Radical Bilingualism in *Killer Crónicas*

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This study considers the English-Spanish code-switching employed by Susana Chávez-Silverman in her text *Killer Crónicas* (2004) in comparison to other bilingual texts like Sandra Cisneros’s *Caramelo* (2002) and Junot Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007). I view them in the context of Torres’s (2007) code-switching strategies utilized by US Hispanic authors. Then, I analyze two chapters of *Killer Crónicas* sentence-by-sentence using Muysken’s (2000) typology of code-switching to illustrate that congruent lexicalization is the category that the language mixing in this text most resembles. I show that, unlike *Caramelo* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, *Killer Crónicas* does not have a base language. Finally, I consider Casielles-Suarez’s (2013) concept of radical hybridism and whether *Killer Crónicas* exemplifies the same kind of radical language mixing.

Torres (2007) notes that “[m]uch of the Latino/a literature written in English in the US incorporates Spanish at some level” (76). She categorizes three strategies that authors utilize for the inclusion of Spanish into their texts: transparent Spanish, gratifying the bilingual reader, and radical bilingualism. Transparent Spanish includes monolingual English readers by incorporating Spanish vocabulary, which is understood through the context. Gratifying the bilingual reader uses Spanish in a way that provides special pleasure to the bilingual reader. Monolingual readers can often decipher the meaning from the context, but sometimes must resort to a dictionary. The last category, radical bilingualism, contains sustained sections of code-switching and can only be read by a bilingual audience. Torres comments that *Killer Crónicas* is different from many other texts authored by Hispanic authors such as Sandra Cisneros and Junot Diaz, who both prefer English as the base language of their novels. For example, in *Caramelo*, the occurrences of Spanish come in the form of simple nouns and are usually italicized, most resembling transparent Spanish. Diaz’s bilingual text also uses English as the base language; however, the single nouns that he inserts are many times culturally charged words that gratify bilingual readers. As a result, they are not very transparent to monolingual readers. Chávez-Silverman, on the other hand, includes Spanish in her texts in a distinct way that exemplifies radical bilingualism. Torres (2007) comments about *Killer Crónicas* that “[t]he language of the text captures the author’s bicultural reality and her transnational experiences living in an ‘in between’ place” (89).

My analysis of two chapters of *Killer Crónicas* found that more than 50% of the utterances contain sustained congruent lexicalization, which occurs when two languages share a similar language structure. These hybrid sentences would be unintelligible to monolingual English or Spanish readers. In comparing *Killer Crónicas* to other texts that include radical bilingualism, it seems that they employ radical language mixing in different ways. For example, Diaz’s novel uses English as the base language to include utterances which may not be understood by monolingual English readers, as in (1), taken from Diaz (2007).
In her twenties, sunny and amiable, whose *cuerpo* was all *pipa* and no *culo*, a "*mujer alegre*" (in the parlance of the period). (112)

Casielles-Suárez (2013) comments about *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* that “the quantity and quality of the Spanish words and phrases which are constantly inserted in English creates hybrid phrases with the result that, rather than alternating with English, Spanish becomes part of English” (447), thus resulting in *radical hybridism*.

*Killer Crónicas*, on the other hand, does not have a base language and can only be read by a bilingual audience, as in (2).

(2) Oh, *esos* delicate, innocuous pale-pink blooms *que de día no huelen a nada ahora* overpower me, *casi jaqueca*-strong (Chávez-Silverman 2004: 4).

Díaz’s and Chávez-Silverman’s texts employ radical code-switching in distinct ways that the term radical bilingualism does not account for. I propose that *Killer Crónicas* exemplifies language fusion, which occurs as Spanish and English fuse together through the use of sustained code-switching and intra-word switches, to create a completely hybrid text which can only be read by English-Spanish bilinguals.

**WORKS CITED**


