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Hey, baby, ¿Qué Pasó?: Performing bilingual identities in Texan popular music

Verónica Loureiro-Rodríguez [a,*], María Irene Moyna [b], Damián Robles [b]

[a] Department of Linguistics, 15 Chancellor's Circle, 534 Fletcher Argue, University of Manitoba, R3T 5V5, Canada
[b] Department of Hispanic Studies, Texas A&M University, 219 Academic Bldg, MS 4238, College Station, TX, 77843-4238, USA

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes Spanish-English code-switching in the music of the Texas Tornados, a bilingual-bicultural San Antonio band. Their entire repertoire was transcribed and analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively to ascertain the form and functions of code-switching. We found that 39% of songs included language mixing, with English being the most frequent matrix language and Spanish lexical insertions and inter-sentential switches prevailing. Lexical insertions are used to exoticize songs and for humorous effect, while inter-sentential code-switching presents similar ideas in sequence demonstrating high poetic virtuosity. Such artistic use of language represents the subaltern status of Spanish, reflecting the sociolinguistic reality of Texas.

1. Introduction

This is a study of the representation of language contact between Spanish and English as manifested in the lyrical production of the Texas Tornados, a bilingual/bicultural band that emerged in San Antonio in the early 1990s. More generally, it is an attempt to map the life of Spanish as a public language in the United States, by highlighting its overlooked presence in some of the country's most salient cultural manifestations. Indeed, Spanish and its speakers have been hiding in plain sight all through the American cultural landscape for decades, in places as conspicuous as Hollywood, where some actors were recognized as Hispanic (e.g., Ricardo Montalbán, Desi Arnaz), while others were veiled behind Anglo artistic names and vaguely ethnic personas (e.g., Rita Hayworth, Anthony Quinn, and countless others) (Rodríguez, 2004). Although for decades Spanish was trivialized or hidden from public view as a threat to the utopia that tied language with nation (Pratt, 1987), its emergence in certain musical styles can be seen as a "small step out of the box" (Schneider et al., 2017, p. 1). This study points the spotlight on the recent past, as a first step to dig up the linguistic resistance buried in the musical production of 20th century America.

Because music lyrics are not spontaneous, a useful starting point for comparison and contrast of Spanish-English mixing may be the creative production of U.S. Latino writers (Callahan, 2001, 2002, 2004; Cortés-Conde and Boxer, 2002; Keller, 1979; Mendieta-Lombardo and Cintron, 1995; Nuessel, 2000; Pfaff and Chávez, 1986; Valdés-Fallis, 1976). The main findings of studies of code mixing in prose and drama have shown that, for all their peculiarities, these genres don't differ greatly from their oral counterparts (Callahan, 2002, 2004; Pfaff and Chávez, 1986). However, written code mixing is both less frequent and more limited in scope. In particular, bilingual writers are more likely to employ individual word switches and less likely to

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: V.Loureiro-rodriguez@umanitoba.ca (V. Loureiro-Rodríguez), moyna@tamu.edu (M.I. Moyna), drobles@tamu.edu (D. Robles).

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engage in longer switches that involve entire constituents (i.e., intrasentential or intersentential switching). By contrast, researchers have found that bilingual poetry is the most distant from oral language and often breaks the rules of prosaic code-switching (Keller, 1979; Valdés-Fallis, 1976). It may do this by failing to abide by the constraints, or rather, general tendencies, that have been identified in spoken code switching, such as the equivalence constraint (i.e., switch only when the surface structures of the two languages don't differ) (Pfaff, 1979), the size-of-constituent constraint (i.e., switch at junctures between larger rather than smaller constituents) (Poplack, 1980), and the free morpheme constraint (i.e., switch only between free morphemes) (Poplack, 1980).

Naturally, our study is even more closely connected to recent work focused specifically on language contact phenomena in musical lyrics, or 'artistic' code mixing, in a variety of language combinations (Bentahila and Davies, 2002; Davies and Bentahila, 2008; Flores Ohlson, 2008, 2011; Hernández, 2012; Lee, 2004; Loureiro-Rodríguez, 2014, 2017; Ohlson, 2007; Picone, 2002; Sarkar and Winer, 2006). These phenomena are of course not new, having been documented as early as medieval Spain, in Arabic-Romance mixing (Argenter, 2001; Armistead and Monroe, 1983), and more recently in a variety of contemporary musical genres and language combinations (Bentahila and Davies, 2002; Davies and Bentahila, 2008; Lee, 2004; Loureiro-Rodríguez, 2014; Sarkar and Allen, 2007). In the specific context of the United States, ubiquitous language mixing between Spanish and English has been identified as a salient feature of many contemporary urban styles, such as Dominican-American *bachata* (Flores Ohlson, 2011; Ohlson, 2007) and Chicano and Cuban-American rap (Hernández, 2012; Loureiro-Rodríguez, 2017). However, the focus on contemporary styles has neglected bilingual lyrical production from the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, which has rural roots that stretch back over a century (Peña, 1985). The present study begins to fill this void.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews what we know so far regarding musical code-switching, and establishes a baseline for the analysis of both the formal and pragmatic features of lyrical mixing. It also presents the background that situates the Texas Tornados within their socio-historical and cultural context. Section 3 presents the methodology employed, including data sources, data extraction and tabulation, and the categories of formal and functional classification of language mixing. Section 4 presents the quantitative and qualitative results, which are then discussed and interpreted in Section 5 in comparison and contrast with the types of code mixing found in other bilingual singer-songwriters of the United States. Section 6 concludes the paper and suggests avenues for future research.

2. Background

2.1. Code mixing in music

The analysis of code mixing in music lyrics must be preceded by a general albeit brief presentation of the main differences between authentic speech and speech representations in song. Whereas spoken language is used for a vast array of pragmatic functions, the typical purpose of language in song is to create an object of aesthetic appreciation, or 'artful performance' (Rampton, 2009, p. 135). Moreover, while in everyday interactions participants normally alternate between the roles of speaker and addressee in physical and/or temporal immediacy, musical performances involve a single speaker and multiple addressees who cannot claim the floor and who are separated from the singer either physically by a well demarcated stage, or temporally, through mass media recording and broadcasting (Bell and Gibson, 2011). Prosaic speech is unplanned, whereas artistic representations of speech are highly monitored and rehearsed to sound natural, i.e., strategically inauthentic (Bell and Gibson, 2011; Coupland, 2009). Artistic speech typically generates a commodified product (i.e., a live or recorded performance) (Coupland, 2009), an acknowledgment that a singer-songwriter is no ordinary speaker, but one imbued with virtuosity that most speakers do not have (Werner, 2012).

These general differences between artistic and mundane language use have specific implications for code mixed lyrics. The first is the fact that the spontaneity normally attributed to language mixing cannot be adduced in lyrics, given that artists edit and rework song content and structure. Mixing is therefore "a device to contribute to the effect achieved by the lyrics" (Bentahila and Davies, 2002). In other words, it is not obvious that artistic code mixing would need to be subject to the same constraints as spontaneous language, especially since similar deviations have been identified in its closest written counterpart, poetry (Keller, 1979; Valdés-Fallis, 1976). Moreover, unlike in a spontaneous conversation, where the speaker can gauge the linguistic abilities of an addressee, artists cannot anticipate the bilingual proficiency of a wide and physically removed audience (Bentahila and Davies, 2002).

From a sociolinguistic perspective, one might ask whether artistic code switching is a valid subject for research. Variationist studies in the Labovian tradition would avoid considering data from songs as a reflection of the vernacular (Bell and Gibson, 2011). However, a strong counterargument is that the musical manifestations of a linguistic phenomenon are of interest in and of themselves, as are their similarities and differences from their spontaneous counterparts (Bell and Gibson, 2011; Trudgill, 1983). This is particularly true in light of third wave sociolinguistic approaches that see even spontaneous language variation not merely as predetermined by static social variables such as class, age, and gender, but as manifestations of speaker agency, identity construction, and performance (Eckert, 2008). Artists' premeditated choices can be seen as just one way to perform identity.

With that in mind, we should now focus specifically on antecedents to the study of code mixing in music. Although the earliest such studies seem to have been an analysis of Spanish/Quechua *waynos* (Muysken, 1990) and of Catalan/Hebrew switching in the written lyrics of wedding and festive songs of the 14th and 15th centuries (Argenter, 2001), it was Picone