Lauro Flores

Bilingualism and the Literary Text

Converging Languages in a World of Conflicts: Code-switching in Chicano Poetry

Department of Romance
Languages and Literatures
University of Washington
Seattle, WA 98195

Visible Language XXI 1 (Winter 1987)
Lauro Flores, pp.130-152

The contact and interaction of English and Spanish, of Mexican and Anglo-American cultures, lies at the heart of the Chicano experience in the United States. Accordingly, code-switching has been a salient feature of many Chicano literary works. The simultaneous incorporation of both languages into poetry and other artistic forms is sometimes interpreted as an expression of the ambiguity permeating the historical evolution of this people. However, it can also be explained as part of the Chicanos' attempt to achieve cultural definition and autonomy in a conflicting reality.

The author gratefully acknowledges the support he received from the Institute for Ethnic Studies in the United States, University of Washington. It made possible the completion of this and other projects.

The historical context.

Any brief reference to Chicano poetry is bound to refer the uninformed reader almost exclusively to the literary production loosely associated with the Chicano movement — poetry written during the last two decades. Until recently, the general contention, or at least the assumption on the part of many critics and literary historians, was that before the 1960s there was no literature written by people of Mexican descent in the United States. Nothing could be farther from the truth. While it is clear that the Chicano movement came to foment and revitalize the artistic endeavors of Chicanos during the last twenty years, subsequent research has demonstrated that the production of literature is hardly a new activity for this group. On the contrary, cultural and literary continuity has prevailed among the "Spanish-speaking" people of the Southwest for generations.[1]

Indeed, by the time the Treaty of Guadelupe Hidalgo was signed in 1848,[2] poetry had been flourishing in the land for nearly two and a half centuries.[3] Other artistic forms such as religious plays, folk-drama and the folktale had also been cultivated, first by Spanish explorers and settlers and later by local Mexicans. However, the works from the early epoch, the Hispanic period of the Southwest, written in Spanish for the most part, should be regarded strictly as antecedents or pre-Chicano literature, as Ray Padilla, Luis Leal, and others have suggested.[4]

Properly understood, the Chicano experience implies by definition contact and interaction, between Anglo-Americans and Chicanos —variously labeled "Mexicans," "Mexican-Americans," "Pochos," etc., at different times and in different contexts.[5] To be sure, this contact did not begin suddenly in 1848 when Mexico officially ceded her northern lands to the United States. One need only remember that the Texan affair had occurred more than a decade earlier (1836). Nonetheless, the year 1848 is generally taken as the conventional point of departure,

to mark the beginning of the irretrievable social and political course of events that would eventually result in the modern phenomena known as the Chicano people and the Chicano movement.

This history, as it is well known, has been characterized by a sharp social inequality which has traditionally relegated most Chicanos to the status of second-class citizens in the United States. Referring to the Mexicans who inhabited the South-west in 1848, folklorist Americo Paredes has said:

> **These were the first Mexican-Americans — the majority of them very much against their will. They were at once involved in a long drawn-out struggle with the North Americans and their culture. Cultural differences were aggravated by the opportunism of many North American adventurers, who in their desire for riches treated the new citizens from the start as a conquered people.[6]**

This confrontation, according to Paredes and others, imprinted on the emerging Chicano culture a distinctive character of conflict and resistance from the very outset. Not surprisingly then, the cultural and artistic manifestations springing from this context have often incorporated in their themes, structure, and motifs a sense of ideological friction and at times attitudes of open antagonism between Chicanos and the dominant groups. Thus, for example, the fight sustained by men like Joaquín Murrieta, Gregorio Cortez, Juan Nepomuceno Cortina, Jacinto Treviño, and others, against the Anglo-American aggressors during the mid and late 1800s has been recorded for posterity in numerous *corridos* [7] recounting the exploits of these Robin Hood-like figures —otherwise branded as *bandidos* by American authorities and official histories.

Along with ambiguous nationalistic sentiments and split allegiances to Mexico and/or the United States on the part of many Chicanos, language, as an integral part of any culture, has been one of the

fundamental issues involved in this conflict from the start. Accordingly, beyond determining the themes and formal aspects of many texts, confrontational attitudes have often become visible in Chicano literature through linguistic preferences and through the utilization of language-shifting and language combinations. The latter phenomenon, the alternate use of both languages, as it is manifested in Chicano poetry, will constitute the focus of the present discussion.

Conflict and the language question.

The antagonistic aspects of the interaction between Mexicans and Anglo-Americans are only one facet of this complex relationship. Despite prejudice and biases, regardless of social and economic inequality, Anglo-Americans and Chicanos have always maintained a symbiotic relationship. For generations they have influenced and interpenetrated each other, culturally and otherwise. This is most obvious, for example, in the adoption and permanent incorporation of Spanish terms into American English, a phenomenon known as *integration* in the terminology employed by some linguists.[8]

Aside from the numerous geographical names that came along with the conquered territories (Los Angeles, Las Vegas, El Paso, etc.), the repertoire of Spanish words and expressions acquired through integration is quite extensive: *corral*, *adobe*, *El Dorado*, *chile con carne*, *pronto*, *patio*, *rodeo*, etc. The same is true, of course, about the influence that English has exerted on the language spoken by Chicanos, and even by Mexicans presently living along the Mexican-American border, where *garage*, *parking*, *O.K.*, *bye-bye*, *bar*, *pool*, *baby*, *hamburguesa*, and many other terms form an integral part of the lexicon utilized by people who are either bilingual or monolingual speakers of Spanish.[9]

Curiously, this interpenetration can be detected even in works that otherwise are typical examples of cultural resistance and whose main thematic function

is to illustrate the friction between the two groups. Thus, some of the early *corridos* cited above already manifest the linguistic influence of Anglo-Americans on Chicanos. For example, "El corrido de Joaquín Murrieta," "El corrido de Gregorio Cortez," and "Jacinto Treviño" — all in Spanish — include the words *cherifes* (an obvious adaptation of the English term "sheriff") and *rinches* (a direct reference to the infamous Texas *Rangers*) in several lines of their respective texts.

The first stanza of "Joaquín Murrieta," quite interestingly, addresses the question of language and national identity:

Yo no soy americano
pero comprendo el inglés.
Yo lo aprendí con mi hermano
al derecho y al revés.

I am not an American
but I understand English.
I learned it along with my brother
forward and backward.

In a similar fashion, "Jacinto Treviño" also associates nationality with the nature of the armed confrontation referred to in the song while making use of an "English" word:

Decia el *cherife* mayor,
como era un americano,
Ay, que Jacinto Treviño,
no niega ser mexicano.

The head Sheriff,
as he was an American, said:
Alas! Jacinto Treviño
does not betray his Mexicanness.

Having depicted the *rinches* as cowardly and inept in the two stanzas preceding the one quoted here, this counterpoising game is intended to underscore the "superiority" of Mexican over Anglo-American culture.[10] Other texts, like "El corrido de *Kiansis*" ("The Kansas Ballad"), intended to echo the plight of the migrant laborer in the United States, also contain examples of integration.

This "borrowing" mechanism[11] and other phenomena concerning the specific features of Chicano language — *interference*, *code-switching*, and the development of *caló* or *pachuco* (a patois utilized among

some groups of Chicanos, youths for the most part) — have been subjected to close examination and much discussion by scholars throughout the last forty years. And while researchers disagree on certain issues,[12] the number of sociolinguistic studies focusing on this matter is already substantial and keeps increasing continuously.[13]

The general aspects of Chicano language are not, however, what constitute the central focus of this paper. Neither is the linguistic research done on this subject. Instead, code-switching, the alteration of languages, in Chicano poetry is the focus.

Bilingualism and literary code-switching.

The critical attention that code-switching in Chicano poetry, or more broadly yet, in Chicano literature, has received in past years is amazingly scant. This is especially noticeable when compared with the abundant research that other (unrelated) literary topics have received.[14] The same is true, as pointed out above, regarding the proportionally large number of linguistic studies devoted to this problem. And, similarly, it is also interesting to note that neither of the only two books on Chicano poetry published to date addresses the question of code-switching in a systematic manner.[15] Therefore, the truly important and more relevant background for the present discussion is to be found in the seminal works of Guadalupe Valdés Fallis and Gary D. Keller.[16]

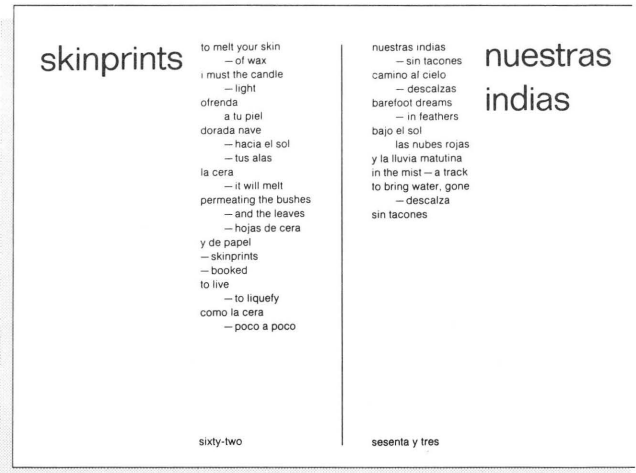
Several points need to be clarified from the outset when discussing code-switching in the context of Chicano literature. First, it must be recognized that, while code-switching is a distinctive characteristic of the works of many Chicano authors, it is neither an essential nor an exclusive trait of Chicano writings. Some Chicano authors, Miguel Méndez and Lucha Corpi for example, usually write in Spanish while others, like Gary Soto, write predominantly in

English and only occasionally use Spanish "cultural identifiers." Code-switching and bilingualism, on the other hand, are also found in the literatures of other groups whose sociohistorical circumstances have brought about the interaction of two or more languages. This is true in the case of various nationalities in the Soviet Union and of the peoples in many other parts of the world.[17]

Second, code-switching in Chicano literature is not necessarily synonymous with "bilingual" Chicano poetry, at least not in the strict sense of this term. In other words, the works of an author like Lucha Corpi, who neither writes in English nor employs code-switching, can be truthfully classified as *bilingual* insofar as they are published in editions containing both the original poems, written in Spanish, and their appropriate English translations.[18] Moreover, some poets who employ code-switching in their texts (José Montoya, Raúl Salinas, Alurista, Juan Felipe Herrera, Ricardo Sánchez and others) often intertwine English, Spanish and *caló*, not only the first two, as seems to be the general impression.[19]

An extreme position regarding the combination of languages would go even farther and suggest, as Keller does indeed, that Nahuatl words are also introduced by some writers thereby amplifying the linguistic spectrum which comes into play in Chicano poetry: "Of course, not only registers within English or Spanish need be involved [in code-switching]. Particularly, in Chicano literature we see an incorporation of lexicon (no syntax that I have been able to detect) from pre-Columbian, Amerindian languages",[20] says Keller and then proceeds to cite such words as *huaraches*, *molcajete*, *esquintle*, and the names of pre-Columbian deities and historical personalities like *Huitzilopochtli*, *Quetzalcóatl*, *Netzahualcoyotl*, *Malinche*, etc., which appear in the poetry of Adaljiza Sosa Riddell, Alurista, Jesús Maldonado and others, as evidence supporting his claim.

Page from Alurista's *Floricanto en Aztlán*. Departing from the usual conventions, the numbering at the bottom of the compositions pertains to each poem, not to the pages in the book. Instead of using digits, the numbers are spelled out and appear randomly in English or Spanish. Also, as part of the poet's effort for a totalizing aesthetic and cultural statement, the titles of the poems appear in brown ink. By permission of the author and the publisher.



skinprints

to melt your skin
— of wax
i must the candle
— light
ofrenda
a tu piel
dorada nave
— hacia el sol
— tus alas
la cera
— it will melt
permeating the bushes
— and the leaves
— hojas de cera
y de papel
— skinprints
— booked
to live
— to liquefy
como la cera
— poco a poco

sixty-two

nuestras indias

nuestras indias
— sin tacones
camino al cielo
— descalzas
barefoot dreams
— in feathers
bajo el sol
las nubes rojas
y la lluvia matutina
in the mist — a track
to bring water, gone
— descalza
sin tacones

sesenta y tres

The problem here is that all of these words — and many others from various Amerindian languages — have undergone a process of "integration" throughout the last four and a half centuries and are now part of the regular, popular lexicon in Mexican and Chicano Spanish. Therefore, any attempts to claim that Nahuatl or any other Amerindian language comes directly into play in the code-switching techniques of Chicano poets — claims based exclusively on such "empirical" observations — are weak arguments. The equivalent of this would be to say that introducing the term *repertoire*, as we have done earlier in this discussion, into an otherwise English discourse constitutes code-switching between French and English or, perhaps what is a more extreme example, that in using the word *almohada* (pillow) in a Spanish sentence, one is code-switching with Arabic. Nor is it possible to claim, in my opinion, that a code-switching incident occurs when the name of a "foreign" personality — be it Mohammed, Kennedy, or Netzahualcoyotl — is introduced into one's predominant or "native" discourse, whether English or Spanish.

It is true, however, that given the cultural-nationalist orientation which prevailed among Chicano activists in the 1960s, there was a deliberate attempt on the

Page from Alurista's *Floricanto en Aztlán*. Designed in the spirit of pre-Columbian and other popular Mexican forms, Judith Hernández's stylized art attempts to capture the main topic of some compositions. This plate, for example, faces the page containing "Nuestras indias" ["Our Indian Women"]. As with the titles of the poems, the art pieces are also printed in brown ink. By permission of Alurista and the publisher.

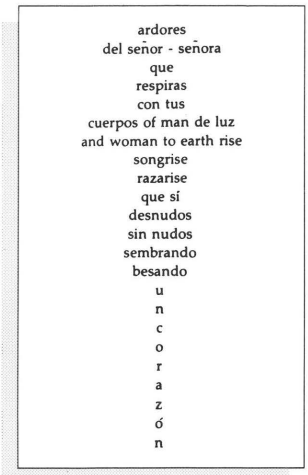
part of many poets and other artists who "pioneered" the Chicano movement to search for their cultural roots by focusing on and attempting to revive symbols of a glorious, and at times highly idealized, pre-Columbian past. In this sense, the introduction of Aztec, Mayan, and other indigenous terms pertaining to mythical, religious, and historical motifs was very marked at that stage. In fact, not only isolated words were used to this effect. The combination or linking of two words or concepts in order to produce a third one, fundamental in the language of the Aztecs, has also been exploited as an aesthetic and highly symbolic resource by poets like Alurista and Juan Felipe Herrera.[21] For example, *in xochital in cuicatl*, which meant "poetry" among the Aztec people, is the combination of two different Nahuatl words with obvious independent referents: *xochitl (flor)*, which means "flower"; and *cuicatl (canto)*, meaning "song". This combination resulted in the highly symbolic expression of "flower-and-song" or "poetry."[22] Adopted and adapted by the Chicano poet Alurista, this becomes in turn the title of his first book, *Floricanto en Aztlán* (1971), and also the name of the many cultural festivals (Alurista, among others, was instrumental in the organizing of the first one) in which Chicano artists and cultural workers gathered to share their expressions.[23]

This technique of fusing together two or more words in order to create a single new concept has not been limited to Spanish expressions in Chicano poetry. In some instances, authors have stretched the boundaries of their experimentation in order to attempt to incorporate code-switching within the technique itself, as illustrated by the following example from Juan Felipe Herrera's *Rebozos of Love* (1974):

besa esa zanahoria
ellipse de llama roja
slow feather of sun
&
ponte trucha que su
verdad de sabor
y
su olor de tierra waterfalls
was sculpted en el volcán de amor
cosmos womb dulzura de
madre materia
padre energía
that speaks y
late * en los ríos de vivir
espirales de agua llamas on
the pyramids
en el templo de tu cuerpo ardiente
concha de luz matutina agua divina
en el f l o w
of time
arroyos que tú nadas
en el día de tu todo
***solrainingotas* anaranjadas**
zanahorias
lágrimas of joy

kiss that carrot
***ellipse* of red flame**
slow feather of sun
&
be alert that its
truth of flavor
and
its fragrance of earth *waterfalls*
***was sculpted* in the volcano of love**
***cosmos womb* sweetness of**
mother matter
energy father
***that speaks* and**
pounds * in the rivers of life
spirals of water you summon *on*
the pyramids
in the temple of your flaming body
morning-light shell divine water
in the *f l o w*
of time
streams you swim
in the day of your whole
orange sun*raining*drops
carrots
tears of *joy*[24]

A third observation is necessary regarding the mistaken belief that code-switching, as it is found in Chicano literature, corresponds directly to the everyday speech of Chicanos. Extrapolated into the realm of literary criticism, this false contention has led some scholars to try to compare literary and quotidian lexicon and syntax in order to pass judgment regarding the quality of a given work. This they do by attempting to determine the fidelity (or the lack of it) with which an author reproduces the speech of the community in his or her work.


ardores
del señor - señora
que
respiras
con tus
cuerpos of man de luz
and woman to earth rise
songrise
razarise
que sí
desnudos
sin nudos
sembrando
besando
u
n
c
o
r
a
z
ó
n

Page from Juan Felipe Herrera's *Rebozos of Love*. By permission of the author.

Criticizing some of the erroneous axiological assumptions that he identifies in Valdés Fallis and other students of bilingual (although not exclusively Chicano) texts, Keller correctly warns us against any attempt to measure the aesthetic value of a literary work on the basis of how "accurately" that text reflects the linguistic norms prevalent among a particular bilingual community: "I judge not only that there may be but that there *must be* significant differences between literary code-switching and real-life code-switching."[25]

Even if one does not entirely agree with Keller's ultimately immanentist position on this issue, it is difficult to imagine that anybody would question at this point in time the fact that literary language, while definitely rooted in real life, is nonetheless different. That no author speaks in the same fashion as he or she writes and vice versa, that nobody writes exactly the same way they speak is, I believe, axiomatic. Therefore, I will not pursue such a line of discussion much further. However, code-switching in Alurista's "Nuestro barrio" ("Our Neighborhood"), for example, does indeed reflect the bilingual context prevailing in the specific *barrio* which the poet is depicting in his composition, and in most Chicano communities by extension:

nuestro barrio
en las tardes de paredes grabadas
los amores de pedro con virginia
en las tardes
barriendo

dust about
swept away in the wind of our breath
el suspiro de dios por nuestras calles
gravel side streets of solitude
the mobs from the tracks are coming
en la tarde
mientras don josé barre su acera
mientras dios respira vientos secos
en el barrio sopla la vejez de chon
y la juventud de juan madura
en la tarde de polvo
el recuerdo de mi abuelo
— de las flores en su tumba
dust
polvosas flores
blowing free to powdered cruces

our neighborhood
in the afternoons of engraved walls
the love between pedro and virginia
in the afternoons
sweeping

dust about
awept away in the wind of our breath
the sigh of god upon our streets
gravel side streets of solitude
the mobs from the tracks are coming
in the afternoon
while don jose sweeps his sidewalk
while god respires dry winds
in the neighborhood chon's old age blows
and juan's youth ripens
in the afternoon of dust
the memory of my grandfather
— of the flowers on his tomb
dust
dusty flowers
***blowing free to powdered* crosses**[26]

That the syntax of this concrete poem may or may not correspond exactly to the speech used by Chicanos in San Diego's Logan Heights is of no major consequence. In other words, such consideration becomes relatively superfluous for literary analysis as it affects neither the aesthetic merit nor the social dimension of the text. These aspects do not necessarily have to be in contradiction with each other; the fact is that "Nuestro barrio" stands as a well constructed poem that graphically conveys and invokes, at the same time, the poet's personal view of a bilingual social reality.

A fourth and final observation must address the judgmental contention which claims that code-switching merely reflects the manner in which Chicanos "butcher" language by randomly "mixing" English and Spanish due to their deficient command of either of the two. To this, one can respond with the following observation made by Felipe de Ortego y Gasca in his article "An Introduction to Chicano Poetry": "...to comprehend Chicano poetry, one must be open to language, free of preconceived notions of what is correct or standard in language usage in Spanish or English."[27] And while it is indeed possible that some poems may include a "willy-nilly mixture" of languages,[28] I would argue, along with other critics, that for the most part code-switching provides Chicano and other bilingual poets with a broader set of stylistic choices and, therefore, allows them to enhance the aesthetic value of their works.

The "purposes" of code-switching in Chicano poetry are multiple and change from text to text. In general, and at the risk of oversimplifying this matter, it may be said that its functions can be classified into three different categories:

1) situational,
2) metaphorical,
3) phonetic.

The first one, *situational* switching — perhaps the easiest to identify and to explain — is intimately associated with the manner in which the poet manipulates his or her relationship with the public. Specifically, it is often used by writers in order to exclude monolingual (usually Anglo-American) readers and/or listeners, and, therefore, to create an atmosphere of familiarity and closeness with the bilingual Chicano audience. This point is well illustrated in Raúl Salinas's "Overcoming a Childhood Trauma,"[29] written, according to the dedication included by the poet, "for a couple of teachers along life's way":

I must not speak Spanish
in the classroom
I must not speak Spanish on
the schoolgrouns.
I must not speak Spanish.
I must not speak.
I must not
O' yesss i willllll,
CHINGUEN A TODA SU MADRE! ! !
Love,
Roy

Addressing directly the long practice of institutional discrimination against Spanish, the formal arrangement of this poem mimics the euphemistic punishment used by many educators in order to "correct" students' "bad habits." Except for the title, the dedication, and the eighth and ninth lines, all of which are printed, the poem appears in the book's page in "long hand" graphically seeking to resemble the handwriting style of a child. This technique, intended to capture the innocence of Salinas's poetic persona as a young child (this poem, as the rest of the book, is evidently autobiographical) is emphasized by one simple trick introduced in the fourth line: the misspelling of the word "schoolgrouns." This also conveys in the form of an understatement the difficulties which Chicano children experience in accurately recognizing English sounds. It is indeed a fact that the succession of phonemes "ounds," as contained in the word "grounds," is nonexistent in Spanish and, therefore, difficult for Spanish-speakers to hear and reproduce.

In the final analysis, then, it is not the repression of the poet himself as an individual, but his symbolic representation of the Chicanos as a group, that becomes relevant in the social context in which the poem was written. This fact is reemphasized by the small letter "i" used by the poet to refer to himself,

as different from the capital "I" norm established by the institution and used by the child in the performance of his assigned punishment. The utilization of the "i" is also common in other Chicano poets of the 60s as an attempt not only to challenge the established social norms which tell us even how to refer to ourselves,[30] but also as a graphic illustration of the minimization which the individual suffers in a rigidly structured society. Thereby the poet assumes his concrete location in society, and invites other Chicanos to do the same, as a new point of departure in a continuous struggle. In the same vein, the code-switching which takes place in line nine of this poem constitutes a rebellious stance challenging the official status quo of one language over another, of Anglo-American over Chicano culture. The switching we encounter here is *situational*, of course, because it excludes readers who are unable to understand Spanish.

Metaphorical switching occurs when a poet feels compelled to change languages because a given concept is better expressed in one language than in the other; as a matter of fact, in some instances the situation will be such that the concept at hand can only be fully expressed in the particular language into which the poem changes. This type of switching is also introduced in order to reinforce or emphasize a particular image while avoiding the straight redundancy or repetition that would result if only one language were used (see for example Alurista's manipulation of *soplar* and *blowing*, *dust* and *polvo*, etc., in "Nuestro barrio"), or to create a natural association or congruence between the subject matter that is being referred to and the language in which it is expressed. Salinas's poem, introduced above to illustrate the previous function of code-switching, can also be useful in this case insofar as the subject matter, the revolt against the repression of Spanish, must necessarily take place in such language.

Since code-switching opens a wider range of possibilities for the poet to comply with the rhyme and rhythmic demands of the poetic pattern, *phonetic* switching is usually intended to enhance the musical quality of the text, as illustrated by the following excerpt from Alurista's "tuning flower tones," one of the poems in his *Nationchild Plumarroja* (1972):

tuning flower tones
guitarra sings in serenata
the twanging, twanging, tone
to tablas tuned
the thumping of a rhythm shoe
tapping, tapping, taconeo
y latido de la sangre
en el corazon explota...[31]

In this example, the musical effect produced by the repetition of the "tu," "to," "ta," "twa," and "ti" sounds of the words "tuning," "tones," *guitarra*, *serenata*, "twanging," *tablas*, "tuned," "tapping," *taconeo*, *latido*, and *explota* is crucial for the rhythmic format of the poem. Obviously, the English equivalents of the words *serenata* ("serenade"), *tablas* ("boards"), *latido* ("beat"), and *explota* ("explodes") in lines 2, 4, 7 and 8 respectively, would fail to comply with the desired pattern. On the other hand, it could be argued that both "guitar" and *guitarra*, "tone" and *tono*, contain the same *ta*, *to* sounds and that, therefore, it would not matter which language they are employed in. It is clear, however, that in these cases the choice is determined by the number of syllables making up each word in the different languages: *gui-ta-rra* / gui-tar; *to-no* / tone. In similar fashion, the word "shoe," at the end of line five, is introduced in English because of metric reasons despite the fact that its Spanish equivalent, *zapato*, would fit better into the sound scheme outlined above.

But, while it is true that the need to change languages may have arisen out of metric and rhythmic considerations, it must also be recognized that some of the code-switching taking place in this poem can be described as *metaphorical*. *Serenata*, *guitarra*, *tablas*, and *taconeo*, for example, immediately evoke a specific Spanish/Mexican cultural ambience that their English counterparts "serenade," "guitar" and "tapping" would be unable to provide. In similar fashion, some of these examples can be referred to as *situational* insofar as the monolingual reader — whether Mexican or Anglo-American — cannot fully comprehend and enjoy the poem, and, consequently, is automatically excluded.

Conclusion

The roots and background of Chicano poetry can be traced all the way back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with the arrival of the first Spanish explorers and settlers to the territories presently known as the Southwest of the United States. In a strict sense, however, the Chicano experience and its literary manifestations constitute a more recent phenomenon and imply, by definition, a dialectical relationship between Chicanos, as a conquered people, and the dominant Anglo-American group.

Never fully accepted as legitimate sons by Anglo-America and also mistrusted by many Mexican nationals who look upon them as *pochos*,[32] traitors who have renounced their mother culture, Chicanos are eventually compelled to come to terms with their circumstances and to assume in full the realities of their new and unique cultural make-up. This new cultural substance has evolved in the course of over one hundred years and, while it still includes traits from the Mexican culture, it has also acquired new characteristics, as a byproduct of the constant interaction between Chicanos and Anglo-Americans.

Thus, while themes and motifs of friction and confrontation with Anglo-Americans are constantly present in the development of Chicano poetry, and in other Chicano literary manifestations, the cultural influence that these two groups have historically exerted on each other must also be recognized. Only in this manner can we understand what otherwise might seem to be a paradox that in asserting their autonomy and cultural uniqueness, Chicanos decide to use, at least partially through the technique of code-switching, the language of the dominant culture.

Discarded by many purists as a "bastardization" of language, the alternation and combination of English and Spanish respond to the social situation of the Chicanos, a situation in which several levels of both languages coexist, influence each other and, therefore, come into play in the linguistic evolution of this people.

The preceding pages present both an overview of the conflictive sociohistorical background of Chicanos and a commentary on the role that language has played within such a context. More specifically, however, this work has endeavored to provide an insight into the literary manipulation of code-switching as it appears in contemporary Chicano poetry. While it is impossible to claim that all Chicano poetry using code-switching is equally successful, the close examination of key texts permits us to conclude that the skillful utilization of this technique allows bilingual poets to enhance the social, communicative, and aesthetic dimensions of their works.