a tighter focus and an analysis with more opportunities for comparison. The translation of Khemiri’s novel is in French, which is a target culture whose demands could be considerably different compared to the Swedish one.

1. Julia Alvarez’s poem “Bilingual Sestina” from the poetry collection *The Other Side/El Otro Lado*, published by Penguin in 1997 and translated by Vendela Engblom as “Tvåspråkig Sestina” in *Post Scriptum* #3-4 2005 (PS Förlag).

2. Junot Díaz's 2007 novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (Faber and Faber Limited). The Swedish translation *Oscar Waos korta förunderliga liv* by Niclas Hval was published by Albert Bonniers Förlag in 2009. I am looking at page 1-3 of the introduction and page 13-15 from Chapter 1 (11-14 and 22-26 of the translation, respectively). Chapter 1 was chosen because it was originally a short story that then became the seed of the novel.
3. As a comparison with the two other texts, I am looking briefly at Giannina Braschi's text "Foreign Speaking English" (Ars Interpres Publications, 2008) and Clemens Altgård's translation that was published in OOTAL #27 2008, "Alla talar Engelska." This translation was done for the WALTIC (Writers and Literary Translators' International Conference) Conference of 2008, which was held in Stockholm under the theme of "The Right to Narrate."

## 4.1 Author Presentations

The novelist, professor and poet Julia Alvarez came to the United States with her family to escape the dictator Trujillo. Her work often deals with themes of immigration and estrangement, such as in the novels *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* and *¡Yo!*, which chronicle a Dominican-American family attempting to make their way in the United States (Alvarez 2003). Arguably her most famous novel, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, is based on the lives of the Mirabal sisters, who were front figures of the resistance movement against Trujillo and were brutally murdered (Alvarez 1994). The novel was translated into Swedish as *I fjärlarnas tid* by Inger Johansson (Hudiksvalls bibliotek 2009b).

Junot Díaz is also Dominican-American and has received widespread critical acclaim for his first novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, which is his second published literary work. It has been awarded with both the National Book Critics Circle Award and the highly prestigious Pulitzer Prize. His debut was a collection of short stories called *Sink*, which was very favorably reviewed (and was also translated into Swedish: *Sjunk*, 1998). Both of these works touch on the issues of growing up between conflicting cultures and the problem of belonging (Díaz 2009).

Giannina Braschi is a Puerto Rican author and academic who has been called the spokesperson or front figure for the movement to gain recognition for Spanglish. Most of her work is written in both English and Spanish; in her novel, *YO-YO BOING*, she sometimes switches from English mid-sentence and then stays in Spanish for several pages, or vice versa. In other words, the novel is impossible to read unless you know both English and Spanish (Braschi 1994). The essay included for comparison here is almost entirely written in English, and it is the only work of hers that has been translated into Swedish. It is almost a programmatic piece, where she writes about the issue of

writing and communicating in a "foreign" language and problematizes the dichotomy of "foreign" and "native" speakers of languages (Braschi 2008).

## 4.2 Translator Presentations

I am currently a Masters student of Translation Studies at Stockholm University. I have translated for the magazines *Post Scriptum* and *00TAL*, and for the literary festivals *Södermalms Poesifestival* and *WALTIC*.

Niclas Hval is a translator who prefers to work with younger American or British fiction, and his published translations include several different genres; apart from *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Hval has translated works by Monica Ali, Nick Hornby, Tom Perrotta and Nick Flynn, as well as Sharon Lawrence's biography about Jimi Hendrix (Översättarcentrum 2009).

Clemens Altgård is a poet, an editor, a critic for *Sydsvenska Dagbladet* and a translator (Altgård 2002). His published translations also include a wide variety of authors, genres and themes, everything from Douglas Coupland's *Jpod* to Charles Grant and Jakob Ejersbo (Hudiksvalls bibliotek 2009a).

# 5 Method

## 5.1 Situating the Study

This study concerns what Jakobson (2004, p. 139) calls "interlingual translation," that is to say, "*translation proper*, an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language." Jakobson's (ibid) assertion that "translation from one language into another substitutes messages in one language...for entire messages in some other language" is particularly interesting in light of the kind of texts that I am looking at, where the author is already using or grappling with two sets of underlying messages. Adding a third language to the mix and using it to depict the relationship between the two languages in the source text might conceivably have a profound effect on the aforementioned messages.

I approach this study with certain biases and situate it within a particular theoretical framework. In my own work with the translation of Julia Alvarez's poetry, I shared Spivak's concerns for what happens to minority-written texts in translation and thus the desire to safeguard the text from undue influence by the target language or culture. Therefore, I worked to stay as close as possible to the

original poem and took a prescriptive stance in wanting to preserve the formal content and the message of the original, even while I wanted to complete a translation that would be readable for a Swedish audience. This meant I was caught between, as Tymoczko (1999, p. 29) puts it, (echoing Schleiermacher and others), bringing the text to the audience or bringing the audience to the text. The latter is also potentially problematic, of course, because a danger in making the poem accessible to a Swedish audience is that in doing so, one could remove the conflict within it that was so important to the source text.

Additionally, the study falls partly within what Holmes (2004, p. 184) terms product-oriented descriptive translation studies (DTS), since it describes existing translations and strategies that the translators have used. DTS, however, stays away from prescriptive analyses, and while I certainly do not wish to prescribe an ideal way of translating border-bending texts, I have to contend with the fact that I have done such a translation and have thus developed a way to work with border-bending texts.

## 5.2 Method of Analysis

When selecting a method for the study, it was important to ascertain that it covered both the linguistic and the thematic aspects of the texts, as in, the analysis was to encompass both how the Spanish words and expressions were treated in the translations, as well as how the translator looked at the overarching themes of bilingualism and cultural conflict. For instance, I looked at Berman's twelve "tendencies" for how the translation can be affected by the target language or target culture. They range from *rationalization*, which entails a "deformation" of the text on the syntactic level (Berman 2004, p. 280), to *the effacement of the superimposition of languages*, which relates to the relationship between languages or dialects in the source text, and how it is altered or eliminated by a translation (ibid, p. 287). Initially, because some of these tendencies discussed how the relationship between two languages could be altered in translation, it seemed like Berman's tendencies might be a useful basis for my analysis. However, as Berman puts it, it is a "negative" analytic, and this would mean that the initial categories used to classify the choices of the translators would then already be negative, and I deemed that this method would be far too value-laden for what was intended to be primarily a descriptive study.

Border-bending texts combine elements of two languages. In order to analyze the ways these languages function in the text, I am using a modified version of the model proposed by Englund Dimitrova (1997, 2004) for analyzing dialectal markers in literary prose and their translations. This model was chosen because the ways the authors examined in this study use Spanish elements in their text are, like some of the ways authors use dialectal markers in literary fiction, purposeful stylistic choices. In Englund Dimitrova's model, the dialectal markers are classified according to

linguistic levels: phonological-orthographic (spelling a word differently than its standard spelling to demonstrate its alternative pronunciation), morphosyntactic (a deviation from standard syntax), and lexical markers (use of words that are not in the standard language). These levels will be used to classify the content I draw from the source texts. My analysis incorporates primarily the lexical and morphosyntactic linguistic levels, because I could only find one instance of phonological-orthographic content (the mispronunciation of Oscar Wilde as Oscar Wao, resulting in this being used as a nickname for the main character of Díaz's novel, which does not occur in the segment I analyzed for this study). I have added a category, a so-called thematic or metalinguistic level, to get at the aspect of the source text that deals explicitly with the complex relationships between languages and cultures within the text. This last category resembles what Callahan calls metalinguistic content in her study: references to categories like "heritage language loss or maintenance, motivations for the acquisition of English or of Spanish, attitudes toward the speakers of each language and toward its different varieties, and beliefs concerning who may use which languages and for what purpose (2001, p. 417)." Because my corpus was more limited than hers was due to time constraints, I am not cataloguing the metalinguistic content in a quantitative way; rather, I am using this category to discuss how thematic references to the bilingualism of the text contributes to the overall depiction of the relationship between English and Spanish, and how this is dealt with in the translation.

I will develop the discussion from the results I achieve when comparing the source texts and the target texts, using the theory outlined earlier to interpret my results. Finally, in order to parse some of the Spanish slang content in Díaz's and Braschi's texts, I have been using non-traditional sites that are not necessarily considered academic as well as consulting a native speaker of Latin American Spanish/English, because these expressions generally do not appear in traditional dictionaries, or if they do, the definitions are lacking much of the cultural context.

## 6 Analysis

### 6.1 Alvarez: Bilingual Sestina

#### 6.1.1 Introduction of the Poem

"Bilingual Sestina" is written from the perspective of a bilingual narrator whose first language was Spanish, but who now speaks and writes in English. It is an exercise in split vision, where Spanish

is described as childhood, first words, as a language that kept the world “simple and intact” (33),<sup>5</sup> whereas English is described with adjectives that are stereotypically white and stereotypically American. By identifying English with a visual stereotype, the poem makes it clear that the narrator does not fit this mold. However, this is not simply a lament over the impossibility of fitting into a new culture or a new language. Instead, the text attempts to weave the two languages closer together, aided by the formal structure of the poem, but the languages never come together completely, the Spanish words and phrases remain italicized, which sets them apart from the English words and phrases.

The poem is written in the *sestina* form. The choice of such a structured, markedly Western European poetic form could be significant, considering that this is a poem about being violently confused by language and that focuses on the non-Western reality of the Dominican narrator’s childhood. The *sestina* is “a poem of six six-line stanzas (with an envoy) in which the line-endings of the first stanza are repeated, but in different order, in the other five” (OED 2009b). It was first developed before the 13<sup>th</sup> century by Provençal troubadours, and the order they repeated the words in goes as follows: “abcdef, faebdc, cfdabe, ecbfad, deacfb, and bdfeca. In the final three-line stanza, the six key words are repeated in the middle and at the end of the lines, summarizing the poem or dedicating it to someone”(Merriam-Webster’s Encyclopedia of Literature 2009). In “Bilingual *Sestina*,” the scheme works out as follows: a=say, b=English, c=closed, d=words, e=*nombres*, f=Spanish. The poem generally follows the earlier referenced repetition scheme, but there are occasional variations. Some of them are slight, such as the use of “word” instead of “words,” “saying” instead of “say” and “*nombro*” instead of “*nombres*” in the third stanza. Some shifts, however, are more marked, like the exchange of “world” for “word” and “numbering” for “*nombres*” in the fifth stanza, and “close” instead of “closed” in the last stanza. These shifts represent actual changes of the meaning of the repeated word, unlike the earlier ones, which simply moved between the gerund and the infinitive form of a verb or between the singular and the plural form of a noun. The fact that the source text uses “world” instead of “word” and “close” instead of “closed” also entails a difficulty for the translator, who has to figure out if there is a way to retain both the wordplay and the altered meaning of the phrase.

“*Nombres*,” the only Spanish word used in the repetition scheme, can serve as an example of how Alvarez presents her theme of bringing languages closer on the lexical level, and of how she uses the *sestina* form to accomplish this. *Nombres* (5, 9, 18, 19, 34), which in Spanish means ‘name’ or ‘noun,’ is the fifth repeated word in the *sestina* scheme, but in certain stanzas, the text uses “names” (9, 16, 17), and “numbering” (27) as well as or instead of “*nombres*.” In the latter case, the text makes the switch work for the reader by using the similarity of the spelling of “*nombres*” with the English word “number.” “Numbering” can also be peripherally related to the

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<sup>5</sup> Line numbers are given in parenthesis after the line is quoted.

theme of naming and names, because “numbering the stars” is a biblical quote from the passage describing God numbering all the stars in the universe (Psalm 147: 4). This play on words centers the entire text on the word “name” or “names” in two languages (and thus on the act of naming); “*nombre*” or “*nombres*” occurs five times, “name” or “names” occurs three times as a noun and once as a verb, and “numbering” occurs once.

Finally, a note on the linguistic levels: I have not included any morphosyntactic examples, because I could not find any. It appears this text explores the problem of meaning and bilingualism through language that generally adheres to Standard English, apart from the Spanish words and phrases that do not alter the English syntax.

### 6.1.2 The Lexical Level

The poem uses two main types of lexical items from Spanish: the first is nouns in Spanish that primarily appears in lists of items or by themselves, integrated into an English phrase and used as if they were the corresponding English word; the second is Spanish phrases uttered by a Spanish-speaking character.

The lists of Spanish words that appear in the poem are part of the overarching theme of naming and meaning: for the narrator, they are recited as if they are significant, but for the non-Spanish speaking reader, their meanings are unclear. The following nouns in Spanish are used in lists in the poem: “*cama*” (5), ‘bed’; “*aposento*” (5), ‘room’; “*sueños*” (5), ‘dreams’; “*sol*” (9; 34), ‘sun’; “*tierra*” (9), ‘earth’; “*cielo*” (9), ‘sky’; “*luna*” (9; 34), ‘moon’; “*casa*” (34), ‘house’; “*luz*” (34), ‘light’; “*flor*” (34), ‘flower.’ Their use in lists (without a surrounding sentence in English for the sake of context) could make it difficult for a non-Spanish speaker to understand what they mean. However, words like *casa* are common enough that a North American reader might be expected to understand them without actually knowing much or any Spanish<sup>6</sup>. The poem calls these words “vocabulary words,” which connotes that they are words that people learn when they are learning a new language. Therefore, people who speak very little Spanish would fairly easily understand the denotations of these words. The reader is then forced to think about why they are called untranslatable by the narrator of the poem. The reason is that the connotations of these words, acquired through their “social use” (Chandler 2006, p. 31), are not as easily transferred into a new language as the denotations are; therefore, the narrator keeps using the Spanish words instead.

Similarly, in order to demonstrate that the merging of English and Spanish leaves gaps where the context is not completely comprehensible unless you know both languages, Alvarez places some Spanish words into English phrases, using the Spanish words as if they were the equivalent word in

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<sup>6</sup> The expression “Mi casa, su casa” is prevalent enough in North American popular culture that the word “*casa*” should bring a North American reader no trouble. The expression is taught in many high school English classes and is also used in the movie *Pulp Fiction* (Metafilter 2005).

English. This allows the non-Spanish speaking reader to gain a partial understanding of the Spanish words, but simultaneously shows how the full understanding of these words is impossible without knowing Spanish. We learn that light sifts through “*persianas*” (3) (‘blinds’) that were closed the night before. Additionally, we understand “*morivivi*” (13), ‘a shy leaf or a touch-sensitive plant’ (Catalogue of Life 2008), must be a plant because the text tells us it has leaves. “*Palabras*” (21), ‘words,’ have been abandoned for English and “stand dusty and awkward in neglected Spanish,” a phrase that does not reveal what “*palabras*” means but does relate it to the theme of leaving a Spanish childhood behind. Lastly, “*el patio*” (23), ‘patio’ is easily matched with the English word patio, which technically has two meanings. It is either “a roofless inner courtyard open to the sky in a Spanish or Mexican house” or “a paved roofless area adjoining and belonging to a house; esp. a garden terrace” (OED 2009a). Thus, patio is easily understood as part of a house, where a maid might reasonably be working. It is clear that an English monolingual would not comprehend the full meaning of all these Spanish words without resorting to a dictionary or to a Spanish native speaker. In short, some context or part of the meaning remain difficult to access for non-Spanish speaking readers. This functions as an illustration of the way the narrator cannot access the full range of connotations - the “closeness” to language - when she is using English.

When the text uses entire phrases in Spanish, they are given some context by the surrounding English phrases, but they are very difficult to understand for a reader who is unfamiliar with Spanish or with Latin American culture. The two Spanish phrases that are included are “*¡Qué calor!*” (26), ‘How warm it is!’ and “*Estas son las mañanitas*” (28), which means ‘these are the dawns/mornings,’ and is the first line of a Mexican birthday song. Both of these phrases are given some context by the poem. When the first one is spoken by Rosario, it “warm[s] the sun” (27), and when she sings the second one, it “open[s] the morning, closed inside the night until you sang in Spanish” (28-29). However, it is evident that without knowing Spanish, it would be difficult to use the English context given to deduce that the phrase “*¡Qué calor!*” contains a reference to heat. The meaning of “*Estas son las mañanitas*” remains similarly inaccessible, and the fact that it is actually a quote from a very well known birthday song is not mentioned in the poem at all. Thus, the only direct cultural reference of the text is not made available at all to non-Spanish speaking readers, whereas readers familiar with Latin American culture would know the song immediately. This relates back to the conflict between English and Spanish that was expressed in the first paragraph: when using English, the narrator cannot take it for granted that anyone would understand her cultural references, and some of them are very hard to translate.

When the poem uses a Spanish phrase that is crucial for the thematic closure of the text, the text makes sure it is comprehensible to a non-Spanish speaking reader. This is accomplished by making the phrase one that an English monolingual would recognize, and by setting up the lines in the poem to help further clarify the meaning. “*En inglés*” (39), ‘in English’ closes the poem and is



comprehensible for a non-Spanish speaking reader by itself due to its resemblance to the English equivalent partly because it is given additional help by the surrounding structure of the poem.

“an intimacy I now yearn for in English— (37)  
words so close to what I mean that I almost hear my Spanish  
heart beating, beating inside what I say *en inglés*.”

This help for the reader is accomplished through placing “in English” at the end of the first line of the three-line stanza in a parallel position to “*en inglés*,” which helps the poem clarify that the narrator is looking for a way to hear “my Spanish heart beating” inside the words she says in her new language.

### 6.1.3 The Thematic Level

The poem uses the Spanish words and phrases and the way they relate to the surrounding English lines to relate back to the overarching themes of bilingualism and meaning. The mix of Spanish and English and the power given to the Spanish phrases also problematizes the difference in status between English and Spanish in the new culture (that of the United States), in which the narrator participates as an adult.

The text uses the lists of words the narrator finds untranslatable as a way to contrast then and now, there and here, in a temporal and spatial back-and-forth that demonstrates how the narrator experiences the split between her childhood Spanish self and her adult English identity. For instance, the lines

a child again learning the *nombres*  
of things you point to in the world before English (10)  
turned *sol, tierra, cielo, luna* to vocabulary words—  
*sun, earth, sky, moon*. Language closed

indicate the narrator’s return to childhood and to learning her first words in Spanish “before English” took away the deeper meanings of these words and left her with “sun, earth, sky, moon” instead. This loss of deeper meaning is in fact a double loss, because the physical things behind the Spanish words are also turned into vocabulary words, thus connoting how the narrator has trouble finding access to the real world. These lines speak to the same division and desire for intimacy in language as the ending lines quoted in the previous section do, and “language closed” indicates that it is not possible to go back to Spanish.

Additionally, the poem indicates that the closeness the narrator is looking for has further implications: language has considerable power when you have mastery over it. The lines:

sing in me and through me say  
the world again, begin first with those first words  
you put in my mouth as you pointed to the world— (25)

not Adam, not God, but a country girl numbering  
the stars, the blades of grass, warming the sun by saying  
*¡Qué calor!* as you opened up the morning closed  
inside the night until you sang in Spanish ,  
*Estas son las mañanitas* (30)

in effect gives the muses of this poem, Rosario and the other Spanish-speaking peasant maids, the power of naming the world, warming the sun and opening the morning, which gives them the same status as Adam and the (Christian) God. Since these women represent Spanish in the poem (the only uttered Spanish phrases are said or sung by them), their being given semi-divine powers is a reference to the status of Spanish as a language, and implies that the narrator is grappling with her own status in a world where (implicitly) white men are given the naming powers. This is important because it deals with the relationship between English and Spanish in the world of the narrator, where the two languages do not have equal standing.

In the same vein, the allusion to translation in the poem indicates the impossibility of making yourself understood once you have switched cultures, which would indeed entail a loss of power. The line “from that first world I can’t translate from Spanish” (6) recalls that same problem of translation that Derrida (2004, p. 429) refers to, and agrees that it is impossible to successfully transpose everything about a culture. Thus, the narrator cannot fully communicate where she comes from. Additionally, the poem contains lines like

Even Spanish  
failed us back then when we saw how frail a word is (15)  
when faced with the thing it names. How saying  
its name won’t always summon up in Spanish or English  
the full blown genie from the bottled *nombre*.

These phrases speak to the gap between the actual world and the names we have for the things in it, and suggests that actually, neither of the languages are perfect. Sometimes Spanish also fails at affecting its surroundings the ways speakers of the language might want it to do.

## 6.2 Engblom: Tvåspråkig sestina

### 6.2.1 Introduction of the Translation

What, then, is a translator supposed to do? First, translating this poem means deciding how to handle the many items from Spanish that are integrated into the English of the text. One must also negotiate the thematic focus on the troubling nature of bilingualism, expressed explicitly in phrases like “no English/ yet in my head to confuse me with translations” (31-32), as well as implicitly through the constant move from one language to another and from present-day United States to the

past in the Dominican Republic. Because the poem uses the highly structured sestina form, I initially believed translating it would be reasonably straightforward. However, a closer analysis revealed the nuances and wordplays that I outlined in section 7.1. In essence, Alvarez's poem is an illustration of the process Tymoczko (1999, p. 21) discusses. The narrator is attempting to transpose her personal culture and the close, meaningful connotations of her Spanish words into her English language, and she is doing so *within the text*. The thought of attempting a translation of this interweaving of English and Spanish into Swedish, thereby adding a third language into this mix was a daunting one. I decided I did not want to replace Spanish with another language or with a variant of Swedish. I actually did not want to translate the Spanish words at all, since they were purposefully left in that language by the source text. Therefore, the target text I created tried to make Swedish describe the relationship between English and Spanish.

There were many complex considerations of translating a poem that used the highly formal sestina structure to express a tension between English and Spanish through the set of the repeated words in both languages. One example would be the aforementioned exchange of "world" and "word," where I chose to use "värld" for "world" instead of using the Swedish word for "earth," "jord," because I wanted to retain the aural qualities of the original text where it did not change the meaning of the poem. However, the latter choice would have allowed me to keep the wordplay aspect of the source text exchange.

### 6.2.2 The Lexical Level

As previously mentioned, leaving the Spanish words in Spanish was important to me, because of the relationship between English and Spanish created by the source text. Additionally, the poem left the Spanish words and phrases in Spanish and italicized, which marked them as foreign from the English lines, and this deliberately emphasized difference between the two languages was one I wanted to retain. Therefore, I had to contend with the possibility of Swedish readers not understanding the Spanish content.

Just like with the source text, the ability to understand the Spanish content of the translated poem depends partly on knowledge of Spanish, but some of the words can be understood through associating the words with corresponding words in other languages. The Spanish words used in lists lack surrounding context and I had no way of adding such context without significantly altering the structure of the poem and was thereby prevented from explaining these words further (Tymoczko 1999: 21-23). An important difference between Swedish and American readers is that English is the first second language taught to Swedish students, whereas Spanish is the first second language taught to most American students. Therefore, a Swedish reader might not be expected to catch the basic meanings of even the simpler Spanish words, unless they have taken Spanish as a third language or know enough of one of the other Latin languages to help them. This makes words like "cama" (5), 'bed,' "aposento" (5), 'room,' "sueños" (5), 'dreams,' and "tierra" (9), 'earth,' or even

simpler words like “*casa*” (34), ‘house,’ difficult to understand for Swedish readers who do not speak Spanish. However, a number of other Spanish words are potentially easier to access for these readers than for non-Spanish speaking Americans. Examples include “*sol*” (9; 34), ‘sun,’ which is the same word as the Swedish word for sun, “*luna*” (9; 34), ‘moon’, and “*cielo*” (9), ‘sky.’ The meaning of the two latter words could be partially inferred by their proximity to the word for sun (words grouped in lists are commonly understood as having something in common) and by their resemblance to the words for moon and sky in other Latin languages. Generally, the fact that many of the more unfamiliar Spanish words like *apoyento* remain inaccessible helps bring home the point of the untranslatability of connotations.

The retention of the Spanish phrases as they are, with no added explanations, leaves them as (or more) inaccessible to Swedish readers who do not speak Spanish, as they were to non-Spanish speaking American readers of the source text. Lines 27-30 are translated as

värmande solen genom att säga,  
,¡Qué calor!’ medan du öppnade morgonen stängd  
inuti natten tills du sjöng på spanska,  
Estas son las mañanitas (30)

This translation retains the actions that these phrases perform on the world. Like in the source text, “¡*Qué calor!*” warms the sun, and the song “*Estas son las mañanitas*” is what opens up the morning. Because Alvarez does not attempt to explain the song in the original poem - there are no footnotes or explanatory sentences for more context - I chose to do the same, leaving the phrase without giving it further context. Just as Tymoczko (1999, p. 23-4) posits, a choice had been made in the source text not to explain this particular culture-specific reference, and as a translator, it was difficult to support an addition of context or explanatory phrases, especially because the tight structure of the poem would have to be altered. A footnote might have been a possible solution.

The choice to explain or to not explain a cultural reference is often relevant when translating border-bending texts, since the transposition of such a text to a third language alters the conditions for its challenge to its readers to read content that is both familiar and unfamiliar. The Biblical allusion in the poem would have been more difficult to convey in Swedish than it was in English, since the general population of Sweden is much less knowledgeable about Biblical content than is the American one. However, I must admit the fact that I missed that “numbering the stars” (26-27) is a Biblical quote (Psalm 147: 4). This may serve as an example of how complex the translation of a text of a border-bending text is, since biblical allusions in literature are far from unusual. The context for “numbering the stars” is made even clearer by the addition of Adam and God. But a translator can miss even such a clear textual reference when he or she is handling an in-between culture that contains characteristics of two overlapping cultures and languages. Had I seen the reference, I would nonetheless had to contend with the disparity of Biblical knowledge between Swedish readers and American ones. In this case, then, the target culture and the target language

provided the translator (me) with a different context than that of the source culture and the source language, which the author was basing her text on, and this had the potential to affect the translation process.

Sometimes the translation of a word from a source language to a target language works so that the shift between them is minor. The rest of the wordplay that “numbering the stars” is a part of, on “*nombres*,” “names” and “numbering,” was easier to translate than it might otherwise have been. This is because the Swedish words for ‘name’ and ‘number,’ respectively, are ‘namn’ and ‘nummer,’ which bear a clear resemblance to the English words. I wanted to make sure that the repetition scheme of the translation worked similarly to how it worked in the source text, and it was particularly important for this wordplay because of its direct relation to Alvarez’s central themes of naming and meaning. The translation loses the “noun” connotation of “*nombre*,” since it is a connotation that the corresponding word in Swedish, ‘namn,’ does not have, but the general idea very much remains.

Finally, as shown in section 7.1.1, the formal structure of “Bilingual Sestina” was closely tied to the way Alvarez was developing her themes of meaning and bilingualism. Thus, the line breaks of the source text influenced my translation choices. This mainly because Alvarez uses them to support her thematic focus on names, naming and languages. Thus, in my translation, “*En inglés*” (39), ‘in English,’ closes the poem, just as it did in the source text, and I also chose to retain the parallel positioning of “*i engelskan*” (37). This was done in order to achieve the same kind of focus on the languages in the last stanza “*mitt spanska*” (38), ‘my Spanish,’ also retained its position at the end of the line. Essentially, Alvarez’s focus on languages, words and meaning returns in almost every aspect of this poem, and my translation choices were meant to reflect this.

### 6.2.3 The Thematic Level

In my translation process, I focused on recreating the conflict between the narrator’s English and her Spanish, and I chose to do this by maintaining that the narrator is attempting to reconcile those two languages specifically. Meaning, I did not simply replace English with Swedish. The references to learning a language that are present in lines 9-12:

a child again learning the *nombres*  
of things you point to in the world before English (10)  
turned *sol, tierra, cielo, luna* to vocabulary words—  
*sun, earth, sky, moon*. Language closed

are retained in the same lines in the translation:

ett barn igen lärande *nombres*  
av saker ni pekade på i världen innan engelskan (10)  
förvandlade *sol, tierra, cielo, luna* till glosord—  
*sun, earth, sky, moon*. Språket stängdes

The translation of "vocabulary words" as "glosord" means the connotation of learning a language in school is kept in the target text. The choice to keep "sun, earth, sky, moon" in English and italicized was an attempt to preserve the distinction that existed between that phrase and the rest of the original poem. Effectively, the result is that the translation of the poem contains three languages, instead of the original two, which connotes that the conflict of the narrator lies between her English and her Spanish, and not between Spanish and any other language. This is strengthened by the other references to English in the translated poem.

Translating the source text's conception of the power in language meant retaining the active properties of the Spanish phrases. The act of naming in the poem that Alvarez tied to creation in these lines:

sing in me and through me say  
the world again, begin first with those first words

you put in my mouth as you pointed to the world— (25)

not Adam, not God, but a country girl numbering  
the stars, the blades of grass, warming the sun by saying  
*¡Qué calor!* as you opened up the morning closed  
inside the night until you sang in Spanish (30)

was translated as :

sjung i mig och säg genom mig  
den världen igen, börja först med de där första orden

du lade i min mun när du pekade på världen— (25)

inte Adam, inte Gud, men en landsortsflicka numrerande  
stjärnorna, gräsets blad, värmande solen genom att säga,  
*¡Qué calor!* medan du öppnade morgonen stängd  
inuti natten tills du sjöng på spanska (30)

and thus, the actions tied to the Spanish phrases ("warming the sun" and "opened up the morning," respectively) are retained. That the Spanish words are still what effectively causes the sun to warm up and the morning to arrive means the maids, with their command of Spanish, retain their power over their surroundings.

## 6. 3 Díaz: The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao

### 6.3.1 Introduction of the Novel

The epigraph for *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, which sets the tone for the novel's narrative voice and its story, is part of a poem by Derek Walcott. The last stanza goes as follows.

I have a sound colonial education

I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,  
and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation

This stanza speaks to the central themes of the novel: culture and belonging, two concepts that are presented as highly complex and interrelated. Recalling Rampton's (1995, p. 8) definition of culture, the novel contains no character with an uncomplicated ethnic or cultural background. For instance, the main character Oscar is a Dominican living in New Jersey, trying to negotiate mainstream youth culture, both that of the United States and that of his Dominican-American peers. Meanwhile, he is much more interested in science fiction and other alternative forms of entertainment, which are traditionally seen as exclusively white domains. To reference the same definition by Rampton again, Oscar has a range of conflicting category memberships, as do the other characters.

In order to demonstrate the complexity of the various cultural contexts and backgrounds, the novel uses several different languages, dialects or speaking styles. These include standard English, Dominican English, Dominican Spanish, academic English and references to genre fiction or other forms of alternative media. Díaz claims he was trying to create a novel that no one could fully understand by themselves.<sup>7</sup> The narrator blends all the aforementioned languages, dialects and speaking style with references to Dominican history and culture, and thus creates a narrative voice that contains all the different cultural categories at once.

The explanations of Dominican culture and history are given an air of objectivity by the fact that they are often footnoted, which recalls academic conventions, and when they are intertextual, the text sometimes mimics structures of encyclopedias or other supposedly trustworthy sources. However, the initial assumption that these explanations are "true" depictions of Dominican historical events, for instance, is undermined by the hyperbolic tone the narrator takes on. It becomes evident that the narrative we are getting in the footnotes is just as partisan and possibly just as fictional as the narrative in the main body of the novel.

The examples I will look at here are from pages 1-3 (the introduction) and pages 13-15 (chapter 1). Specifically, I will look at where these parts of the novel uses Dominican Spanish words and expressions, and whether they are used in such a way that a non-Spanish speaking reader could understand them and what implications this has for the relationship between the two languages in the novel. From here on, the references to *Oscar Wao* refers to the segments I have analyzed and not to the whole novel, unless otherwise is stated. There will be no analysis of the thematic level of the translation, since this work's border-bending approach to English and Spanish lies in Díaz's mix of languages and dialects. Therefore, the thematic content is implicit rather than explicit.

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<sup>7</sup> Junot Díaz, Author Presentation and Discussion, *International Writer's Stage*, Kulturhuset, Stockholm, March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

### 6.3.2 The Lexical Level

The majority of the Spanish words or expressions used in these passages fall into the lexical category: they are mostly nouns or idiomatic phrases, partially or completely explained by the context in which they appear. Generally, the novel provides more or less thorough explanations for its Spanish content, whereas, for instance, the references from works like *Lord of the Rings* mainly go unexplained. However, the novel does not or cannot provide a complete explanation of the whole cultural or linguistic context of the Spanish words.

The most explicit example of how the text explains Dominican Spanish terms through the surrounding sentences in English, lies in the beginning of the novel: the introduction opens with what is essentially a definition of the central term or concept for the entire plot.

*Fukú americanus*, or more colloquially, fukú—generally a curse or a doom of some kind; specifically the Curse and the Doom of the New World. Also called the fukú of the Admiral because the Admiral was both its midwife and one of its greater European victims; despite “discovering” the New World the Admiral died miserable and syphilitic, hearing (dique) divine voices. (p. 1)

We start with a faux-Latin, italicized version of the word “fukú,” which evokes Linnaean classifications or encyclopedia entries. The italicization of “fukú” and its separation from the explanation of its meaning by the use of a dash, suggest introductions of terms in academic texts. Because this paragraph begins with “generally a curse or a doom of some kind,” and continues by referring to the specific curse that “fukú” entails, it resembles a definition in a dictionary or an encyclopedia. The latter often begin with the umbrella concept that covers the term in question (for example, a *bus* is a kind of vehicle) and go on to define how this specific term differs from other terms that are included in the concept (a *bus* is a vehicle that is used in public transportation) (Spri 2009, p. 13). The italicization of “fukú” points out the foreignness of this term to the reader, but because it is also thoroughly defined and contextualized in the introductory chapter, the text can continue to use the term throughout the novel without italicizing it or further explaining it, because the reader knows what it is. At least, he or she has been given a definition of the term that holds throughout the novel.

In order to give the reader even more context for the story, the text lays out important events and personalities from Dominican history in the loquacious footnotes. However, it soon becomes clear that, unlike the definition of “fukú,” the explanations given in the footnotes are not necessarily meant to be helpful to the reader. Rather, they take on a hyperbolic and demanding tone, and present a decidedly partisan narrative. For instance, the first footnote on Trujillo (p. 2-3) says he was famous for, among other things, “changing ALL THE NAMES of ALL THE LANDMARKS to honor himself (Pico Duarte became Pico Trujillo, and Santo Domingo de Guzmán, the first and oldest city in the New World, became Ciudad Trujillo).” The capital letters and the lack of explanation for the old names demonstrate that a) non-Dominican readers cannot assume this is true, because the way it is explained seems partisan and hyperbolic, and b) those same readers must



also look elsewhere for confirmation on whether Trujillo actually did this or not. These allegations concern a real dictator and a real country, but their placement within a fictional novel and the tone taken by the narrator leaves doubts about their veracity. A reader who does not already know this history would have to look elsewhere for ‘truth.’

Generally, the fictional narrative in the novel also leaves out a lot of context when using Spanish references, albeit in a less purposefully provoking way than that of the footnotes. Consider, for instance, the following segment:

For what Kennedy’s intelligence experts failed to tell him was what every single Dominican, from the richest jabao in Mao to the poorest güey in El Huey, from the oldest anciano sanmacorisano to the littlest carajito in San Francisco, knew:...it would make the one that attached itself to the admiral jojote in comparison (p. 3).

None of the Spanish words here are italicized, which indicates an effort not to set them apart from the rest of the English text. They are also not words that are generally seen as part of formal Spanish, which (as I explained in section 6.2) means they are generally not found in standard dictionaries. “Jabao” indicates an individual of mixed African and European ancestry (Soundclick 2009; Perez 2009). “Güey” basically means ‘guy,’ but has many connotations. It is generally a pejorative term that can also be “used as an endearment” (Urban Dictionary 2009a; Perez 2009). “Anciano sanmacorisano” is ‘a person from “San Pedro de Macorís” or “San Francisco de Macorís,” both provinces (political divisions) of the Dominican Republic’ (Yahoo 2009). “Carajito” is a term that means ‘little kid/boy’ (Urban Dictionary 2009b) and is also occasionally used as a pejorative epithet. “Jojote” is potentially a variation on *jojota*, which means ‘corn’ (Perez 2009). Clearly, the majority of these words carry specific cultural connotations that will be incomprehensible to someone who is not Dominican or does not know the culture intimately. For instance, if you do not know the culture, you are unlikely to pick up on the fact that some of these words can be used both as pejorative epithets and terms of endearment, and if you do not know the language, you are unlikely to understand them at all. However, readers are able to follow along.

In the example above and in other paragraphs, the novel uses the sentence structure surrounding the Spanish words or phrases in ways that enable readers to follow the narrative, even when they do not know both languages. Despite the cultural specificity of the terms mentioned above, the quote manages to very clearly present the idea that the sentence means “everyone knew that—.” Of course, the paragraph begins by saying just that, but the sentence aids the narrative by setting up a parallel structure that presents the diversity of the Dominicans who know about the curse. This structure, with its pairs of opposites: “richest”—“poorest,” “oldest”—“littlest,” attributes that are also paired with place names, makes it clear that the curse is widely known to all kinds of Dominican people from different parts of the island. Also, the way “jojote” is used here evokes the English idiom “it pales in comparison,” thereby making a meaning (if not necessarily the correct one) of the last phrase accessible to a non-Spanish speaking reader.

Another tool used by the text to explain Spanish words or phrases is opposition. In “unlike his sister, who fought boys and packs of morena girls who hated her thin nose and straightish hair” (p. 15), the meaning of “morena girls,” ‘dark-skinned girls’ (Perez 2009), is clarified through this setup where they go after Olga because of her “thin nose and straightish hair.” These are attributes that are generally seen as associated with being mixed-race, and the assumption is then that they do not look like that, or they would not persecute her for being different. Similarly, in the following line said by Oscar’s mother, “A puertorican over here? his mother scoffed. Jamás!” (p. 15), the negative connotations of the word “scoffed” indicate that having a Puerto Rican in the house is not something that Oscar’s mother wishes would happen. The extreme negation of the word “Jamás!” paired with an exclamation mark may not be accessible to a non-Spanish speaking reader, but the negative attitude surely is.

Longer Spanish phrases that occur in dialogue are often explained to the reader through context in the surrounding English phrases, as well as through the structure set up by the text, where the reader expects a certain kind of phrase to occur in the dialogue based on the sentence that comes right before the spoken line.

The girls—his sister Lola’s friends, his mother’s friends, even their neighbor Mari Cólón, a thirty-something postal employee who wore red on her lips and walked like she had a bell for an ass—all purportedly fell for him. *Ese muchacho está bueno!* (Did it hurt that he was earnest and clearly attention-deprived? Not at all.) In the DR during summer visits to his family digs in Baní he was the worst, would stand in front of Nena Inca’s house and call out to passing women— *Tú eres guapa! Tú eres guapa!*—until a Seventh-day Adventist complained to his grandmother and she shut down the hit parade lickety-split. *Muchacho del diablo! This is not a cabaret!* (p. 13)

“*Ese muchacho está bueno!*”, ‘This guy is delicious!’, comes after we learn that the girls “all purportedly fell for him,” and is followed by “Did it hurt that he was earnest and clearly attention-deprived? Not at all.” These sentences surround the Spanish phrase with more than enough clues that the phrase appearing in the middle is going to be a positive comment about Oscar. The next Spanish phrase, “*Tú eres guapa! Tú eres guapa!*”, ‘You’re hot! You’re hot!’ is even more clearly explained, since we are told Oscar would stand and call out to women walking by the house, and the context we have been given of him as a (very young) ladies man essentially tells us he is probably commenting on the appearance of the women. Finally, “*Muchacho del diablo!*”, ‘Son of the devil!’, is made easier for the reader to understand both because it is clearly some sort of a negative epithet (Oscar is being scolded by his grandmother) and because “diablo” has a clear linguistic relationship to words like “diabolical” in English. Similarly, in

What’s wrong with you? His mother asked...When Oscar whimpered, Girls, Moms de León nearly exploded. *Tú ta llorando por una muchacha?* ... She threw him to the floor. *Dale un galletazo*, she panted, then see if the little puta respects you. (p. 14)

the question-and-response structure gives us the explanation for the first phrase. When Oscar responds, “girls,” to the question of what is wrong with him, we can extrapolate that his mother’s

incensed reaction is due to that answer. The non-Spanish speaking reader might be able to infer that she must be saying something like ‘You’re crying over a girl?’ This assumption is made clearer by the last phrase in this quote, where Oscar’s mother tells him to demand respect from the little “puta,” ‘whore,’ which the reader can also infer is a pejorative term. “Dale un galletazo,” ‘slap her,’ is the phrase a non-Spanish speaking reader would presumably have the most trouble with here, since it contains no familiar words. But at the very least, the juxtaposition of that phrase with “then see if the little puta respects you” and the violent reaction of Oscar’s mother toward his sadness over the girl could enable the reader to pick up on that the mother is telling Oscar to do something to the girl so she will treat him better. Additionally, the following sentences of the novel, “if he’d been a different nigger he might have considered the galletazo. It wasn’t just that he didn’t have no kind of father to show him the masculine ropes, he simply lacked all aggressive and martial sentences” (p. 15), tell us that “galletazo” has to do with violence, because it is associated with both “aggressive” and “martial.”

Even the Spanish phrases or words that are very unlike English are generally surrounded with clues as to what they mean.

She lived in the house at the end of the block that his mother complained about because it was always filled with puertoricans who were always hanging out on their porch drinking beer...And since her mother was una maldita borracha (to quote Oscar’s mom), Olga smelled on some days of ass, which is why the kids took to calling her Mrs Peabody. (p. 13)

“Borracha” means ‘a female drunk’ (Babylon 2007), which would not be immediately obvious to a non Spanish-speaking reader, but the paragraph does contain references to how the people in her house are always drinking. Additionally, the fact that her daughter sometimes doesn’t seem clean because her mother is a “maldita borracha,” indicates that this expression describes a mother that does not fulfill her obligations toward her child. Thus, there are hints at the meaning of the Spanish expression within the English paragraph, even if a non-Spanish speaking reader could have trouble picking up on these hints.

The Spanish words or expressions that are used in English as well are clearly the easiest to understand for readers who do not speak Spanish. In “Look at that little macho, his mother’s friends said. Que hombre.” (p. 14), “macho” exists and is used in English. Through the setup of the sentence, where Oscar is first described as macho, the reader would probably expect the last phrase to mean something like ‘what a man,’ which is in fact what it does mean.

### 6.3.2 The Morphosyntactic Level

I could not find very many examples of morphosyntactic markers in the segments I looked at. Classifying the content of this novel according to this level is enormously difficult, due to its aforementioned mix of languages and registers; figuring out what, specifically, is an English phrase influenced by Spanish syntax would demand intimate familiarity with all the languages and

registers involved. One of the examples I found occurs in dialogue. Oscar says “No be a baby” (p. 14). This is a fairly clear example of Spanish grammatical structure influencing an English sentence, since in Spanish, the negation would come first in the phrase like it does here, whereas in standard English, the correct corresponding sentence would be “Don’t be a baby.”

Another example of a morphosyntactic marker is the use of “puertorican” on page 15. In standard English, Puerto Rican is spelled as two words and is capitalized, whereas here it is written in lower case and as one word, as the corresponding word would be in Spanish ‘portorriqueño’ or ‘puertorriqueño’ (The Concise Oxford Spanish Dictionary 1998).

Lastly, in the pages that I analyzed, the Spanish content is never obviously influenced by English syntax, spelling or grammar.

### 6.3.3 The Thematic Level

The thematic content of *Oscar Wao* resides in the deliberate interweaving of languages and idioms to create what the author referred to as a story that no reader can understand the entirety of on their own.<sup>8</sup> Thus, there are no direct references to the relationship between English and Spanish in the segments I looked at. Instead, the thematic idea is extratextual, pronounced by the author but not contained within the novel.

## 6.4 Hval: Oscar Waos korta förunderliga liv

### 6.4.1 Introduction of the Translation

The translation of Díaz’s novel entails handling the many interwoven languages and registers and determining what needs translating into Swedish, what (if anything) needs additional explanations, and what should be left in the original language. This, of course, means dealing with the Spanish words and phrases, but it also means deciding what to do with the many references to works of genre fiction (references and allusions that may be in Japanese or English) and it means handling standard English content and the academic references. Díaz has received extensive praise for his inventive use of language in major newspapers like the New York Times and the Guardian (Scott 2007; Tayler 2008), and his Swedish translator, Niclas Hval, has been specifically mentioned and lauded for his work in the two reviews of the novel in Sweden’s major morning papers (Håkansson 2009; Johansson 2009).

This analysis focuses on the Spanish words and phrases and their context that were looked at in section 7.3, and outlines what Hval elected to do with them. In the segments I analyze here, Hval

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<sup>8</sup> Junot Díaz, Author Presentation and Discussion, *International Writer’s Stage*, Kulturhuset, Stockholm, March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

lets all the words that were in Spanish in the original remain in Spanish, though he adjusts certain words or expressions for Swedish grammar or syntax. However, what is Dominican Spanish slang remains in Spanish (whereas he translates expressions like “negro” as “blatte,” which substitutes a very different cultural context for the one in the source text).

#### 6.4.2 The Lexical Level

Generally, Hval’s translation follows Díaz’s original very closely, right down to the sentence structure, when it comes to dealing with the Spanish phrases or words, with some minor differences related to their context.

*Oscar Waos korta förunderliga liv* opens with that familiar definition of “fukú,” which largely works like the definition in the source text, with minute differences.

*Fukú americanus*, eller i folkmun: *fukú* – i allmänna ordalag en förbannelse av något slag, mer specifikt Nya världens förbannelse och dom. Kallas även Amiralens fukú eftersom Amiralen både var dess barnmorska och ett av dess mer framstående europeiska offer; trots att Amiralen ”upptäckte” Nya världen dog han i misär av syfilis medan han hörde (dique) gudomliga röster. (p. 11)

An interesting difference between the original and the translation is that the second *fukú* remains italicized, which might be an attempt to further underscore the foreignness of the word or to create an even stronger resemblance to a dictionary definition. The translation retains the structure of the passage in the source text; just like as the English “generally...specifically,” the use of “i allmänna ordalag” followed by ”mer specifikt” gives a general context for the term first, followed by its more specific meaning. The category shift from ”more colloquially” and ”generally” to ”i folkmun” and ”i allmänna ordalag” cannot be seen as major, because the meaning of the phrases remain very close to their English counterparts. Additionally, shifting both of them into expressions that resemble each other by starting with “i” means that the target text retains a semblance of the echo between the two adverbs in the source text, which of course both end in -ly. Finally, the last translated sentence stays very close to the structure of the corresponding sentence in the English original. This is accomplished by beginning with “kallas även,” which recalls the source text’s “also called,” and starting the sentence after the semicolon with “trots att,” which mirrors the original’s “despite.”

In addition to staying close to the sentence structure of the source text, the target text uses said sentence structure for similar purposes. It is used to create a context for readers who are unfamiliar with Spanish or with Dominican culture, so that he or she can follow the narrative despite perhaps not being able to pick up on all of the cultural context.

För Kennedys informatörer lyckades inte förmedla det som varenda dominikan visste, från den rikaste jabao i Mao till den fattigaste güey i El Buey, från den äldste anciano sanmacorisano till den minsta carajito i San Francisco...att den som amiralen drogs med skulle framstå som jojote. (p. 13-14)

The Spanish words are left intact, as are the opposition pairs of “från den rikaste...till den fattigaste” and “från den äldste...till den minsta,” which means the translation sets up a structure that closely resembles that of the source text, and that can be used by the reader to gain a general sense of what the sentence means. Naturally, the specific meanings of the Spanish words remain inaccessible to readers who do not know Latin American Spanish, but the way the text is set up, the reader can still follow along. ”Jojote” here gives the sense of the Swedish “verka som ingenting” (seem like nothing), which makes the phrase accessible even to readers who do not understand the word.

Similarly, in the following example, Hval mimics the source text’s use of the context in the paragraph and the expectations set up by the dialogue in order to make the Spanish phrases somewhat comprehensible.

Tjejerna—systemen Lolas kompisar, mammans väninnor, till och med grannen Mari Cólón som var runt trettio och jobbade på posten och målade läpparna röda och gick som om hon hade en klocka med kläpp i stället för ett arsele—alla föll till synes för honom. Ese muchacho está bueno! (Låg det honom i fatet att han var ivrig och helt klart hungrande efter uppmärksamhet? Inte alls!) När de åkte till DR och besökte släkten i Baní på somrarna var han som värst och kunde stå utanför Nena Incas hus och ropa efter förbipasserande kvinnor—Tú eres guapa! Tú eres guapa!—tills en sjundedagsadventist klagade hos mormodern och hon stängde ner hans paraderande fortare än kvickt. Muchacho del diablo! Det är ingen kabaré det här! (p. 25)

“Ese muchacho está bueno!” is again given meaning by the fact that it directly follows “tjejerna....alla föll till synes för honom.” With the next Spanish sentence, the translation also retains the structure set up in the source text—we are explicitly told that “Tú eres guapa! Tú eres guapa!” is something Oscar says, and the retention of the two dashes around the phrase makes it even clearer.

In the same way, the translation of phrases that created an opposition between a Spanish word and another phrase in order to clarify the meaning of the Spanish word, remain structured thus. Consider, for instance, “Till skillnad från sin syster som slogs mot pojkar och horder av morenatjejer som avskydde hennes smala näsa och halvraaka hår” (25), where ”morenatjejer” hate Oscar’s sister’s “smala näsa och halvraaka hår.” Arguably, the recognition of biracial characteristics might be less immediate for Swedish readers, since the debate about immigrants tends to be ostensibly centered around nationality instead of around race. However, the reader would at the very least be able to discern that the girls who are going after Oscar’s sister look different than her. Similarly, the negative attitude of Oscar’s mother in the line “En puertoricanska här? sade hans mamma spydigt. Jamás!” (25) is indicated in the word “spydigt,” which helps the reader understand that “Jamás!” must entail some kind of a rejection of “En puertoricanska här?”

On occasion, Hval’s translation adds clarifications or qualifications to the structure set up in the source text, such as in the following example.

Vad är det med dig? undrade hans mamma....När Oscar snyftade fram ett *flickor* höll morsan de León på att explodera. Tú ta llorando por una muchacha?...Hon kastade honom till golvet. Dale un galletazo, flämtade hon. Sedan får vi se om den lilla putan visar dig någon respekt. (p. 25)

The “whimpered” of the source text is translated with “snyftande,” which tells us that Oscar is crying and provides further clues to the phrase “Tú ta llorando por una muchacha,” because ‘llorando’ means crying. Hval goes on to qualify another Spanish expression slightly beyond how it is clarified in the original.

Hon bodde i huset längst bord i kvarteret, det som hans mamma brukade beklaga sig över eftersom det var fullt av puertoricaner som alltid var ute på verandan och drällde och drack öl...Och eftersom hennes mamma var una maldita borracha (för att citera Oscars mamma) hände det att Olga ibland luktade gammalt skrev, vilket ledde till at en del av ungarna började kalla henna Pissråtten. (p. 23)

First, the translation gives the reader similar textual hints at the meaning of borracha as the source text did, with the references to drinking and to how Olga sometimes seem to be lacking in personal hygiene. The translation also qualifies the first reference somewhat, with the translation of “hanging out” as “drällde,” ‘lazing about,’ a word with stronger pejorative connotations than the fairly neutral “hanging out.”

#### 6.4.3 The Morphosyntactic Level

The two morphosyntactic variants I observed in the original are normalized in the Swedish translation. “No be a baby” becomes “Var ingen bebis nu” (26), which adheres to standard Swedish where the source text did not adhere to standard English. Similarly, “puertorican” is translated to “puertorican” or “puertoricanska,” which are the standard Swedish expressions for those nationalities. In the latter case, however, it is important to remember that the morphosyntactic variation in the original text is in fact the word for a (male) Puerto Rican in Swedish. A source-text oriented translation of this would possibly involve creating a slang expression for Puerto Ricans in Swedish, if no such expression exists.

There were two instances where an epithet was affected by Swedish syntax. First, in the line “Sedan får vi se om den lilla putan visar dig någon respekt” (25), “puta” is altered to end with -n, a suffix that indicates a specific person in Swedish. Similarly, “machon” in “Titta på den lille machon, sa mammans väninnor. Que hombre. (24),” receives the same suffix, which helps clarify that it is indeed a noun (“macho” is generally used as an adjective in Swedish).

## 6.5 Braschi: Foreign Speaking English/Altgård: Alla talar engelska

### 6.5.1 Introduction of the Essay

Unlike Díaz in *Oscar Wao*, Braschi is explicitly thematic *within the text* of “Foreign Speaking English” about working with two languages and the tension between them, despite the fact that the essay contains very few Spanish phrases or words. The relationship she creates between the narrator’s two languages is expressed as a contrast between “foreign” and “native” and is not necessarily dependent on the rare Spanish phrases to convey this difference. I will, nonetheless, present the Spanish words and phrases briefly here along with their translations as a comparison to the two other texts that I have analyzed. This because it is important to include Braschi in the study, as she is someone who is actively working to combine English and Spanish into a new language that uses elements of both.

Braschi’s essay is an exploration of what it means to be a foreigner living somewhere and having to speak a foreign language. In a way, one can look at this as a programmatic text that explains, pokes fun at and problematizes the often-used dichotomy of immigrant and citizen, foreign and native. Foreign and native are, the text demonstrates, adjectives that can be turned around quite easily in the equation of nationality as related to languages. Foreign to whom? Native to where? As Braschi puts it when addressing the perceived imposition of immigrants on nationalities and languages,

When I am misplaced--I am noticed--as a misplacement--and I like to be figured out--as somebody who you have to keep misplacing, and changing the view you had, because the foreigner is invading the native--the native is becoming foreign--and in a country where foreigners become natives--and natives foreigners--languages must be demolished and rebuilt--not on a geographical continent with a boundary called flag, but in the infinite space of a nutshell. (p. 2)

Further, she problematizes the idea that a native language is always something nurturing and loving.

*I never thought my mother tongue was my mother. I never felt my mother tongue was the language of my house—of my fire—of my desire. I don’t believe my mother tongue protects me from enemies. From what enemies have you protected me, may I ask you. And now that I am speaking in my foreign tongue—you—mother—claim that you don’t understand the language of my affections, but the truth, mother, is that you never understood my feelings.* (p. 3)

Because the Spanish examples are so few and isolated, I have chosen to combine the analysis of the source text and the translation.



### 6.5.2 The Lexical Level

All of the Spanish phrases except one occur in dialogue and none of them are translated into Swedish in Altgård's target text. "*Howdy, amiga, bienvenida*" (p. 1), 'Hello, friend, welcome,' is the first in a list of lines said to "minorities" to keep them at bay. The ironic contrast of "howdy," which is a very stereotypically American thing to say, with "bienvenida," when the speaker in question is in fact not welcoming the foreigners, is made clear when the next line is "go back where ever the hell you came from" (p. 1). This phrase is not translated at all in the Swedish version of the text, which indicates that the translator is attempting to keep the relationship between "foreign" and "native" as one between English (the English of the United States, that is) and Swedish. Similarly, "*Por qué me torturas con engelska när mitt språk är modersmålet*" (p. 2) is the translation of "*Por qué me torturas con English when my language is native*" (p. 57). Altgård translates "English" as "engelska," and thus creates the impression that the languages involved in the conflict here are English and Spanish. This causes Swedish, the language the majority of the target text is in, to be left out of the linguistic tension. This shifts the linguistic dynamics of the piece from how they work in the source text, since there is a third language explaining the conflict between English and Spanish, which in some ways lessens the tension: the conflict is no longer situated in the language that the piece is written in.

When the text provides context for word or a longer sentence in Spanish, the context is perhaps not particularly helpful, and the translation is equally or even more ambiguous.

We leave the revolt for another term--a speaking term of four years maximum--at any location where tongues roll like dice--and there is no TV to program your mind, fabricate consent, steal elections, and change the subject with a remote control. Right now, we have to clear my objectives which are a little confusing, but such is the nature of my subject, as such, a controversial subject that needs years, to say the least, and time to organize parades of agitation, ribbons and flags. We don't need to create a slogan:

*--Todos los partidos estan partidos y son unos partidos.* (p. 2)

The use of "term" and of "clear my objectives" evoke academic texts, which need to define what the aims of the text in question are, but Braschi (or the narrator) does not want to reveal them. She claims they are "a little confusing," take "years, to say the least," and disavows the "need to create a slogan." The slogan she gives anyway (or perhaps the reason a slogan is not needed), is "*Todos los partidos estan partidos y son unos partidos.*" This sentence is very ambiguous, and the meaning "all of the parties are divided and are dividers/piece of shit or incompetent" (Perez 2009) had to be teased out carefully. It is very evident that the various different meanings of "*partidos*" would not be accessible to someone who does not speak Spanish, or even to someone who speaks non-Latin American Spanish. The translation works similarly, not adding any context for this slogan, leaving it as it is without any explanation beyond what was already provided.

When the text mixes English and Spanish in the same sentence, there is sometimes a level of ambiguity added, because readers who do not speak Spanish would read the phrase differently than readers who do. “*Why were you such a pendejo que te dejaste colonizer?*” (p. 3) is the agonized and angry admonishment of the mother tongue to the narrator of the piece. The last word, “colonizer,” is ostensibly an English word for someone who colonizes (the Spanish verb would be *colonizar*), but the phrase is followed by “*Now they’ll suck the blood of your economy, drain your natural resources, make you...defenseless, powerless, homeless, useless, speechless, so foreign that you’ll lose touch with families and familiarities.*” This entails that the phrase is intended to read “why were you such an asshole and let yourself be colonized?” (Perez 2009). This intentional ambiguity problematizes the idea of colonizing in today’s day and age: as the rest of the text demonstrates, the immigrants can do the colonizing now. This ambiguity is perhaps very difficult to accomplish in translation—the version chosen here was “*Varför var du ett sådant pendejo que te dejaste colonizer?*” (58) It is impossible to say whether the translator made a conscious choice to forego the double meaning, but the result is a phrase that reads as if the last word is in English (as long as the non-Spanish speaking reader does speak English).

### 6.5.3 The Morphosyntactic Level

The entire piece is playing with, stretching and adjusting English syntax and structure to such an extent that it is difficult to determine whether any of it has specifically Spanish roots. Nonetheless, I want to mention the title, “Foreign Speaking English” as an example of how Braschi plays with language for thematic purposes. The title is essentially an announcement of the theme of the entire piece, particularly since it contains “foreign,” the word she will center her textual back-and-forth around. It is not immediately clear what she means, since the title phrase can be read either as a foreign[er] speaking English, in which case she is using an adjective as a noun, or as a version of the English language that speaks foreign, in which case the sentence is backwards, since the verb would normally follow the noun. The translation of the title as “*Alla talar engelska*” quite obviously contains none of the aforementioned linguistic ambiguity. What we do have is a sort of sarcastic phrase, since the piece itself discusses what happens to language depending on who speaks it, and a proclamation that everyone speaks English should be followed by, the piece suggests, the questions of: yes, but what kind of English? Who has the right to speak English? Who does not?

# 7 Discussion

## 7.1 The Relationship Between the two Languages in Border-bending texts

The way English and Spanish work together in the texts in this study is generally characterized by a tendency to use English to partially, but not completely, explain the Spanish content. The latter is also made clear to the reader through the help of context given in the surrounding paragraph; however, the full range of the cultural connotations of the Spanish expressions remains inaccessible to the non-Spanish speaking reader. By leaving parts of the text in Spanish, and thereby unexplained and unclear to some readers, the authors are able to develop themes of identity, belonging and bilingualism in their work.

The interplay between English and Spanish in the border-bending texts in this study tends, for the most part, to be one where English is the assumed first language of most of the readers and therefore is primarily responsible for conveying information, both denotatively and connotatively. Spanish, meanwhile, serves as a kind of local color that is partially explained through the English content. For example, in *Oscar Wao*, the relationship between English and Spanish is often characterized by the use of English to explain enough of the Spanish content that the non-Spanish speaking reader is able to follow the general meaning of the passage and the direction of the plot. The clues can be in the sentence structure, such as in the case of the earlier mentioned example "every single Dominican, from the richest jabao in Mao to the poorest güey in El Huey, from the oldest anciano sanmacorisano to the littlest carajito in San Francisco, knew," where the pairs of "from the...to the" give readers who are unfamiliar with Dominican slang an idea of what is being said, even while he or she will not understand the pejorative nuances of the expressions or be able to link the place names to familiar physical locations. This is an example of what Tymoczko (Tymoczko 1999, p. 23-4) terms a simplification of "cultural fields": what is transmitted to the reader is a general idea of all different kinds of Dominicans knowing something, but what differentiates these Dominicans from each other remains inaccessible. Here, because the sentence is there to tell us that all Dominicans knew not to say anything negative about Trujillo, perhaps the precise meanings of the words for different kinds of Dominicans were deemed to be less crucial for the narrative. Essentially, then, the use of Spanish words serves as a clue to the plot, even while it gives the non-Spanish speaking reader a sense of reading a story about an unfamiliar place. This makes the Spanish words simultaneously purposefully strange, foreignizing the English text in the vein of Venuti, and helpful to the narrative as a whole.

Meanwhile, Alvarez makes use of the formal structure of her poem both to help make sure that the Spanish words are understood and to have them contribute to her theme. The formal structure of

the sestina provides a number of tools to this end; for example, the pattern of line-ending words allows Alvarez to set up the pair of "names" and "*nombre*", where she switches the repeated words from one language to another, thereby associating the meanings of these words with each other. In effect, this is a non-explicit translation within the text. Alvarez's poem also contains one of the only examples of explicitly including a translation in the text (Simon 1999, p. 61): she includes a translation of four Spanish words ("sol, tierra, cielo, luna") into English ("sun, earth, sky, moon"). This represents the clearest explanation of Spanish words I could find, and it simultaneously relates to Alvarez's theme of moving back and forth between languages and serves as a helpful aid to the reader. In a similar vein, the poem contains lines like "dawn's early light sifting through *persianas* closed the night before" (3-4), which use the surrounding English phrase to clearly convey the meaning of the Spanish word.

Alvarez thematic focus on the confusion of bilingualism recalls how Díaz discusses his novel as a work that puts together languages and references in a way that should leave individual readers unable to understand the whole of it by themselves. The Spanish content of Alvarez's poem is generally fairly comprehensible to readers, compared to the Spanish words of the novel segment, whose general meanings can usually be inferred, but whose cultural connotations often are not. This difference is because Alvarez is not using her Spanish content in the same manner that Díaz is using his; she is using her Spanish references to demonstrate how both languages can be comprehensible but remain insufficient. Her poem is explicitly situated in the in-between, where English is not enough and the narrator could not bring enough of his or her Spanish context with them to the United States. Alvarez is in fact writing what Ruano and Vidal Claramonte (2004, p. 83) define as the "halfway *between*" of Spanglish, but her poem does not play into the dichotomy of English and Spanish as the "strong and the weak." Both by bringing up her maids as muses for the poem (and as world-creators) and by underlining how much stronger the meanings of Spanish words are to her narrator, she is pointing out that a) strength of language is relative, and b) solving the dilemma of bilingualism within a (largely) monolingual culture is not as simple as wanting to affirm the minority language or culture. Hybridity might, in this case, be about being able to combine the first (childhood) culture with the second (adult) culture.

Braschi does mix English and Spanish together in ways that sometimes give the reader some context, but she often uses this context to either openly or covertly go against what the reader might be expecting. Braschi's text is centered on the dichotomy of the foreign and the native, and the essay is written so as to leave the reader off-balance through unexpected use of language; the style thus further develops the point made by the content, and Braschi uses Spanish as a part of this stylistic and thematic effort. That is, from the grammatical "mistake" in the title to the slogan in Spanish that is incomprehensible to non-Spanish speaking readers, the reader has to handle content that does not necessarily match Standard English or is explained to him or her at any point.. The only non-English sentence, in fact, that is fairly immediately comprehensible even to a non-Spanish

speaking reader, is *Por qué me torturas con English when my language is native*, which the reader can parse because *torturas* is certainly close enough to "torture" to be interpreted correctly. It is ironic—and perhaps intentionally so—that the one Spanish word that "translates" whether you know the language or not, is a very violent one. This further problematizes the dichotomy holding the mother tongue or the "native" culture as natural and nurturing, and the foreign language or the foreign culture as violent. Similarly, the ambiguity "*Why were you such a pendejo que te dejaste colonizer?*" where the word *colonizer* can be read both as the verb 'colonize' and the noun 'colonizer', helps Braschi confuse the reader about who, exactly, is colonizing whom.

To summarize, the choice by these border-bending authors to explain a Spanish word or phrase (or not) tends to depend on a thematic focus, but none of the texts leave the readers completely without help in navigating the text. It is clear that the authors have made some choices about what or how much to explain to their audience, which relates to Tymoczko's (1999, p. 21) notion of post-colonial authors and the way they transpose their culture into another one. It is impossible to get everything across every single nuance or connotation of the Spanish words or phrases or of their cultural context, and the authors therefore have to choose the aspects that are essential for the readers to understand. It is clear that the Spanish content of these texts and the way they are or are not understood often relates to what the text is trying to accomplish: Alvarez's poem makes sure its Spanish words and phrases are at least partially understandable in order for the reader to see the in-between linguistic space that the narrator inhabits; Braschi has her Spanish content comprehensible but startling or only partially comprehensible and ambiguous so that her readers will be unsettled by the language she creates; and Díaz uses the partial explanations of his Spanish content to further the narrative and leave enough unexplained to encourage his readers to perhaps seek more complete explanations or translations outside of the novel. Consider further the fact that the texts expects his explanations of Dominican history or expressions, like his footnoted aside on Trujillo's regime or his initial definition of *fukú*, to be taken as truth for the novel, yet there are no sources for any of the quotes or historical events casually included in either. The reader is expected to take the narrator's word for everything he says happened, yet the increasingly hyperbolic tone of the narrative in the footnotes, for instance, begins to problematize the idea of truth here. What seems like history may not be entirely real. By ostensibly filling the reader in on Dominican history but doing so in a clearly subjective narrative voice, Díaz simultaneously brings the reader into Dominican history and culture and shuts them out, because they have no way of determining what actually happened, what is supposed to be true for the story at least, or what the narrator just said because he felt like it. Using a mix of English and Spanish, of explanations and ambiguity, helps these authors further illustrate their idea of the in-betweenness of culture and bilingualism, whether they are dealing with it explicitly or implicitly.

## 7.2 Translations of Border-bending Texts: A Three-way Communication

### 7.2.1 Looking at the Relationship Between English and Spanish

In addition to the language and stylistic choices made by the authors of these source texts, their translators make choices that further complicate the relationship between English and Spanish. This relationship either remains one between English and Spanish, mediated through a third language, or becomes a relationship between Swedish and Spanish, occasionally relating back to the North American English of the source text as well. In the first case, the target text loses a great deal of the adversarial tension or the ambivalence that existed between the languages in the source text and also makes the text less immediate (since the language the reader is reading it in is not part of the conflict). In the second case, the translation loses some of the cultural context of the source text. In either case, the target text creates a literary space where the cultural relationships as expressed in language are different than the ones in the source text.

The translations of Alvarez and Braschi both retain the idea that the conflict portrayed between English and Spanish is one between just those two languages, which is in line with the source text's relationships between languages. With Alvarez's text, it is expressed in the translation of English as "engelska" and Spanish as "spanska," and in the "vocabulary words" that I kept in English: "sun, earth, sky, moon." This adds Swedish as a mediating language that explains the conflict of the narrator to the reader, which appears to go against the idea of domestication and falls closer to the adequacy end of Toury's spectrum (1995, p. 60-1). It does, however, remove the reader from the conflict—he or she is not a speaker of the new problematic language. Possible ways translations of the poem that would have been more acceptability-oriented and target culture-oriented might have substituted Finnish or Same for Spanish, thereby recreating the conflict on the linguistic playing field of Swedish, so to speak. What was helpful was that the source text laid out the push-and-pull between the two languages so clearly (in the passionate ending lines, for instance), which made me feel like the translation might be accessible to a Swedish audience despite its unfamiliar content. In the translation of Braschi's text, Altgård appears to be following a similar strategy, demonstrated by the fact that he translates "English" as "engelska," keeps the Spanish phrases in Spanish, and also keeps "howdy" in English. The question is, then, what this evidently source-text oriented translation strategy (keeping the adversarial relationship described in the original as one between English and Spanish) does to the text's cultural conflicts.

It seems evident that keeping the Spanish phrases in Spanish in the translation would be a source text-oriented strategy, one aimed at adequacy rather than acceptability. While this is true if one looks at the structure and formalia of the source texts, one still has to determine what adequacy is, in this situation. One of the results of translating these texts as if the adversarial relationship

between the two languages is between English and Spanish while the translation is in Swedish, is that it invariably means the conflict in the text is less immediate for the reader. Examples include Braschi's foreign-native dichotomy, which loses much of its abrasive quality when the actual language the text is written in is excluded from the conflict, as well as Alvarez's poem, where the confusion of bilingualism is no longer partly situated in the primary language of the text. This lessening of immediacy is occasionally strengthened by certain translating choices. For instance, the translation of Braschi's title as "Alla talar engelska" (Everyone speaks English) initially leads the reader to believe that the essay will be about the hegemonic status of English, since the phrase associates the text with the debate about the status of English as a global language. This debate is something a Swedish reader could potentially sympathize with, given that Swedish is actually also a small language, but Braschi's title, "Foreign Speaking English" by contrast, refers more to the heated debates about English-language dominance relating to immigrant assimilation into North American culture. Swedish is a Western European language, one that has faced similar conflicts over the last decades, and using it as intermediary here is not unproblematic.

In the translations of Alvarez's and Braschi's texts, using Swedish to explain the tension between English and Spanish leaves the Swedish language largely untarnished by this conflict. Alvarez's poem alters the status of the Spanish-speaking maids in the poem, giving them the naming power of Adam and God, some of the most authoritative of Western male authority figures. It is not difficult to draw a parallel to illegal domestic workers in both the United States (NNIRR 2009) and Sweden (SR 2003), who generally do not speak much (or any) English or Swedish, who are often female, and rarely have power in society due to their status as illegal immigrants. Giving back the power of their first language to them is a subversive act, which loses its immediacy when it is happening somewhere else than where the text is read. Additionally, the stereotypical conception of the Swedish language and its people could be just as implicated by the descriptors "blond" and "blue-eyed." Yes, this is a stereotype often rejected by the Swedish people, but it is also a stereotype used to brand immigrants as different from Swedes. Similarly, Braschi's text signals a revolt against the established ideas about foreign and native people and languages: "in a country where foreigners become natives--and natives foreigners--languages must be demolished and rebuilt--not on a geographical continent with a boundary called flag, but in the infinite space of a nutshell" (p. 2). Braschi is of course referencing the arguments about an English-only United States that periodically resurface among conservative groups. This conflict recalls the often vitriolic debates concerning "Rinkebysvenska," the 'Swedish of Rinkeby,' which is the collective name for the variation on standard Swedish spoken by immigrants who live in the suburbs. But because "Alla talar engelska" makes an effort to keep the conflict between foreign and native one between English and Spanish, the Swedish reader can avoid reflecting on anything too close to home. This undoubtedly explains the context of the source text more fully than a translation that brought the

conflict into the domain of the Swedish language would, but the loss of some of the source text's subversive impact is worth reflecting further on.

### 7.2.2 Staying Close or Adjusting for Target Audience Expectations

When dealing with the relationship between English and Spanish and deciding how to treat the Spanish content, these translators seem to have used both source-text oriented strategies (leaving the Spanish content in Spanish, for instance, or staying close to the sentence structure in the source texts) and target-oriented strategies, such as making the target text more grammatically correct. The latter may or may not have been influenced by audience expectations.

It has been shown that the contexts in which these translations appeared were fairly different from each other, and one might expect this to influence the choices made by the translator. The publication of Braschi's text in the special issue of *OOTAL* for the literary conference on the Right to Narrate might ironically enough have resulted in Braschi's text being translated with the idea of using it as a text against the hegemony of English, even if the text's discussion of the foreign/native split is not limited to the Spanish/English split, and more concerned with how English is changing because of the foreigners using it than with how prevalent it is as a language. At least, the presence of the text in such an issue might cause a *reader* to interpret it as such. My translation of Julia Alvarez appeared in a standard issue of the literary magazine *Post Scriptum*, and the fact that the editor expressed no particular expectation for how the poem should sound, or even what poem I should translate, gave me a fair amount of freedom to translate according to my own ideas. Hval, by contrast, may not have had the same freedom available to him when translating a Pulitzer Prize-winning bestseller, because such a popular work could put pressure on the translator to make the target text one that could be read by the widest audience possible, thereby potentially reducing the ways that it deviated from standard English. However, because Díaz's novel had been praised specifically for its inventive language, its translators may also have been expected to reproduce said unusual language in their translation. In their surrender to the source text, then, might lie an expectation to foreignize.

As a general rule, the translators of the target texts in this study seemed to emulate the source texts fairly closely in terms of how the Spanish phrases are used, both in the translations of Alvarez and Díaz, and the one of Braschi. For example, the translated segments of *Oscar Wao* used similar strategies as the source text to explain its Spanish content, such as relying on the surrounding English sentences to provide context. Similarly, in my translation of Alvarez's poem, I retained structures like the parallel positioning of "in English" and "*en inglés*." All the translations mostly left the Spanish phrases as they were, without explaining them more than the source text did or allowing Swedish to affect them.

However, there is some evidence that the translations of Díaz's and Braschi's texts contain segments where they adjust for Swedish grammar. For instance, the morphosyntactic content of the



translation of *Oscar Wao* contains an adjustment of a phrase that deviated from standard English to a phrase that is, in fact, expressed in standard Swedish. This may suggest some target-language orientation in the vein of what Venuti (2004, p. 282-3) calls domesticating the target text, the smoothing out of differences in the source text in order for it to be more palatable to the target audience. It is important to note both that the sample used in this study is fairly small, and that it contained very few morphosyntactic sentences. As explained in the analysis, the translation of “No be a baby” as “Var ingen bebis nu” means a move from what was an English sentence clearly influenced by Spanish syntax to a standard Swedish sentence that obeys the rule of Swedish syntax. I do not want to place undue importance on what is just one sentence, but the fact remains that it does represent a standardization of the original content into a more grammatically palatable form (Lefevere 2004, p. 243, -9). In addition to associating the text with a slightly different debate about hegemonic languages than what was perhaps the intended one, the adjustment of the title of Braschi’s essay puts the title in grammatically correct Swedish, as opposed to the non-standard “Foreign speaking English.” As was discussed earlier, this means the (thematically important) ambiguity of the original title is lost. Domestication can thus have implications that go beyond the fact that they change the grammatical or syntactic structure used in the source text.

While the target text’s connotations of a Spanish phrase were generally left approximately as mysterious to non-Spanish speaking readers as they were in the source text, *Oscar Wao* contained two instances where the Spanish word or expression was given a little more context. The translation of “whimpered” as “snyftande” provides additional information that helps the reader interpret the phrase “Tú ta llorando por una muchacha?” (You’re crying over a girl?) and the addition of “drällde” (lazing about) to the descriptions of the Puerto Ricans at Olga’s house leaves the reader with a slightly more negative impression of these people. In the source text, they were simply described as “hanging out,” which carries less pejorative connotations. This is not a major shift, of course, because the rest of the paragraph uses the obvious disdain of Oscar’s mother to make it very clear just how undesirable the neighborhood considers these Puerto Ricans. Because both of these expanded explanations represent minor shifts, it is difficult to attach a great deal of significance to them, but they seem to represent a small move toward the adequacy-oriented kind of translation.

At this point, it seems worth revisiting Ruano and Vidal Claramonte’s (2004, p. 96) assertion that more nuanced dichotomies of translation are needed: it is not as simple as domesticating or foreignizing the text. Mezei’s (239-241) analysis of the translation of “Speak White” supports their assertion, since the translation that ventured further from the linguistic structure of the original text actually stayed very close to the source text in terms of its ironic tone changes. My findings here also provide support for the need to nuance the dichotomy of translation: the relationship between English and Spanish in these texts was invariably altered by the addition of Swedish as a mediating language. When granting a new audience access to a text that contains two languages, perhaps small added explanations could be a valid solution in certain situations. The balance needing to be

kept would be between the demands of the audience, which might be for a text they can understand and a text they can exoticize, at the same time, and the demands of the source text to retain its linguistic and formal structure as well as its thematic language use.

### 7.3 The Post-Colonial Translation of a Border-bending Text

Finally, let us look at whether the post-colonial approach of surrendering to the source text was in operation in the translations examined above, and whether this approach is potentially a useful tool for translators and analysts alike when looking at border-bending texts. Thinking about the translations from a post-colonial perspective of safeguarding the original relationship between the languages, the original "difference," seems - when looking at the translations included in this study - to be both very difficult and very useful. Very difficult because the tension between the languages in the original text is extraordinarily complicated to transfer into a new language (as we have seen, looking at these three texts) and it might not be entirely fair to the translators to demand that they manage to transpose every aspect of it. It might also be very useful because we are dealing with narratives of difference, of in-between, of texts where some of the content may not be meant to be understood by everyone and should, in keeping with the spirit of the original work, remain that way.

As we have seen, the preservation of the original content and form is very important to post-colonial theorists like Venuti and Spivak, who promote the translation strategy of staying extremely close to the original. Ruano and Claramonte (2004, p. 96) point out that, in fact, foreignizing a target text by preserving the source text syntax, for instance, might be providing the audience with exactly what they want: an exotic minority writer. This is a concern for translators, particularly those who work with border-bending texts. Exoticized texts are easier not to take in as applicable to your current situation, because they are so obviously different. As we have seen, the works in this study aim at somehow disturbing the reader's idea of what language is, or what culture is, or what history is, and they depend on the reader being drawn in and bothered by their subversive strategies. However, the translations of these texts generally stayed very close to the original linguistic structure, especially in the case of the poem and the novel. There were a few explanations or adjustments of syntax toward standard Swedish, but in order to create a target text that involved the Swedish readers through the Swedish language and its associated debates, the adjustments would have had to be of a different nature. For instance, as discussed earlier, the title of the Swedish translation of Braschi's text associates the text with the debate on English as a global hegemonic language, whereas the actual language debate associated with "Foreign Speaking English is one that could be relevant to Sweden.

Here is where the individual translator will have to make choices about what aspect of a border-bending text takes precedence. My translation process was admittedly helped by the formal aspects of the poetry genre. Many translations theorists have discussed poetry as a particularly difficult genre to work in: as Jakobson (2004, p. 143) put it, “poetry [is] by definition untranslatable,” and the only possible solution is an “interlingual transposition” because, according to him, the way poetry works, means that the verbal constructions become part of the message. The way in which poetry is sometimes constructed to convey meaning through content and formal structure both is undoubtedly a complication for a translator. However, I felt that these complications showcased some of the unique problems of border-bending texts (though this was before I defined the category). For instance, the way the text switched back and forth between English and Spanish made the particular relationship between the two languages very explicit. Therefore, the formal structure of the poem made it easier to understand how Alvarez was combining English and Spanish and what the inevitable difficulties would be in attempting to transfer this interaction between languages into Swedish.

It is important to recognize the difficulty of analyzing operational norms (Toury 1995, p. 58). I can say with a reasonable degree of certainty what my own outlook was when translating the poem by Alvarez, but I cannot be sure of those of the other two translators. It is possible to see, however, that they were translating in a situation that was fairly unlike mine. The translation of a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel that has been a success and received widespread critical acclaim, both in the United States and abroad, puts a certain kind of pressure on the translator to deliver, if not necessarily to conform. It is possible that retaining difference here might be seen as positive, given the reviews that laud both Díaz and Hval for their use of inventive language. If one extrapolates from the segments analyzed in this study, one could theorize that Hval probably used both target language-oriented and source language-oriented translation strategies. For instance, he may have standardized the dialogue and replaced certain colloquial epithets with Swedish equivalents that have very different historical backgrounds, and at the same time, he may have stayed very close to the sentence structure of the original narrative in other places.

Given the possible variations of translation approaches that might be needed for translating border-bending texts, the most useful strategy for the translating process and for analyzing these translations seems to be to think of the various available tactics as part of several sets of spectra. As we have already seen, the opposition between source text-oriented strategies and target text-oriented strategies needs to be further nuanced in order to allow for the layers of language relationships in border-bending texts. Toury’s (1995, p. 60-61) scale of adequacy and acceptability might still be a useful tool, even for an analysis that looks at border-bending texts through a post-colonial perspective. Particularly if one begins by teasing out how this spectrum would work when the source text uses language in a way that is intended to bother the reader.

## 8 Conclusion

In the texts studied here, the relationship between English and Spanish is one where English is expected to convey most of the plot and other kinds of content, and the Spanish words or expressions are added to the English text in deliberate ways. The Spanish content is always relevant to the rest of the text, but the surrounding English does not always explain it to the non-Spanish speaking reader. The Spanish words or phrases are used to convey thematic content, to provide further cultural context (mainly in the case of Díaz), and, in some cases, to provide deliberately incomprehensible content for those readers who do not know the language. These texts also create some kind of troubled relationship between English and Spanish, where the inability to use both or understand both results in confusion or frustration or anger, for the narrators or, in the case of Díaz's novel, the non-Spanish speaking reader has to rely on outside sources in order to understand the text. The relationship of the bilingual speakers or narrators or characters to their languages is a complicated one: they navigate the territory of trying to combine English and Spanish, trying to establish themselves in a new language, or struggle with several conflicting aspects of their identity that are related to language and culture.

In summary, we have seen translators grapple with where their work is to fall on the adequacy-acceptability spectrum, particularly translators of such complex works as border-bending texts. Additionally, a close examination of the translation of a number of bilingual works has shown that the best target on this spectrum varies by work, and it has also shown that different aspects of the translation (vocabulary, syntax, etc.) may end up at different points on the spectrum. In the translations of these border-bending texts, the conflict between English and Spanish is made less immediate by the addition of Swedish as a mediating language that explains the conflict to the Swedish readers. Translations that were initially approached with a view toward creating a target text that was faithful to the source text, translations that stuck very close to the syntax of these source texts, and translations that showed tendencies to make some adjustments for the sake of the target audience, all ended up altering the relationship between English and Spanish in ways that markedly decreased the tension between them and the reader. Given this, it seems appropriate to go back to Ruano and Vidal Claramonte's declared need for more nuanced dichotomies of translation than those generally preferred by post-colonial theorists, as well as to the idea that an analysis focused merely on whether a translation is source text-oriented or target text-oriented may not be sufficient. Perhaps in the case of border-bending texts, what is needed is an approach that focuses on the relationship between the two languages, as this is central to the thematic content of these texts. At the very least, it is evident that further research is needed on the possibility of combining different spectra of translation when translating these kinds of texts, both to incorporate this relationship between languages, and to nuance the analysis.

Further questions to consider include the fact that Braschi, whose texts are normally very complex in their combination of English and Spanish, has only been translated once into Swedish, and it is this programmatic text that is nearly entirely in English. What happens to the authors who are deemed too complicated to translate? What would happen if we did translate them? Here lies a possible venue of further research, in looking at which border-bending authors are translated, what happens to them in translation, and what seems to determine their level of success. One also has to ask, whether foreignization when translating novels like *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* might not be a form of conforming, as well: the readership expects an immigrant author, so they shall get one. This would of course need to be confirmed through a close analysis of the whole translated novel. It might be interesting to see whether there are more standardizations of grammar happening in the dialogue.

Lastly, it seems pertinent to motivate the study of translations of such complicated texts. It might seem futile to study translations of border-bending texts when there is an admittedly limited availability of such translations—after all, they are quite difficult to translate. They also reference (sometimes very specific) cultural conflicts and one might demand what the relevance of these conflicts are to cultures or languages that are not part of this conflict. In short, it may not be immediately obvious why they should be translated at all, let alone why the translations should be studied. But multiculturalism is a fact of life for our society. The characters of Oscar Wao are not the only ones to have immensely complex cultural backgrounds that are illustrated by their struggles to master several dialects or languages or sets of references, all of which they need. What is more, languages change and evolve constantly, and if the next step is to combine elements of languages into a new one, then translations of border-bending texts are not only important but necessary, and it is also crucial to understand what happens in these translations.

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