Fictional Code-Switching

Spanish elements in Junot Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* 
and Ernesto Quiñonez’s *Bodega Dreams*
Table of Contents

1 Introduction.......................................................................................................................................1

2 Code-Switching in Theory..................................................................................................................2
   2.1 Approaches to Code-Switching....................................................................................................2
   2.2 Written and Fictional Code-Switching......................................................................................6

3 Data and Analysis................................................................................................................................7
   3.1 The Two Novels and Their Authors.........................................................................................7
   3.2 Method of Analysis....................................................................................................................9
   3.3 Results.......................................................................................................................................11

4 Discussion..........................................................................................................................................17

5 References.........................................................................................................................................23
1 Introduction

When Junot Díaz’s novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, was published in 2007, many reviewers remarked on the author’s particular use of language, or rather languages. They referred to his writing as a “riot of accents and idioms” (Scott 2007), “neological dazzle” (Asim 2007), a “sort of streetwise brand of Spanglish” (Kakutani 2007) and as “earthly, streetwise, Spanish-interlaced prose” (Kirkus Reviews 2007). What these critics point to, is the mixing of codes Díaz utilises in his immigrant tale set in the Dominican community of New Jersey and their Caribbean patria. Written and published as an English-language novel, *Oscar Wao* uses Spanish words, phrases and sentences throughout its story and makes them part of both its characters’ and its narrator’s speech. The contact between the two languages Spanish and English thus results in code-switching, a linguistic feature which in real life “occurs among immigrant communities, regional minorities and multilingual groups alike” (Gardner-Chloros 2009: 20).

The typical linguistic analysis of code-switching has focused on naturally occurring dialogue, that is on data which is spoken (as opposed to written) and spontaneous (as opposed to scripted). In contrast, I have chosen to analyse code-switching in the context of the novel, a written and fictional text form. Clearly, there are a number of differences between spoken and written data that have to be considered in order to put the eventual results of the analysis into perspective, and the same is true for the distinction between naturally occurring and fictionally created texts. I will elaborate on these differences in section 2. At this point it shall suffice to note that the written and fictional data analysed in this paper is comparatively complex in terms of voice, as it will more readily switch between narratorial text, direct speech, indirect speech and free indirect discourse than any spoken dialogue is likely to do. Furthermore, it will not allow the study of speech behaviour in a certain group because the instances of code-switching found here are not occurring in the sense that they would occur in naturally produced utterances. In contrast, the findings of this paper will be results of choices made by the author of the text. They will be part of a certain character’s or the narrator’s speech and will be indicative of what the author attempts to achieve, what kind of reader they have in mind and what role or function they assign to code-switching within their writing.
With this in mind, I will ask the following questions in this paper: How are Spanish utterances embedded into the English matrix text? In what parts of the text are they used? How are they highlighted or emphasised, and to what extent is the (monolingual) reader made aware of their presence and helped in their understanding? On a syntactic level, what words and phrases does the author borrow from Spanish? And on a semantic level, what meaning is expressed with these instances of code-switching? In order to give perspective to the answers the findings within Oscar Wao will provide, I will analyse a second novel with respect to its use of code-switching. Bodega Dreams by Ernesto Quiñonez shares a number of traits with Diaz’s novel and for that reason will be able to confirm some of the findings as being possible properties of the (partly) bilingual novel or, on the contrary, display a certain amount of variation in the mixing of codes and with that speak for code-switching as a creative element of bilingual fictional writing that can be used in different ways and with different effects.

Before I get to the main part of this paper, viz. the contrastive analysis of two English novels that embed Spanish within their texts (section 3), some theoretical groundwork is certainly necessary. In section 2, I will therefore clarify the terminology used here, shed light on different models of code-switching and I will ask how code-switching can be and if it must be differentiated from similar concepts, such as borrowing, in the context of this analysis. Moreover, I will look into some of the features of narrative fictional texts and their possible effects on code-switching. With the theoretical framework set, section 3 will characterise the data I am working with in this paper, which includes a brief overview of the two novels and some information about their authors. I will explain how the data was analysed and what aspects were taken into consideration when analysing the two novels. After the presentation of these findings, section 4 will compare the two novels on different levels, put the findings of section 3 into perspective and give answers to the questions raised above.

2 Code-Switching in Theory

2.1 Approaches to Code-Switching

The concept of code-switching seems to be quite easily definable as “the alternate use of two (or more) languages within the same utterance” (MacSwan 2006: 283). But while everybody seems to agree that this broad definition is a necessary condition, it is unclear whether it is also sufficient to separate code-switching from other, similar concepts. Before pointing to
potential problems of Jeff MacSwan’s definition, I will look at a small sample of what has become a field of extensive linguistic research in the last 40 years in order to situate my analysis in the proper theoretical framework and thus provide the necessary tools for subsequent sections.¹

The beginning of the “explosion of interest in CS,” as Gardner-Chloros (2009: 9) puts it, is generally associated with the research done by Gumperz in the 1960s and 70s (see, for instance, Blom and Gumperz 1972). From an early understanding of code-switching as “a chaotic form of expression, used as a last resort by people incapable of expressing themselves adequately in a single language” (Davies and Bentahila 2008:2), it came to be regarded as a complex element of bilingual speech that is rule-governed and becomes more elaborate the more proficient in both languages its speakers are.² As such, it has been investigated from various points of view and in different linguistic subdomains. These approaches are categorised by Gardner-Chloros (2009: 10) into “sociolinguistic/ethnographic descriptions”, “pragmatic/conversation analytic approaches” and “grammatical analyses”, but often, researchers have used combined approaches to study code-switching.

Rather than giving an overview of all the research that has been done in this field, I will concentrate on a few theoretical models/approaches that entail concepts useful for the subsequent findings and their discussion in this paper. A first important concept on a syntactic level is the distinction between intra-sentential and extra-sentential code-switching. Researchers like Appel and Muysken (1987), Winford (2003) or Romaine (2000) all refer back to Poplack (1980) for this distinction, which divides code-switching into switching between sentences (extra-sentential, which is also referred to as inter-sentential) and switching inside sentences (intra-sentential or code-mixing). Poplack (1980) found that intra-sentential code-switching was more demanding on the speaker’s abilities “since a code-switched segment, and those around it, must conform to the underlying syntactic rules of two languages which bridge constituents and link them together grammatically” (589). Analysing my data according to the distinction between extra- and intra-sentential code-switching will thus allow conclusions about the complexity of switches used by the novels studied in this paper.

¹ As a possible explanation for the fact that code-switching has received a lot of attention, Monica Heller states that “it violates a strong expectation that only one language will be used at any given time. It is seen as something to be explained, whereas the use of one language is considered normal” (Heller 1988: 1).
² See Poplack (1980: 605) for a statistical analysis of English-Spanish code-switching in a Puerto Rican community with reference to different degrees of bilingual proficiency.
Moreover, Poplack states that “in-group membership favours intra-sentential code-switching” (1980: 589–90), which means that the ratio between intra- and extra-sentential code-switching within the context of the novel might also be indicative of the kind of writer-reader relation the author envisions.

On a grammatical level, Sankoff and Poplack (1981) define constraints which prohibit code-switching at certain places within a sentence. Their model, which Romaine claims is “[t]he first attempt to formulate general syntactic constraints” (2000: 126), is mainly based around what they call the free morpheme constraint and the equivalence constraint. The former indicates that “a switch may not occur between a bound morpheme and a lexical form unless the latter has been phonologically integrated into the language of the bound morpheme” (Sankoff and Poplack 1981: 5), the latter states that “the order of sentence constituents immediately adjacent to and on both sides of the switch must be grammatical with respect to both languages involved simultaneously” (5–6). While undoubtedly of some value in indicating the likelihood of a code-switch at any given place within a sentence, the validity of these constraints as general rules has since been undermined by many counterexamples3 (not least of all provided by Sankoff and Poplack themselves). At the same time, this attempt to formulate general rules that constrain code-switching in bilingual discourse has triggered new attempts that explain code-switching with different models.

Myers-Scotton (1993) presents a new approach to code-switching with her Matrix Language Frame (MLF) model. Rather than seeing code-switching as a rule-governed alternation of languages, she describes it as a series of insertions from one language into another. In every utterance, a base or matrix language can be established, and within this ML, constituents of the L2 language are embedded. This second language is accordingly called embedded language EL. As Winford (2003) states, this model sees code-switched units not as simultaneous interplay of two grammars, but rather “as generated by a single grammar – that of the ML” (166). Myers-Scotton modified her own model at a later stage, changing the unit of analysis from sentence to “‘CP’ (projection of complementizer)” (2002: 54) and expanded the concept to the 4-M model, which makes a clearer distinction between different system morphemes.4 For the purpose of this paper, the less evolved MLF model will suffice. It is deemed appropriate for this paper precisely because it is an insertive approach of one

---

3 For a list of studies with such counterexamples see Winford (2003: 131).
language being embedded into another, matrix language. Such an approach is certainly suitable for the analysis of two novels which can be clearly identified as English-language novels and are expected to pose few problems in establishing the ML of their text.

We need to go back to the initial broad definition at this point and discuss its potential shortcomings with regard to sufficient separation from similar concepts. The two related concepts that need to be looked at here are borrowing and nonce borrowing. As Myers-Scotton (2002: 153) puts it, “the issue of distinguishing borrowing from codeswitching” has lead to “[a] discussion that will not go away.” Myers-Scotton sees borrowing and code-switching as part of the same process and therefore sees “no need to make the borrowing vs. codeswitching distinction” (153). Others, however, have argued for a distinction not only in degree, but in principle, claiming that code-switching is a process of alternation, whereas borrowing is one of insertion (cf. Poplack and Meechan 1995).

Clearly, in a model like the MLF that sees code-switching itself as an insertive process, no clear-cut distinction is necessary. However, even if borrowing and code-switching are thought to be triggered by the same process, it seems useful to differentiate between established loan words that are part of monolingual speech and single-word code-switches, sometimes referred to as nonce borrowings, which are only used in a bilingual context. Winford (2003: 107) lists two main criteria which are commonly used to distinguish borrowing from code-switching, namely the “degree of use by monolingual speakers” and the “degree of morphophonemic integration.” Both criteria are sound in principle but lead to some difficulties in their practical use. The latter is not always useful because “both borrowings and word switches may or may not be morphologically and phonologically adapted to the ML” (Winford 2003: 117). The former is problematic because it demands a method to distinguish clearly between what is and what is not used by monolingual speakers.

Nevertheless, I have adhered to these criteria in the process of analysing the code-switches in Oscar Wao and Bodega Dreams. To establish what words were to be counted as loan words (and thus excluded from code-switches), I relied on my own language competence in English and Spanish and on the Merriam Webster and Oxford English online dictionaries. Even though the distinction between what was counted as code-switching and what was counted as an established loan in the English language is certainly not water-tight, it produced
very few cases of doubt and proved to be a fairly reliable and practicable method for identifying code-switches in the two novels.

2.2 Written and Fictional Code-Switching

With the analysis of fictional writing as the focus of this paper, some thought must be given to the concept of code-switching in the context of written language, and in the context of fiction. Although most of the research done on code-switching focused on spoken dialogue, quite a few studies of written texts that use code-switching have been published (e.g. Valdés Fallis 1976, Mendieta-Lombardo and Cintrón 1995, Callahan 2001, Camarca 2005, Torres 2007, Vizcaíno 2008, etc.). Vizcaíno’s study about several of Sandra Cisneros’s novels and their translations into Spanish is interesting because it links the pragmatic functions of code-switching to different illocutionary acts (Vizcaíno 2008: 214 and Searle 1976 referenced therein). She finds examples for four of the five illocutionary speech acts discerned by Searle and sees switching to Spanish as a strategy to heighten an utterance’s illocutionary force (214–6). In that sense, Vizcaíno certainly sheds light on some of the pragmatic functions, code-switching may have in literary texts, but like most researchers tackling code-switching in the context of written data she gives relatively little weight to the question in how far the data she is working with is different from natural speech. Valdés Fallis (1976: 878) sees Chicano poetry as a reflection of Chicano language and Torres mentions a political effect of literary code-switching in that it “serves to legitimize the much-maligned practice of mixing codes in vernacular speech” (2007: 76), but only Camarca (2005) tries to look beyond the functions of code-switching in spoken dialogue – in all other works listed above, fictional language is mainly regarded as a mimesis of natural speech.

Camarca (2005: 229–232) distinguishes between a mimetic use of code-switching, which adds to the realism of the represented dialogue by including code-switching as a feature of spoken language, and symbolic function of code-switching, which she describes as a cultural marker: “a linguistic device to bring cultural enrichment” (232). She also takes note, however briefly, of a possible difference between direct speech and narratorial voice, the former being strongly linked to the mimetic function, the latter sharing elements of both functions.

What will have to be taken into account in this paper, then, is first of all that there are different narrative levels (cf. Bal 1997: 44) in a novel, which is to say there are different
speakers who can take the floor. Bal further discerns different possibilities in the presence of the narrating entity, which may or may not be directly present in any narrated scene (46). Furthermore, the different levels can be subdivided into narrator’s text, direct speech, indirect speech and free indirect discourse (50–51). This means that when an author such as Díaz or Quiñonez chooses to use code-switching (or not to use code-switching, for that matter), he has further options in deciding on what narrative level he does or does not use it. This also further enhances the ability of their fictional texts to reflect upon the linguistic behaviour of their authors’ own community – the use of code-switching may imitate their speech or add comment or a certain attitude towards mixing codes.

The role of the reader is another aspect worth examining. Clearly, a novel is written with a reader in mind. Depending on level, place and frequency of code-switched units in the texts, conclusions can be drawn about what reader each author envisioned when writing his novel. Moreover, the author’s choice to include translations of L₂ elements or to use other devices in order to make his text intelligible for the monolingual reader may also reveal a certain attitude towards both reader and language by the author. Along those lines, another property of written text that has to be considered is its use of typography. As Camarca (2005: 232–233) notes, this may include devices such as italicising in order to clearly mark code-switched elements. All of these additional aspects have to be taken into account when discussing the found code-switches in the two novels analysed in this paper.

3 Data and Analysis

3.1 The Two Novels and Their Authors

Now that some thought has been given to analysing code-switching within the written and fictional context of the novel in general, I can shift focus to the actual data at hand, viz. the novels The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao by Junot Díaz and Bodega Dreams by Ernesto Quiñonez. The names of the two authors already suggest that they are both of Spanish-speaking origin, and indeed both were born in Latin American countries (Díaz in 1968 in the Dominican Republic, Quiñonez in 1966 in Ecuador)⁵. They both immigrated into the United States at an early age and were raised in the New York area by Spanish-speaking parents (Díaz in Parlin, New Jersey with his Dominican father, Quiñonez in East Harlem with his Puerto

⁵ See Amend (2010) for short biographies of Junot Díaz (95) and Ernesto Quiñonez (79).
Rican mother and Ecuadorian father). *Bodega Dreams* and *Oscar Wao* are both the first novels of each of the two authors who would go on to teach creative writing at US American universities (Díaz at MIT, Quiñonez at Cornell). The similarities between the social and linguistic background of the two writers is quite apparent, there are however a few differences that will not be overlooked here. First of all, *Bodega Dreams* was published seven years prior to *Oscar Wao*; secondly, Diaz is a Dominican-American writer, whereas Quiñonez is a Puerto Rican-American (or even an Ecuadorian/Puerto Rican-American) writer.

In order to situate the two novels, some information about their content needs to be given at this point. *Oscar Wao* tells the story of Oscar’s struggle in New Jersey where he lives with his sister, his mother and his uncle. He is hopelessly in love most of the time and is either at home reading or later at Rutgers College, where he shares a flat with the narrator Yunior. Episodes of Oscar’s tale are set in the Dominican Republic where he and his sister visit their grandmother. But the novel goes beyond the here and now of Oscar and portrays the life of both his mother and his grandmother. In this story over three generations, the novel traces a curse it links to the former Dominican dictator Trujillo. This curse accompanies all protagonists of the novel and is provided as a possible explanation for the violent encounters each of them have to face.

*Bodega Dreams* is narrated by its protagonist Chino who lives with his wife in East Harlem. Although the story is limited to his own life, it also moves back to his youth and describes his growing up with his friend Sapo who will eventually introduce him to a man named Willie Bodega. The title of the novel refers to Bodega’s pragmatic idealism and his humanitarian efforts of making East Harlem a better place by creating a proper Hispanic working class with the money he earns as a large-scale drug dealer.

Both novels feature first person narrators that are themselves part of a Hispanic community (the same community the respective author could claim to belong to, that is Puerto Rican in East Harlem or Dominican in New Jersey), both stories play in the present (the time when the novel was published) as well as in the past of their protagonists, and they share a focus on their protagonist’s relationship with family and friends. A clear difference is the fact that *Oscar Wao* is strongly rooted in the Dominican Republic and with it moves parts of its story away from the bilingual community of Dominican New Jersey to Spanish monolingual surroundings. This does not mean that the text of the novel needs to be presented in Spanish in
these episodes, but it is possible that this shift in speech community will influence the author’s choice of code and leave its mark in the form of an increased number of switches to Spanish (either locally, when the story plays in Spanish surroundings, or overall, because it is more strongly connected to its non-US roots).

3.2 Method of Analysis

Bearing in mind the theoretical models presented in section 2, I analysed the two novels with regard to their use of code-switching. In order to make the data more manageable, I refrained from analysing the novels in their entirety and instead limited the data to roughly half of each book. This resulted in a sample of 45’603 words (the first 160 pages) of Oscar Wao and 28’709 words (Book 1 of 2, 81 pages) of Bodega Dreams. The overall number of words in the former novel was counted with the help of standard software, all other counts presented here (including the word count in the sample of Bodega Dreams) were done manually. Because the first sample was counted with the help of computer software, what was counted as a word can easily be defined as any number of letters and/or numbers between two spaces. This means that instances like *it’s or *don’t were counted as one word, whereas *it is and *don’t you would have been counted as two words. This might be problematic in other circumstances. However, it is safe to assume that for the purposes of this paper the resulting imprecision is insignificant.

More important, of course, is the question of what was counted as a Spanish (and not an English) utterance. As mentioned in section 2, the Matrix Language Frame (MLF) model was deemed most fruitful for this analysis and with this frame of reference, English was established as the matrix language for both samples. This is to say that every word was counted as an English word unless it was specifically labeled Spanish. In (1) (taken from Oscar Wao), all words were counted as English despite the fact that the expression “in flagrante delicto”, a Latin loan, exists both in Spanish and in English.

(1) [he] surprised the undercover couple in flagrante delicto in a broom closet (Díaz 2009: 100)

6 Something made possible by the fact that Oscar Wao is available as an e-book.
7 First of all, there are relatively few instances where two or more words are contracted into one, which means the effect on the total number of words will only be minimal. Secondly, this kind of imprecision is unavoidable when counting syntactic words, which will always result in code switching being counted as two and codeswitching as one word. Finally, the overall number of words will only be used to give a rough figure of the frequency of Spanish words in both texts, for which this method of counting words is certainly accurate enough.
The same holds true for homographs of Spanish and English such as *no*, which were only counted as Spanish if a code-switch to that language could be detected. This seems rather obvious and unproblematic, but it could – in theory – lead to indeterminable cases (if, for instance, a single *no* were switched, or the switch were to occur right before the *no*). In practice, however, no such cases occurred, and it was generally fairly easy to decide which utterances could be counted as Spanish and which ones as English. As defined in section 2, this paper’s understanding of code-switching to Spanish includes single words which might elsewhere be categorised as nonce borrowings, but it excludes established Spanish loans\(^8\) in the English language and proper names. Clearly, it can be difficult to decide whether a certain word can be considered an established loan or has to be regarded as an instance of code-switching. In this analysis of two novels, the standardised forms of English documented in the online dictionaries of Merriam Webster and Oxford English were used as a frame of reference and thus established loans could be quite easily distinguished from code-switching. Due to the fact that *Bodega Dreams* marks (most of) its code-switches into Spanish typographically by using italics, it could at least be safely established that the combination of my own language competence and the use of the afore mentioned dictionaries largely coincided with Quiñonez’s opinion on what is to be considered Spanish and what English.

Having established and made comparable the frequency of Spanish words in each of the two samples, the Spanish utterances were analysed in more detail. First of all, they were looked at in terms of word length, then a distinction between extra-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching was made. On a syntactic level, the intra-sentential switches were further analysed in terms of word or phrase class. The large number of nouns and noun phrases was then categorised according to semantic fields, which – while by no means an exact science – may indicate what kind of meaning is expressed in Spanish. On the level of the novel as a fictional text, the findings were assigned to different narrative levels. Because of Díaz’s writing style, it wasn’t possible to clearly distinguish between direct, indirect and free indirect discourse in *Oscar Wao*, and accordingly on this level code-switching was classified along a dichotomy between narratorial text and any form of reported speech, be it

---

\(^8\) This includes place names like *Santo Domingo, Nueva York*, on the other hand, was counted as Spanish since it can clearly not be regarded as a part of monolingual English speech. (The same criterion of a valid L\(_2\) alternative which could be used instead of the L\(_1\) place name is applied by Poplack 1980: 585).
direct or indirect. Finally, the findings were analysed qualitatively in terms of typographical highlighting.

### 3.3 Results

In the sample taken from *Oscar Wao*, 904 of 45’603 words (about 2%) were Spanish, whereas only 279 of 28’709 words (about 1%) in *Bodega Dreams* were Spanish. This means first of all that the vast majority of both texts is written in English. Secondly, it shows that *Oscar Wao* uses twice as many Spanish words as *Bodega Dreams*. The relative scarcity of Spanish is surprising because the impression created by the novels – both on me and on the reviewers quoted at the beginning of this paper – is one of a text full of Spanish utterances.\(^9\)

The 904 Spanish words found in *Oscar Wao* and the 279 found in *Bodega Dreams* accounted for 578 and 98 separate utterances, respectively. These Spanish utterances ranged from 1 to 18 words in length in Díaz’s and from 1 to 22 words in Quiñonez’s novel. Charts 1 and 2 show the distribution of Spanish utterances according to the number of words they contain. The charts clearly display that both novels show a vast majority of single-word utterances – 55 of 98 (about 58%) in the case of *Bodega Dreams* and, even more pronounced, 426 of 578 (about 74%) in *Oscar Wao*. It can be noted that *Bodega Dreams* shows a propensity for longer Spanish utterances, but the numbers are too small to carry much weight and the difference between longer utterances is of little importance in this paper.

\(^9\) To further qualify this, one would have to establish exactly how much code-switching is needed for it to be considered extensive, but both novels are certainly a long way from some of the Chicano poetry presented in Valdés Fallis (1976), where the distribution between Spanish and English is closer to 50% each.
Before we look at that majority, the various single-word Spanish items embedded in the two novels, the distribution between intra-sentential and extra-sentential switching must be taken into account. Clearly, there is some connection between this dichotomy and the length of utterance, but it is only one of degree, which is to say every utterance, be it 1 or 22 words long, can be an instance of intra-sentential or extra-sentential code-switching, but a longer utterance is certainly more likely to be a case of extra-sentential switching than a single-word utterance.

Of the two general types of code-switching distinguished by Poplack (1980), extra-sentential switching is found less often in both novels. In *Oscar Wao*, 3 interjections, 2 tags (both times the word *dique* ‘he said’) and 55 sentences amounted to a total of 60 extra-sentential switches (a little over 10% of all Spanish-language items). In *Bodega Dreams*, 8 interjections and 29 sentences added up to a total of 37 extra-sentential code-switches (about 38%). This leaves almost 90% of code-switching in *Oscar Wao* and a little more than 62% in *Bodega Dreams* which were instances of intra-sentential code-switching. Table 1 gives an overview of both extra- and intra-sentential code-switching and their absolute and relative frequency in each of the two novels.

Shifting the focus to intra-sentential code-switching, the vast majority of L₂ items were single nouns (67% in *Oscar Wao* and 45% in *Bodega Dreams*), with another 16% and 6% of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Oscar Wao</th>
<th>% of Total CS</th>
<th>Bodega Dreams</th>
<th>% of Total CS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>extra-sentential</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sentence</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interjection</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tag</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>intra-sentential</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>67.3%</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>44.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun phrase</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verb</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verb phrase</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adjective</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other phrase</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clause</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>total</strong></td>
<td>578</td>
<td>98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
noun phrases, respectively. In other words, over half of all code-switches in *Bodega Dreams* and nearly three quarters of all switches in *Oscar Wao* were found to be nouns or noun phrases. Interestingly, some single adjectives were found in *Oscar Wao*, whereas no occurrences of this kind appeared in Quiñonez’s novel. (2a) and (2b) demonstrate this kind of single-adjective switch, (2a) being an example of a L₂ predicate adjective, (2b) one of an L₂ attributive adjective.

(2a) He made her feel guapa and wanted and safe (Díaz 2009: 127)

(2b) You could have the whole maldito world if you wanted (113)

This difference in the use of L₂ adjectives aside both novels are similar in that they mostly, and in the case of *Oscar Wao* almost exclusively, embed Spanish nouns and noun phrases or entire sentences. Clauses or phrases other than noun phrases, on the other hand, are quite rare.

Given the fact that the majority of L₂ elements are thus items which carry lexical meaning, it seems appropriate to look into what kind of semantic fields they are situated in. On this level, code-switching was categorised into kin- and friendship (kinship), other references to people (people), which includes general descriptive terms, character traits and references to people’s appearance. Then other items that, while not directly describing people, are closely linked to them (people-related); this includes references to people’s profession, origin, clothing, etc. The remaining semantic categories were food, object, religion, nature, mythology, expletive and a number of singular items which were categorised as miscellaneous.

Table 2 shows the distribution of code-switching according to these semantic fields. What is shown first of all, is that code-switching is used most often in the two novels to describe people, i.e. characters of the story. In *Bodega Dreams*, kinship, which includes terms for family and friends, was expressed especially often with L₂ items (20 out of 50 items). Examples here include abuela ‘grandmother’, Mijo ‘my son’ (a contraction of *mi hijo*), and in 13 of 20 cases *pana* ‘friend’. While not as frequent as in Quiñonez’s novel, kinship terms accounted for 19% of noun and noun phrases in *Oscar Wao*. Almost all of these 93 items referred to kinship proper, i.e. to directly related family, abuela, tío ‘uncle’ and hija ‘daughter’ being prominent examples in this field.
Fictional Code-Switching

Even more frequent in Oscar Wao were other direct references to or descriptions of people (160 items or 33%). This category includes references to people proper such as anciano ‘old man’, la chica de mi escuela ‘the girl from my school’ or mujer alegre ‘happy woman’; other descriptions of people like loca ‘crazy woman’ or desgraciado ‘unlucky fellow’; and references to people’s appearance and bodies, such as morena ‘dark-skinned woman’, gordo asqueroso ‘gross so’ or culo ‘arse’. The same category accounted for 9 instances of code-switching (18% of nouns and noun phrases) in Bodega Dreams.

In the field of people-related words and phrases, the sample from Oscar Wao showed another 77 items (16%). Subsumed in this category are references to people’s profession like bailarina cubana ‘Cuban dancer’, colmadero ‘shop owner’ or zapatero ‘shoemaker’; terms for clothing, which were always used in descriptions of people and only appeared 4 times in the whole sample; and references to people’s origin, that is nouns and phrases like caribeña ‘Caribbean’ or Nueva Yol ‘New York’. While the former example, caribeña, refers directly to a person, the latter, Nueva Yol, is clearly a place name. However, these place names are always used in sentences like (3a) and (3b).

(3a) But he told her instead about one of his trips to Nueba Yol […] (Díaz 2009: 162)

(3b) Not long after the back-to-school showdown, Beli put on one of La Inca’s dresses […] and caught a ride down to the parque central. (103)
Both examples, (3a) and (3b), link the Spanish place names directly to actions of people – and this holds true for all L₂ place names in the sample.

*Bodega Dreams* is quite different here in that it uses almost no Spanish words and phrases to express people-related meanings. Professions are always rendered in English (*lawyer, boxer, etc.*) and the same is true for references to people’s origin (*Puerto Rican-American*), a single instance of *Nueva York* being the only Spanish people-related noun or noun phrase that is used in this sample.

Of the remaining semantic categories, none appeared very frequently. Fields like objects or miscellaneous may assemble more items mainly because they are broader categories which span over a range of relatively different meanings. In the case of *Oscar Wao*, objects include terms like *hamaca* ‘hammock’, *jueguito* ‘toy’ or *página en blanco* ‘blank page’ and account for 23 (about 5%) code-switched nouns and noun phrases. Even fewer items referred to food (*dulces* ‘sweets’), religion (*Todosíeroso* ‘Almighty’), nature (*orikán* ‘hurricane’) or were used in an expletive sense (*pendejada* ‘rubbish’) – these categories need not be elaborated any further as they proved to be relatively rare in both samples.

What must be noted, however, is the category of mythology which accounted for 52 (about 11%) of nouns and noun phrases in *Oscar Wao* and did not appear in *Bodega Dreams*. This field includes examples like *el cuco, baká* and *ciguapa*, all of them magical Dominican beings, but most prominently appears in the two nouns *zafa* ‘counterspell’ and *fúkú* ‘curse’. Since *Bodega Dreams* does not include strong references to mythology (other than that of Christianity), the absence of code-switching in this field is self-explanatory. It seems noteworthy, however, that Diaz chooses to use such references to Dominican mythology and culture, and I will come back to this use of code-switching in the discussion in section 4.

Having analysed types of code-switching in terms of syntactic and semantic criteria, I will now turn to the different narrative levels on which the switched units are placed. First of all, it can be noted that the 98 code-switched units in *Bodega Dreams* are mostly used in reported speech (72 units and 74%) with only roughly a quarter of L₂ elements appearing on the level of narratorial text. In *Oscar Wao*, quite the opposite is the case, as there appear only 195 (33.7%) of code-switches in reported speech and almost two third of switches (383 and 66.3%) in narratorial text. As there was no data gathered on how the ratio between narratorial text and reported speech is for the entire novel (irrespective of what language is used), the
precise numbers presented here cannot be taken as absolute figures. They do, however, support the impression created on the reader that whereas Díaz’s narrator switches codes himself reasonably frequently, Quiñonez’s narrator speaks mostly English and leaves most of his story’s code-switching to reported dialogue.

Table 3 and 4 show how the different semantic categories are spread over narratorial and reported-speech levels. It becomes quite clear that the aforementioned smaller proportion of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Oscar Wao</th>
<th>% of Narr. CS</th>
<th>Bodega Dreams</th>
<th>% of Narr. CS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>extra-sentential</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sentence</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interjection</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tag</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intra-sentential</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>79.1%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>69.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun phrase</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verb</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verb phrase</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adjective</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other phrase</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clause</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>383</td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Oscar Wao</th>
<th>% of Rep. CS</th>
<th>Bodega Dreams</th>
<th>% of Rep. CS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>extra-sentential</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sentence</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interjection</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tag</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intra-sentential</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun phrase</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verb</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verb phrase</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adjective</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other phrase</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clause</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>195</td>
<td></td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
single-noun switches in *Bodega Dreams* is in fact not a property of that text as a whole, but rather the effect of a propensity by Quiñonez to use few noun switches in reported speech; on a narratorial level, Quiñonez uses a similar number of single-noun switches as Díaz. A second striking finding is that both authors use extra-sentential code-switching almost exclusively in reported speech and it also becomes clear that the overall difference in extra-sentential switching noted earlier on is in fact at least partly due to the different ratio between reported speech and narrative text: Both authors switch entire sentences in reported speech and largely refrain from doing so in narratorial text.

As to the distribution of semantic fields on narratorial and reported-speech levels, a statistical overview seems of little use. Let it suffice to state that the category of mythology, which only appeared in *Oscar Wao*, was almost entirely limited to the narratorial level, with only a single instance found in reported speech. Apart from this exclusive use of one semantic field on only one of the narrative levels, no connection between semantic category and narrative level could be established.

Finally, a remark has to be made on the typographical choices in the two novels. When reading them, it becomes apparent quite quickly that they use different strategies with regard to the typography of the L2 units embedded in the English text. *Bodega Dreams* sets all of its Spanish words apart by using italics – *Oscar Wao*, however, does not typographically set them apart at all.

## 4 Discussion

The results presented in the previous section of this paper have shown a number of differences between Junot Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and Ernesto Quiñonez’s *Bodega Dreams*. It was noted first of all that *Oscar Wao* used a lot more code-switching than *Bodega Dreams* (twice as many switches in relation to the overall length of each sample), while both text showed a small number of switches when compared with texts analysed in other studies (cf. Callahan 2001). That there could be substantial differences in the frequency of code-switching in literary texts, comes as no surprise; the relative scarcity of code-switches, however, went against the subjective impression expressed by the reviewers quoted above that both novels were examples of frequently mixed codes.
Looking merely at word length – regardless of syntactic category –, both samples already showed a propensity for single-word switches, which was slightly more pronounced in the case of *Oscar Wao*. Analysed in more detail, both novels turned out to favour intra-sentential switching over extra-sentential switching. The fact that *Bodega Dreams* seems more prone to use extra-sentential switching when compared with *Oscar Wao* has to be partly relativised by their different ratio between narrative levels. Within intra-sentential switching, both samples showed a clear preference for single-noun switches, which in the case of *Oscar Wao* accounted for more than two thirds of all switches. That single-noun switches are relatively frequent, corresponds to the findings of other studies – mainly on oral data (cf. Poplack 1980: 603) –, but the frequency of single-noun switches noted here even exceeds studies like the one done by Poplack, where full sentences were the most frequent category. Poplack (589) explains this by stating that code-switching of single-nouns is easy when compared to other forms of intra-sentential switching. However, she states that extra-sentential code-switches stand even lower on a scale of “presumed degree of bilingual proficiency required to produce them” (605).

It seems then, that both novels favour simpler modes of code-switching, most likely because of the fact that they cannot write to a bilingual readership exclusively. This is to say that the choice for a certain type of code-switching in literary fiction is largely dependent on external factors like readers and publishers. Along those lines, Torres (2007: 77) states that “[i]n the context of Latino/a texts published by mainstream presses, the reader is largely imagined as a monolingual speaker.” Which means that there is only so much Spanish allowed in an English-language novel for it to be acceptable to the mass market. Callahan (2001: 418) even goes as far as to draw the general conclusion that “[i]n the majority of the texts published in the United States that contain Spanish/English code-switching, the ratio of Spanish to English is small, the style of code-switching predictable, and the cognitive demands on a reader monolingual in English minimal.” The findings of this paper certainly correspond to the first statement about the overall frequency of Spanish words, and they may give some support to the third claim. I cannot agree, however, that code-switching in such surroundings is generally predictable, which would mean that it would have to be very similar in both novels analysed here.
Bodega Dreams and Oscar Wao diverge considerably in some aspects and show that, even within the limits of the monolingual mass market, a variation of styles in literary code-switching can be used. This divergence becomes apparent when looking at the semantic fields the different switches are situated in. Expanding Callahans generalisation to semantics, Torres (2007: 77–78) claims that:

The most common strategy used by Latino/a prose writers published by mainstream presses is to include only those Spanish words whose meaning is obvious from the context. These include culturally recognizable items like food (mango, taco, tortilla, etc.), places (casa, rancho, playa, etc.), familiar common nouns (mami, hermano, hijo), and so forth. These items of easily accessible Spanish may serve to Latinize the text, conjuring those few well-known items identifiable to the monolingual as ‘Latino’ or ‘Spanish.’

Accordingly, one would expect to find just such items expressed in Spanish in the two mass market novels. Indeed, both Oscar Wao and Bodega Dreams showed a large number of kinship terms, which included such well-known terms as hijo, hija, papi, mami and only slightly less familiar ones like tío, tía or abuela. However, there is a clear difference between the two novels in that 40% of Bodega Dreams’ nouns and noun phrases belong to this group, whereas only 20% do in Oscar Wao. That Díaz’s novel does not fit the generalised image Torres sets above, becomes clear when looking at other frequent semantic categories used therein. While only few references are made to food or places, Oscar Wao includes a great number of terms to describe people, most of which are unlikely to be easily understood by monolingual English speakers: Puerca, bachatero, palomo, sapos, bochincheras or zángana are but a few examples here.

Some of these terms are typical of Dominican Spanish and it is clear that, while all Spanish code-switches will certainly carry at least some hint of general Hispanic culture into English, specifically Dominican terms and concepts will give Díaz’s writing a more localised Spanish-language influence (that is if the reader recognises them as such). The Dominican-ness of Oscar Wao is also reinforced by mythological references which were responsible for roughly 10% of all nouns and noun phrases in Díaz’s novel. The references to specific Puerto Rican items is less apparent in Bodega Dreams, which seems to define its identity as a Puerto Rican-American novel through its setting and characters, rather than through language and specifically code-switching. As was mentioned in section 3.1 that Oscar Wao seems more Dominican than Bodega Dreams seems Puerto Rican is also caused in part by the shift of
some of the former’s story to the community’s Latin American place of origin. Based on this study, a clear answer cannot be given to the question whether these Dominican episodes have an impact on the overall number of code-switches. That code-switching was distributed very regularly across all parts of the story, be they set in New Jersey or in the Dominican Republic, does however indicate a limited influence by the geographical location on Díaz’s language.

Looking at the syntactic distribution of code-switching on the two narrative levels discerned here, viz. narratorial text and reported speech, it becomes even clearer that the embedded Spanish elements are not simply specks of flavour, but are in fact results of specific stylistic choices made by each author. Bodega Dreams displays code-switching first and foremost as a part of its characters’ speech and thus can be said to fulfil the mimetic function of adding realism to its reported dialogue. This view of code-switching as an element of stylised realism is further supported by other features of spoken language such as the contractions presented early on in this paper.

Oscar Wao, on the other hand, goes the opposite way and includes more switches on its narratorial level. As Camarca (2005: 231) states, code-switching may also fulfil mimetic functions on the narratorial level as the narrator him-/herself may be bilingual. This is indeed a possibility in the case of Oscar Wao’s narrator even though it remains unclear for the greater part of the novel whether the narrator is actually part of the fictional world or an omniscient external narrative instance. Because of this ambiguity, it seems unlikely that code-switching would be used here for purely mimetic reasons, and the fact that a difference in code-switching between narrative levels is discernible makes it clear that the narrator’s and the characters’ speech are not identical in style. This is not to say that the reported speech itself cannot be used for reasons other than mimesis. And Oscar Wao certainly seems less prone to give flavour to its characters’ speech with the help of typical features of spoken language.

If code-switching on the level of reported speech and even more so on the level of narratorial text is used for something more than mimetic reasons, we must ask what else might have motivated the author to use it, even at the cost of reduced intelligibility by some of his readers. Torres suggests that in addition to the stereotypical, easy understandable code-switching novel, there is a second category of texts which “favour the bilingual, bicultural reader” (2007: 83). Such reader gratification is one possible motivation for the use of code-switching; another are the author’s cultural and political views, which Diaz expresses thusly:
Also, for me, allowing the Spanish to exist in my text without the benefit of italics or quotation marks was a very important political move. Spanish is not a minority language. Not in this hemisphere, not in the United Stated, not in the world inside my head. So why treat it like one? Why ‘other’ it? Why denormalize it? (Céspedes et al. 2000: 904)

Contrary to Quiñonez, whose Bodega Dreams italicises almost all embedded Spanish words, Diaz tries to use a more integrative form of embedding and creates a mode of code-switching which functions in accordance with his political views. As he says himself, he does not want to alienate the Spanish words in his text and prefers to integrate them seamlessly and make them seem part of his own language.

The clear difference in that aspect between the two novels is further accentuated by the fact that Bodega Dreams uses mostly easily understandable words or gives English translations in the text. Oscar Wao, on the other hand, was shown in this paper to make use of a great variety of words and phrases – many of them unfamiliar to the monolingual English reader –, and it refrains from translating them into English. This suggests that Quiñonez is more concerned with the understandability of his novel for a monolingual readership than Diaz. Bodega Dreams does express a positive attitude towards bilingualism through the character of the narrator’s teacher Mr. Tapia who says: “You speak two languages, you are worth two people” (86). But despite this, it switches only 3 sentences, 18 nouns and 5 phrases (of which 4 are NP) on the narratorial level. If Quiñonez uses code-switching, he does so within the speech of his characters, and he makes sure they stick to well-known everyday terms for the most part. It seems then, that in the case of Bodega Dreams, code-switching does add relatively little to the author’s repertoire of expressing himself, and does indeed fulfil mainly mimetic functions. It includes Spanish words every so often and lets its reader know that what he/she is reading is a form of English that embeds L₂ elements, but it does so without requiring a great deal of bilingual language competence.

Oscar Wao, as mentioned before, does not fit this image of literary code-switching as mimesis of spoken code-switching. It uses Spanish on all levels and embeds it even more frequently on a narratorial level than within reported speech. The fact that these Spanish units are not set apart from the English matrix language further suggests that the main reason for their use is not to be found in stressing the existence of Spanish on a superficial level. Rather than pointing towards the Spanish elements in his text, which would at the same time hinder
the seamless integration Díaz attempts, he chooses a more subtle form of L₂ insertion and makes code-switching seem intrinsically tied to his prose. Moreover, one need not resort to one of his interviews to take note of the fact that the use of Spanish elements in his writing is not there by accident. The novel itself shows an awareness of language, expressed for instance in references to its own characters’ linguistic abilities or in a range of pop-culture neologisms like *otakuness*¹⁰ or *Minas Tirith*¹¹, and also apparent in the choice of mythological Spanish words like *zafa* or *fuki* which seem to carry an almost performative power as words themselves.

Code-switching is thus a stylistic device for Díaz, a way to express himself not only in cases where a notion might not be easily expressed in English and not only to imitate his community’s speech behaviour. Additional to the set of monolingual possibilities at the hand of an English-language writer – like the representation of dialogue in free indirect discourse or the use of different registers – switching codes is another stylistic possibility for writers like Díaz, and its seamless integration leads to a creative and individual form of language, to a specific authorial style, which despite its enriching, seemingly alien elements is neither Spanglish nor a riot of accents, but reads just as comprehensive and self-contained as monolingual prose.

---

¹⁰ *Otaku* is a term mainly used for aficionados of anime or manga.

¹¹ *Minas Tirith* is the name of a walled-in city in Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* and is used in *Oscar Wao* to mean ‘guarded’ or to reinforce the notion of ‘guardedness’: “Respectability so dense in la grande that you’d need a blowtorch to cut it, and a guardedness so Minas Tirith in la pequeña that you’d need the whole of Mordor to overcome it” (78).
5 References


(Language in Society Vol. 13).


