

# Code-Switching in Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* and Walcott's *Omeros*



## *A Literary Device for “New Readability”*

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## **Introduction**

As an oral rhetoric strategy, code-switching is aggressively exclusive of monolingual participants or those with a different set of languages at their disposal (Myers-Scotton, 2006). This does not seem to be the case, however, when we start close reading multilingual, code-switching texts. Indeed, both Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* and Derek Walcott's *Omeros*, with their dense code-switching, prove far from being exclusive. Strategies employed by them in written code-switching mode seem to differ significantly from oral practice in their dynamic, structure, and communicative purpose. Upon closer examination, it can be argued that the phenomenon we are considering is not code-switching at all but a literary device that actively engages the reader and to a certain point ensures partial transparency of languages other than English. This device both complicates and simplifies the text, repulsing and attracting the monolingual readers and inevitably engaging them with a previously unknown culture. Both *Borderlands/La Frontera* and *Omeros* are constructed in such a way as to make the reader *experience* their writerly aspects, as Roland Barthes conceives them, on an epistemological level (Barthes, 1974). Understanding the code-switching practice as inclusive and accommodating rather than exclusive and alienating has major implications for what literary texts we may consider as accessible for our monolingual English-speaking students.

Using empirical data collected from student readers without Spanish specialization, I would like to show that both authors, but particularly Anzaldúa, have created certain more or less stable conditions for *new readability* for their texts (Venuti, 1995). Further, I would like to suggest that because of the shared desire between the writers discussed here and translators of foreign literature to expose the reader to the new culture and its language, the conditions and tools of new readability in Anzaldúa's and Walcott's texts could also be borrowed and practiced in literary translation in general. Thus, despite the fact that both texts under discussion represent and belong to their respective oral traditions, this work focuses primarily on the *written* modes of representation of these oral traditions and on translation, which is an immanently *written* mode of communication. The intellectual value of this essay, I would like to suggest, consists not in the analyzing of the literary texts as such, better left to the area specialists, but in creating conceptual, empirically supported bridges between poetics and translation techniques and between semiotics and contemporary translation theory.

As a reader without Spanish or French, I represent the majority of American and World Literature teachers who need access to multilingual texts with all kinds of embedded languages and who should be able to make these texts accessible to their students. My own and my students' non-expert reading experience of Anzaldúa's and Walcott's texts is valuable because these texts are written with readers like us in mind. Both texts are "writerly" in the Barthesian sense on this bilingual level only for us because engaging with these polylingual texts and conscientiously seeking to bridge the linguistic gap in a state of constant epistemological uncertainty proves to be an experience unavailable to bilingual readers.

The effect that *Borderlands/La Frontera* and *Omeros* have on a reader without Spanish or French, respectively (for the sake of convenience, let's call this reader "monolingual"), is akin to that ideal state of self-conscious awareness about the foreignness of the text that, one imagines, a foreignizing translation should bestow on its readers (Venuti, 1995, 310-311). Just as a foreignizing translation should not be completely inaccessible to its readers—Lawrence Venuti argues for "a new kind of readability"—the bilingual texts discussed here are not completely closed to a monolingual reader either. A mechanism that looks like code-switching to a casual reader provides this readability for monolingual readers.

## The Writerly and the Foreignizing

Let us discuss the theoretical ideas that travel from literature to translation studies and back describing the linguistic behavior of our writers. Considering the term “readability” self-explanatory, Lawrence Venuti does not attempt initially to define it. From the context, it becomes clear that what we consider “readable” is limited to “the current standard dialect” and that “readable” translation does “ethnocentric violence” to the original by making it concordant with the dominant values and language of the translating culture. A “readable” translation is fluent, deceitfully transparent and unproblematic in terms of communicating a foreign culture to the reader; in a word, it is a text ready for consumption and easy to swallow and forget (Venuti, 1995, 310-311). From the point of view of semiotics, Venuti describes here the manufacturing of a *readerly* text (Barthes, 1974, 4). A readerly text is a type of text that “like the commodity, disguises its status as a fiction, as a literary product, and presents itself as a transparent window onto ‘reality’” (Keep, McLaughlin, and Parmar, 1993-2000).

If we further examine Venuti’s suggestions for resisting this type of transparent “window” onto the “reality” of a source culture and language, such as experimentation with the lexicon, syntax, register, dialects, styles, and discourses of the translating language, we will observe further parallel development of the ideas related to a foreignizing translation with those of a *writerly* text. Barthes defines “writerly text” as a text that “make[s] the reader no longer a consumer but a producer of the text;” a text that makes the reader engage with it as a process, not as a product; a text that makes the reader work (Barthes, 1974, 4). Barthes elaborates the idea of the ideal text in *S/Z* and then illustrates the dynamics between the reader (himself) and the writerly text by discussing a specific piece of literature not as a linear story but as a fabric of signs. When discussing readability, Venuti cites Philip Lewis and his idea of “abusive fidelity” (Lewis, 1985, 41), a gesture that not only echoes Barthes’s thought, but also uses Barthesian terminology: “Abusive fidelity directs the translator’s attention *away from the conceptual signified to the play of signifiers on which it depends*, to phonological, syntactical, and discursive structures, resulting in a ‘translation that values experimentation, tampers with usage, seeks to match polyvalencies or plurivocities or expressive stresses of the original by producing its own’” (Lewis, 1985, 41, *qtd.* in Venuti, 1995, 310, my emphasis). Compare this description of a translator’s choices as an active reader, who literally rewrites the text of the original, with the Barthesian definition of an ideal writerly text:

In this ideal text, the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one; the codes it mobilizes extend *as far as the eye can reach*, they are indeterminable...; the systems of meaning can take over this absolutely plural text, but their number is never closed, based as it is on the infinity of language (Barthes 1974, 5-6).

Lewis's and Venuti's emphasis on play, on the systems of signs, on multiple entry points and a shifting dominant, on polyvalencies, etc. undoubtedly speaks to and perhaps takes precedence in Barthes's "pluralistic text." While translation theorists mold a foreignizing translator who performs as an engaged reader of a writerly text by creating *experiences* rather than products for the next generation of readers, in *S/Z* Barthes literally performs as a translator who converts a readerly text into a writerly one by showing how one should read texts that have potential to be writerly.

Both Venuti and Barthes point out that the distinction between *domestication* and *foreignization* or *readerly* and *writerly* is not absolute or binary but dynamic and contextualized: in Venuti's case, dependent on linguistic, cultural, and historical contexts of the receiving culture (Venuti, 1995, 311); and in Barthes's case, on "proportion" of plurality in *a priori* "incompletely plural texts, texts whose plural is more or less parsimonious" (Barthes, 1974, 6). While cultural, historical, and other contextualization outside of the text determines whether and how a text is foreignized in Venuti's semiotics, for Barthes "nothing exists outside of text" (Barthes, 1974, 6). This polarity of factors determining essentially the quality of the translating/writing reflects the degree of maturity of the readership that these two theorists take into account as they imagine readers of a foreignizing translation, on the one hand, and those of the writerly texts, on the other. Barthes can count on a sophisticated elite reading culture in Europe and publishing industry that can support this readership. He is certain that once he teaches his readers to see, value, and enjoy the writerly aspects of literary texts, they will need nothing but the text to extract the valuable "writing" experience from it. Venuti is not so lucky. The very fact that he needs to reinvent "readability" and that he uses essentially Barthesian theory twenty years *post factum* indicates that his readers in the US are not ready to work with foreignized

texts independently. He can rely only on educating translators (i.e., specialists), not their readers. That is why translators essentially have to produce translations that accomplish the high cultural mission of communicating difference and plurality, and at the same time provide support for the readers to enjoy this experience rather than to reject it.

This discrepancy in maturity between readers of literature in Europe and readers of translation in the US can be approached from a different perspective. While we assume that high-quality literature with a potential to be called “literature” will be difficult, i.e., resistant to consumption in a number of ways, we are not there yet in our expectations for high-quality literary translation. That is why Venuti elaborates upon the notions of “readability” and “fluency” as something that is necessary, like scaffolding in education, to ensure comprehension and independent work, as something that will close the gap between the translated text and the readers’ ability to appreciate it. The term “new readability,” according to Venuti, refers to a set of stable conditions for accommodating the reading of foreignizing, resistant, unusual, or radical translations. Venuti emphasizes this possibility of innovative translation that, if systematized in its style or approach (similar to how stylistic aspects in any literary text are systematized), could open up new horizons in literary translation practice, shifting our readers’ perception of foreign as normal and interesting rather than unusual and alienating. Venuti writes:

The foreignizing translator seeks to expand the range of translation practices, not to frustrate or to impede reading, certainly not to incur a judgment of translationese, but to create *new conditions of readability*. For the fact is that what constitutes fluent translating changes from one historical moment to another and from one cultural constituency to another....  
(Venuti, 2012, 19, my emphasis)

Echoing Goethe, Venuti implies that readers are ultimately teachable and can be trained to appreciate and enjoy what is now largely perceived as poor translation (Goethe, 2004 [1819]).

## **Foreignizing the Original**

The parallel between a writerly text and a difficult, foreignizing translation can be extended to a writerly text that, I would like to argue, employs translation techniques. In addition to being complex in any number of ways, Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La*

*Frontera* and Walcott's *Omeros* greatly complicate the process of reading them by resorting to code-switching. The code-switching technique in these texts, similar to a difficult translation, serves the purpose of foreignizing the texts and risks alienating the reader who does not have a command of both languages. Because Anzaldúa and Walcott portray marginal, hybrid cultures, they face the challenge of communicating the difference, drawing attention to the literary devices involved in this communication, and creating conditions of new readability that allow the readers to access the text. This challenge is akin to the foreignizing translator's challenge.

The question that one should ask here is this: if we can teach difficult literary texts in one language, and can create stable conditions for foreignizing translation practices, can we train the reader to appreciate code-switching as well and perceive it as non-interrupting? The short answer is "yes" because the code-switching as it is constructed in the two texts in question is not as it naturally occurs in bilingual exchanges confined to specific geographic localities. The code-switching here is constructed to *look* natural while employing various translation techniques to accommodate the monolingual reader, i.e., to create stable conditions for new readability. In a sense, and only partially, of course, both Anzaldúa and Walcott already practice foreignization as Venuti begins to conceptualize and campaign for it.

It would seem paradoxical that resisting texts should accommodate what they are resisting, but it stands to reason that communicating only resistance, the gesture itself and nothing else, is not very productive. Examples of highly resisting texts that make considerable concessions to readers abound. Vladimir Nabokov's *Eugene Onegin* comes to mind, with its 900 pages of commentaries and explanations supporting his own radical translation, which resists domestication at all costs (Lakhtikova, 2007, 2016). A more common, less radical, example of accommodation would be any translator's introduction if it provides access or a framework for comprehending the translator's approach or explains the design or functionality of translation methodology—in a word, that educates the readers by preparing them to meet the translated text on its own terms, not on the terms of the original.

Likewise, apart from their literary merits, *La Frontera/Borderlands* and *Omeros* are educational texts that open a window on their respective hybrid, multilingual, marginal cultures to the mostly monolingual readership. Their goal, among other things, is to acquaint the readers with these complex cultures and the political and epistemological challenges they encounter when clashing with more homogenous cultures or frames of mind.

To be effective in this task, the text must accommodate a monolingual English speaker through linguistic strategies that will allow the new multilingual world to seep in and give a taste of its cultural and linguistic complexity without alienating readers and without unduly candy-wrapping this experience, creating a false sense of complete understanding. Therefore, the applied analysis of code-switching techniques as practiced in *Borderlands/La Frontera* and in *Omeros* will be very useful for both understanding and teaching these texts and for applying similar strategies to literary translation practice.

### **Engaging a Monolingual Reader**

As creators of resisting texts, Anzaldúa and Walcott employ very different strategies from those of, for example, Nabokov. Both of these strategies are available to translators in theory; however, Nabokov produces a scholarly translation supported by “[f]ootnotes reaching up like skyscrapers to the top of this or that page” (Nabokov, 1955, 127), while Anzaldúa and Walcott produce poetic works. Nabokov, leaning on the literary authority he had earned in the US by 1964, was able to use essentially limitless footnotes to accommodate his readership, but very few translators have the luxury of using footnotes. Poets, for poetic reasons, would probably prefer not to use footnotes at all. In terms of basic background knowledge, they should assume, quite in accord with the Barthesian reader of writerly texts, that nothing exists outside of their texts for the reader who is not bilingual like themselves or who has not been exposed to their culture. In this role, their task is more similar to the task of a poetic foreignizing translator than that of Nabokov, a scholarly foreignizing translator. The more established a writer Nabokov became, the more scholarly license he could take to create a more specialized, “unreadable” text because his readership also became more specialized and therefore narrower. The scholarly apparatus of a commentary allows the translator to incorporate as much scaffolding and other support for the primary text as he or she deems necessary.

The dynamic between the scholarly translator and his readership that grows more similar to him as the scaffolding proliferates is different from the dynamic between a poet and a foreignizing literary text (translation or original). It stands to reason that if a poet wants to speak to a broad readership, he or she must consider the differences his or her readers will have to absorb. Our poets cannot step outside of their primary texts to accommodate readers very different from themselves, so the

scaffolding for “new readability” must be incorporated into the text itself. Serendipitously, the natural code-switching practiced in Anzaldúa’s and Walcott’s respective cultures provides a vehicle for such seamless scaffolding. As mentioned above, we perceive this practice as code-switching out of habit, while in fact we are dealing with translation.

Lawrence Breiner, who studies creole in Walcott’s poetry, demonstrates how Walcott’s creole, in its written form, underwent several modifications from unreadable to barely readable to more or less readable. The more prominent a poet Walcott has become, the more readable his writing had to be to include a broader readership that was not familiar with his native idiom (Breiner, 2005). In a sense, Walcott experimented with various degrees of fluency in translating the oral creole into the Latin alphabet. The broader his readership became, the more transparent (undoubtedly under the pressure of his publishers) his representation had to become, i.e., the more he had to translate. In general, the more established a poet becomes, the broader grows his or her readership; the more dissimilar to the poet and his or her culture the readership becomes, the more accommodation has to be created for this broad readership. Both Anzaldúa and Walcott must balance their desire to recreate the hybridity, foreignness, and orality of their respective cultures without compromising them against the necessity to include readers who do not belong to these cultures, so that these readers can learn about them. This difficult task is also a translator’s task, and this is why translation techniques work for these texts. However, because these techniques are habitually and erroneously termed “code-switching,” their effectiveness is not broadly recognized and they are not consciously employed by other authors to make the texts more foreign and yet accessible to monolingual students. Nor are these techniques practiced on a broad scale in literary translation as a proven and successful foreignizing strategy.

### **Code-switching or Translating?**

The most general definition of code-switching, according to Myers-Scotton, is “the use of two language varieties in the same conversation” (Myers-Scotton, 2006, 239). Code-switching can occur within a single clause, between the clauses within a sentence, and between the sentences. Anzaldúa stretches this practice by switching between full paragraphs of different languages. A sentence of an embedded language is the largest unit I shall consider here, as the larger chunks of languages other than English

infusing the book, while having their own purpose, remain completely impenetrable for a monolingual reader and therefore cannot be considered part of the literary device I am about to discuss.

Code-switching is practiced intentionally by bilingual individuals or groups (Giles, 1977). Howard Giles's communication accommodation theory maintains that, as a means of socio-cultural self-presentation, code-switching is not an accommodating practice. If you do not belong to the bilingual community that practices it, you cannot comprehend what is being said in one or both of the languages in use. In Anzaldúa's and Walcott's texts, embedded language *represents* the oral speech of their communities, emphasizes its orality, its rootedness in oral rather than written tradition. However, the bulk of the code-switching in their texts, as opposed to embedded non-English segments, is not represented code-switching, direct speech, the reconstructed way people speak as in example (1) below. Instead, the bulk of the code-switching is *presented*, constructed code-switching for a written text designed for a monolingual reader. As any writerly self-conscious text or translation, *Borderlands/La Frontera* and *Omeros* "acknowledge [their] artifice by calling attention to various rhetorical techniques, which produce *the illusion of realism*" (Keep, McLaughlin, and Parmar, 1993-2000, my emphasis). In our case, code-switching is a rhetorical device that imitates the natural phenomenon practiced in the cultures represented in these texts. However, in these written texts, code-switching is not natural but constructed and therefore functions differently. In a word, code-switching in *Borderlands/La Frontera* and in *Omeros* is code-switching designed to make the embedded foreign elements transparent or semi-transparent to a monolingual reader with the goal of actively engaging the reader to interact with the culture, its languages and texts, by deciphering the meaning of their foreign elements. Barthes defines "writerly text" as "ourselves writing, before the infinite play of the world is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages" (Barthes, 1970, 5). In the case of meaning that can be "deciphered" by monolingual readers of code-switching texts, the plurality of meaning will be ensured by the absence of the singular system—that of the embedded language—that readers without Spanish or French do not have at their disposal.

Below are two examples of code switching, the first as it supposedly occurs in a natural flow of speech, and the second as it

is constructed in our texts for better comprehension by a monolingual reader. My reading of these passages functions on two levels: as a meta-commentary and as an example of “actively engaging with the text.” For this reason, it may end up being erroneous or not sufficiently theoretical or scientific from a linguistic point of view; nevertheless, this manner of reading is worthwhile because in the process I not only learn something the author is trying to say, I also begin to learn about and be interested in Spanish and the cultures it represents. The engagement attempt is valuable in and of itself:

- (1) My grandmother lost all her cattle,  
they stole her land.

“Drought hit South Texas,” my mother tells me. “*La tierra se puso bien seca y los animales comenzaron a morir de se’. Mi papá se murió de un heart attack dejando a mamá pregnant y con ocho huercos*, with eight kids and one on the way. *Yo fuí la mayor, tenía diez años*. The next year the drought continued *y el ganado* got hoof and mouth. *Se cayeron* in droves *en las pastas y el brushland, panzas blancas* ballooning to the skies. *Elsiguiente año* still no rain. *Mi pobre madre viuda* *perdió* two thirds of her *ganado*. A smart *gabacho* lawyer took the land away *mamá* hadn’t paid taxes. *No hablaba inglés*, she didn’t know how to ask for time to raise the money” (Anzaldúa, 1987, 8).

In this example, the monologue enclosed between the quotation marks is a representation of code-switching as it occurs in the speech of the narrator’s mother. However, in this supposedly natural flow of speech, most of the Spanish words are either cognates (*animales, papa, mama*) or are derived from Latin (*mayor, blancas, año, pobre madre, inglés, morirse*), while the meaning of others can be deduced from the associative context (only cattle, “*el ganado*,” can have “hoof and mouth [disease]”; one usually dies, “*murío*,” from a “heart attack”). One wonders whether this semitransparency is accidental. By the time a non-transparent but important word, “*huercos*,” appears in “*y con ocho huercos*,” which is immediately followed by “with eight kids,” one has no doubt that this passage has been carefully constructed. After all, when we switch languages while talking to similarly bilingual individuals as us, we do not translate for them.

- (2) Our mothers taught us well, “*Los hombres nomás quieren una cosa;*” men aren’t to be trusted, they are selfish and are like children. Mothers made sure we didn’t walk into a room of brothers or fathers or uncles in nightgowns or shorts (Anzaldúa, 1987, 17-18).

In this example, unlike in the reconstructed flow of someone else’s speech above, we encounter code-switching that is entirely the narrator’s creation. Therefore, unlike example (1) with its reconstructed code-switching, example (2) contains constructed code-switching. The direct speech is entirely in Spanish, “*Los hombres nomás quieren una cosa,*” then the language changes to English, when the author translates, or rather explains, the Spanish sentence “Men only want one thing” as “Men aren’t to be trusted.”

Both examples have direct quotes, and example (2) also has a direct quote that is not presented as such. “[M]en aren’t to be trusted, they are selfish and are like children,” is presented without quotes in the flow of the narrative right next to the direct speech in Spanish presented in italics and within quotation marks. This switch may indicate that what follows the quote in Spanish has been translated into English, but this is uncertain. The seamless, unpunctuated blending of the narrative voice with that of the represented women creates the effect of ventriloquism, casting upon the entire narrative the aura of orality and performativity.

Let us examine similar examples of reconstructed (3) and constructed (3, 4) code-switching from Walcott’s *Omeros*:

- (3) “Ous croire ‘ous c’est roi Gros Iles? Voleaur bomme!  
“You think you’re king of Gros Ilet, you tin-stealer?  
Then in English: “I go show you who is king! Come!”  
(Walcott 1990, 16).

In example (3), the phrase in French patois in line 1 is followed by an English translation in line 2, which is the author’s doing and therefore represents a constructed code-switching. This sentence is followed by the phrase “Then in English” in line 3, indicating that the second line is not really part of what the character actually says. The character switches to English patois by saying, “I go show you who is king! Come!” The first and third lines are the only ones that represent the native patois, while the second line is written in a more standard English and represents a necessary addition inserted by the author for the benefit of monolingual English speakers.

The following example, like examples (1) and (2) in Anzaldúa's text, represents a different voice, that of the narrator, not the character. Through code-switching the narrator represents himself as a native, the one who is of the place where both languages flow seamlessly. However, because this passage is third-person narration and not the poet's direct speech, the code-switching here functions as a translation, which gives the passage the characteristic of a written text rather than an oral transcription.

- (4) ...And Achille,  
the moment he saw him carrying the cutlass, *un homme fou*, a madman eaten with envy, replaced the tin (Walcott, 1990, 16).

## The Uncertain Reader

As readers without Spanish or French, we are forced to experience a modicum of uncertainty, wondering whether our reconstruction of the meaning presented in a foreign tongue is accurate. This uncertainty makes the meaning of the text volatile, ever rife with possibilities. It makes us scrutinize and compare the lines, returning to them over and over in an attempt to resolve the uncertainty. It is up to us and our abilities to use whatever pieces of Latin and other languages we have to reconstruct the meaning, engaging with the writerly aspects of the text in the ways that bilingual readers who have both languages do not. This uncertainty, the place between the languages, between knowing and not, between having and not having—a history, for example—is symbolic of the *mestiza* culture and state represented by both writers *in* their languages and *by* their languages. Through bilingual coding, the texts allow us to experience the *mestiza* state, but not really own it.

In a sense, this state of uncertainty is an insurance against overinterpretation, simplification, ethnocentrism, or assimilation of a culture through the certainty of misplaced “understanding,” readerly translation (Spivak, 1992). Gayatri Spivak calls for a translator to “solicit the text to show the limits of its language,” to “surrender herself to the linguistic rhetoricity of the original text” (Spivak, 1992, 377), by which, quoting a private conversation with Michèle Barrett, she means “the literarity and textuality and sensuality of the writing” (Spivak, 1992, 372). This is obviously not the position of a strong handler of the text, of a reader who is in control. Note the sexual overtones, also strongly present in Barthes, that bring into the reader-text relationship not only uncertainty, abandonment, and submission, but also danger (Spivak, 1992, 370).

In both *Borderlands/La Frontera* and *Omeros*, the reconstructed and constructed code-switching turns into a literary device that enhances the writerly characteristics of the texts and offers the reader a new experience of creative and seductive uncertainty. It imitates orality or represents how things are said in the native languages. The representation of the native speech and native languages in English and the necessity to make this speech and these languages accessible to the monolingual reader constitute the core of the code-switching compromise—the same compromise against which Spivak cautions eager translators:

It is more just to give access to the largest number of feminists. Therefore these texts must be made to speak English. It is more just to speak the language of the majority when through hospitality a large number of feminists give the foreign feminists the right to speak, in English (Spivak, 1992, 371).

That pause in the end, the comma before “in English,” marks the theorist’s reservation against what is commonly considered “just,” the received idea, common sense. She elaborates on the danger of common sense and received ideas:

...there is nothing essentially noble about the law of the majority either. It is merely the easiest way of being “democratic” with minorities. In the act of wholesale translation into English there can be a betrayal of the democratic ideal into the law of the strongest (Spivak, 1992, 371-372).

The point this hyper-conscientious theorist and translator makes boils down to the following: do not take what is considered universally “good” and “progressive” for granted. Reexamine. In certain contexts progressive ideas backfire. Politically, translation of minority feminists and their cultures is as much a balancing act as a foreignizing translation is linguistically. One imagines this is the reason Anzaldúa left significant portions of the text in Spanish, Chicano, and Nahuatl untranslated and, apparently, signed an agreement with the American radical publisher of her book not to sell the world translation rights.<sup>1</sup> Not all translation is helpful; some of the text will remain a mystery to the monolingual majority as long as this majority stays monolingual.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> From personal conversation with one of Aunt Lute’s editors.

<sup>2</sup> Non-translation as political protest is practiced by a number of poets writing in minority languages. One can find similar instances among Irish

## The Reading Comprehension Experiment

As the close reading of the examples above indicates, what looks like code-switching is a very carefully designed and balanced tool both in terms of linguistics and politics. The practical purpose of this tool is similar to that of a foreignizing translator, one who follows Venuti's lead by "experimenting" with non-standard linguistic norms (Venuti, 1995, 310). On the one hand, one wants to represent the culture or text of origin, to keep it authentic, not to erase it completely by bringing it into the dominant language entirely. On the other hand, to make oneself comprehensible and not outright repel the reader, one must translate. This contradiction puts similar pressure both on the writers we are discussing here and on foreignizing translators and calls for creative solutions: the making of a new readability. What follows is an analysis of the conditions for new readability created by Anzaldúa. I should emphasize again that these conditions will be different for different foreignizing devices and for different language pairs and that "readability" should always be bracketed as uncertain, partial, tentative understanding.

In three classes of eight, twelve, and six, I asked students without Spanish to study Anzaldúa's code-switching technique according to the following plan:

- 1) Read the text without a dictionary.
- 2) Find embedded segments that are no longer than one sentence (which was not hard to do as they are printed in cursive).
- 3) Determine thematic and/or functional categories into which one can group the segments in languages other than English.
- 4) Analyze how Anzaldúa makes these segments transparent (this made for a useful close-reading exercise).
- 5) Systematize your findings.

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poets, such as Nuala ni Dhumbhnaill and Bidy Jenkinson, who struggle with the idea of translating their poetry into English or outright reject it. Neither do I think Vasyl' Stoos, a Ukrainian poet who starved himself to death in a labor camp in the mid-1980s, would have fancied the idea of being translated into Russian.

Essentially, these are the textbook stages for terminological analysis in the translation industry. They align as follows:

<b>Analysis of Anzaldua's Code-Switching</b>	<b>Stages of Terminological Research (Dubuc, 1997)</b>
1. Read the text	1. Familiarization with the field that generates the terms
2. Find embedded segments	3. Term identification
3. Determine the categories into which one could group the embedded segments	2. Breakdown of the subject field
4. Analyze <i>how</i> Anzaldua makes these segments transparent	4. Contextual analysis
5. Systematize your findings	5. Standardization

**Table 1**

To read Anzaldua's text is to familiarize oneself with the subject field, i.e., the Chicano language and culture. For this specific text, where non-English segments are in cursive, it is easier to identify the terms first and then break the subject field into categories. That is why the order of terminological identification is reversed here. Item 4 is essentially contextual analysis and close reading combined. Item 5 is the systematization of Anzaldua's literary devices or translation techniques.

The following information has been gathered in the three classes and collated. The embedded fragments, following the students' report, can be grouped into the following categories:

- Chapter titles: "El otro Mexico," "La herencia de Coatlicue"
- Song lyrics and poems
- Proper names that signify, such as tribal or personal designations: *Aztecas del Norte*, *Yemaya*, *la Llorona*, *Cihuacoatl*, etc.
- Key cultural terms: *pueblo*, *el mar*, *la migra*, *sin papeles*, *mistizaje*, *los notreamericanos*, *ganado*, *gobacho*, *la mojada*, *raza*, *la facultad* (the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see deep structure)

below the surface), *la sena* (the mark of the beast), *susto* (the soul frightened out of the body), *mictlan* (the underworld)

- Exclamations: *me raja, me raja*
- Name-calling, culture-loaded emotional names for certain categories of people associated with social roles, race, ethnicity, occupation, or behavior (sometimes translated and sometimes not): *rajada, mujer mala, padrino, la abuela, papa, el patron, la gente, muchacha*, lowly *burras, los atravesados, mestizos, mexicanos, los gringos, coyotes, pasadores, engachadores, la mujer indocumentada, “una de las otras,”* (one of the Others), *mita y mita* (neither one, nor the other)
- Food and cultural realia: *enchiladas colorados, la gorra, el rebozo, la mantilla*
- Womens’ voices rendered in direct speech: “*Los hombres nomás quieren una cosa*”; men aren’t to be trusted, they are selfish and are like childre” (Anzaldúa, 1987, 17).

Following this analysis, the non-Spanish speakers created a spreadsheet on which they marked all the embedded segments from a chapter of their choice that they could or could not understand. Further, they marked the ones that they did understand and explained what made them understandable.

Here is an example of such a spreadsheet collated from several reports.<sup>3</sup> In chapter 1, one can find 90 embedded items of varied length in languages other than English. The transparent or semi-transparent for comprehension items are shaded. Less than 25% of them are not transparent:

<b>unit</b>	<b>transparent?</b>	<b>translated?</b>	<b>transl. strategy</b>
Aztecas	*	no	
del norte	*	no	
Anishinabeg	-	yes	(brackets)
Aztlan	-	yes	[square brackets]
Miro	-	no	

<sup>3</sup> Student responses have not been corrected for linguistic accuracy.

<b>unit</b>	<b>transparent?</b>	<b>translated?</b>	<b>transl. strategy</b>
el mar	*	no	Latin
atacar	*attack?	no	
la cerca en	around?		
con sus buchones de agua	with its ??? of water		Latin
Oigo el llorido del mar	-	no	
el respiro del aire	it breathes air?	no	cognate
tortilla curtain			translation from Spanish, inverted commas
el rio Grande	* great river	no	well known name
a pueblo	*	no	Latin
me raja	-	yes	beforehand
el mar	*	no/yes	a sentence/referent in the previous sentence is in English
Yemaya	*	no	context makes it clear
follows an untranslated poem	-	no	
es una herida abierta	-	no	the paragraph describes what it is but still unclear what it is called
Los atravesados	~degenerates? degraded ones?	no	described physically, not named
Gringos	*	no	known term
la migra		yes	
no corran	-	yes	right after
del otro lao	-	no	
sin papeles	*	no	the paragraph describes the situation & mentions papers; sans-Latin; cognate
la migra took him away	*	no	clear from context
Se lo llevaron			

<b>unit</b>	<b>transparent?</b>	<b>translated?</b>	<b>transl. strategy</b>
Se lo llevaron sin un centavo al pobre.	poor?	no	finishes the phrase he wanted to say when taken away?
Se vino andando desde Guadalajara.	-	no	
Tibueque	-a name?	no	
Vamonos	*	yes	in preceding line
Un pajarito canto	song?-	no	
los aztecas siguieron a los dioses Huitzilopochtli	aztecs let's sing to god H.	no	
mestizos	*	yes as a term	
En 1521 nació una nueva raza, el mestizo, el mexicano			Latin
conquistador	*	no	well known name
mestizaje	*	no	context makes it clear
El destierro/Lost Land			
tejanos	*	yes as a term	()
los norteamericanos	*	no	cognate
el río Nueces	*	no	
el río Grande	*	no	well known name
Con el destierro y el exilio fuimos desunados, destroncados, destripados	-	yes	same sentence, post-position, across a dash.
La tierra se puso bien seca y los animales comenzaron a morir de hambre. Mi papá se murió de un heart attack dejando a mamá embarazada y con ocho buercos, with eight kids and one on the way	*	yes	cognates, translations & context (see analysis in this essay) interjections of English create enough context to understand Sp.
Yo fui la mayor, tenía diez años.			cognate, basic Spanish
el ganado	*	no	contxt - animal disease
Se cayeron			interjections of English create

<b>unit</b>	<b>transparent?</b>	<b>translated?</b>	<b>transl. strategy</b>
			enough context to understand Sp.
en las pastas y el brushland			
panzas blancas			
El siguiente año	*	no	cognate, basic Sp.
Mi pobre madre	*	no	cognate
viuda perdió	-	no	
gabacho	*	no	context makes it clear
No hablaba inglés	*	no	basic Sp.
terreno	*	no	cognate
El cementerio estaba cercado	-	no	
enchiladas coloradas	*	no	borrowed; cognate
Ahora si ya tengo una tumba para llorar, dice Conchita	-	no	voice of an individual
La crisis	*	no	cognate
los gringos	*	no	well known name
maquiladoras	*	no	context makes it clear
cholo	-	no	name
pesoq	*	no	well known name
No hay trabajo	-	no	unless the next sentence is a translation
centavos	*	no	context makes it clear
La travesía	-	no	
Mexicanos del otro lado	-	no	associated with the title of the chapter. Is it a term that Mexicans know?
Dicen que cada mexicano...	-	no	the next sentence is a summary
A la cueva volverán	-	no	citation

<b>unit</b>	<b>transparent?</b>	<b>translated?</b>	<b>transl. strategy</b>
coyotes	*	no	term
pasadores	-	no	term
enganzhadores	-	no	term
Que dicen muchachos a echarsela de mojado	~	no	context makes it clear
la migracion de los pueblis mexicanos	*	no	cognates; context
el retorno	*	no	cognate
braceros	*	no	term, context
cucaracho	*	yes	()
mojados	-	yes	()
Virgen de Guadalupe	*	no	name
Ay virgencita morena, mi madrecita, dame tu benediction	*	no	cognates; basic Sp.
barrios	~ getos?	no	context makes it clear
coyotes	-	yes	()
mexicana	*	no	term
Se enferma de los nervios, de alta presion.	~		cognates; context
La mohada; la mujer indocumentada	*	no	cognates; basic Sp.

**Table 2. *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Analysis of Transparency of Embedded Languages.**

Column 4, Table 2 shows a finite number of ways to make the embedded language transparent that one might analyze and systematize. These strategies are translation, contextualization, summary or elaboration, use of Latinate vocabulary in common with English, use of the most basic Spanish, borrowings from Spanish into English, and cognates.

Here is a close-up of one student’s work based on the analysis of the following segment:

There was a *muchacha* who lived near my house. *La gente del pueblo* talked about her being *una de las otras*, “of the Others.” They said that for six months she was a woman who had a vagina that bled once a month, and that for the other six months she was a man, had a penis and she peed standing up. They called her half and half, *mita y mita*, neither one nor the other but a strange doubling, a deviation of nature that horrified, a work of nature inverted. But there is a magic aspect in abnormality and so-called deformity. Maimed, mad, and sexually different people were believed to possess supernatural powers by primal cultures’ magico-religious thinking. For them, abnormality was the price a person had to pay for her or his inborn extraordinary gift.

There is something compelling about being both male and female, about having an entry into both worlds. Contrary to some psychiatric tenets, half and halves are not suffering from a confusion of sexual identity, or even from a confusion of gender. What we are suffering from is an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other. It claims that human nature is limited and cannot evolve into something better. But I, like other queer people am two in one body, both male and female. I am the embodiment of the *hieros gamos*: the coming together of opposite qualities within. (Anzaldúa, 1987, 19)

Embedded Non-English Fragments	Meaning	Transparent (in E text)?	Translated (in E text)?	Why or How Comprehensible to Reader Who Doesn’t Know Spanish
muchacha	E: girl J: 少女	Y	N	Somewhat transparent due to associative context, but I had to look it up to make sure it meant “girl.”
la gente del pueblo	E: townspeople	Y	N	La gente came up before as people, and pueblo means home,

Embedded Non-English Fragments	Meaning	Transparent (in E text)?	Translated (in E text)?	Why or How Comprehensible to Reader Who Doesn't Know Spanish
	J: 町民 or 村人 (villagers)			so the meaning is somewhat transparent to those familiar with those words by associative context
una de las otras	E: one of the other J: 他の者	Y	Y	Translated as “one of the Others” in the text.
mita' y mita'	E: half and half J: 半々	Y	Y	Translated in the previous fragment.
hieros gamos	E: hieros gamos or hierogamy (“holy marriage”) J: ヒエロス・ガモス or ヒエロガミ (聖なる結婚)	Y	N	Somewhat transparent due to Greek origin and is defined in the text as “the coming together of opposite qualities within.”

**Table 3. Lisa Honda. Transparency Analysis of “Half and Half” from Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* (Anzaldúa, 1987, 19).**

Three out of five embedded segments are left untranslated, but are nevertheless deciphered by the student, who claims not to have had any Spanish in her schooling. The epistemological uncertainty of this reader manifests itself in the comments on transparency in column 5. “Somewhat transparent” figures three times, each time Anzaldúa chooses to forego the translation. The student had to look up even the most basic word, *muchacha*, once again exhibiting epistemological uncertainty. The necessity to look this word up also demonstrates the purity of the experiment in this case, as it indicates that the student had no previous exposure to Spanish.

Anzaldúa explores all syntactic variations and possibilities to vary her translation patterns. Within a sentence, Anzaldúa’s translation and explicitation can occur in post-position via a comma, in brackets, or over a semicolon. When the translation is long, it makes its own sentence. It also can occur in pre-position: “They called her half and half, ‘*mita y mita*’” (Anzaldúa, 1987, 19).

An example of a more complex technique, that of a summary, can be found on page 18:

Through our mothers, the culture gave us mixed messages: *No voy a dejar que ningun pelado desraciado maltrate a mis hijos*. And in the next breath it would say, *La mujer tiene que hacer lo que le diga el hombre*. Which was it to be—strong, or submissive, rebellious or conforming? (Anzaldúa, 1987, 18)

The last, English sentence gives the meaning to the previous two sentences in Spanish. True, it is a vague meaning—that of contradictory ideals imposed upon women—but it is recognizable from the vantage point of any traditional culture and therefore at this point sufficient for comprehension. Interestingly, the dubious, contradictory situation in which women in traditional cultures find themselves is replicated in the interstitial place of *mestiza* and in that of the readers' epistemological uncertainty.

Walcott also broadly uses this translation technique:

“Touchez-I, encore: N'aifendre choux-ous-ou, salope!”

“Touch it again, and I'll split your arse, you bitch!”

“Moi j'ai dire—'ous pas prêter un rien. 'Ous ni shallope, 'ous ni seine, 'ouscroire 'ous ni choeur campêche?”

“I told you, borrow nothing of mine. You have a canoe, and a net. Who you think you are? Logwood Heart?”  
(Walcott, 1990, 15-16)

...“Bon Dieu! Deja?”—meaning ‘Hell? Already?’”  
(Walcott, 1990, 117)

In this case, Walcott's translation techniques are less elaborate than those used by Anzaldúa. He simply repeats the same line in two languages. The relatively similar syntax of French and English, homogenized in creolization, allows the seamless repetition of the same lines with the same cadences reinforcing the poetic patterns, for poetry, and particularly epic poetry, welcomes repetition.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Here Homer comes to mind.

## Explicitation through Context

As is obvious from the explanations of transparency in both tables above, Anzaldúa practices translating embedded elements quite a bit. However, open translation is not the limit of Anzaldúa's translating techniques applied in this text. Several categories of embedded units listed above, such as signifying proper names; key cultural terms; exclamations; name-calling associated with culture-specific social roles, race, ethnicity, occupation, or behavior; as well as food and realia, prove so culture specific that essentially they possess the same depth of meaning as technical terms. Just throwing them into the flow of the English text would not make them clear as they are unique or too complex. Here an explanation is required, a context. That is why translation of such terms is problematic. Since Anzaldúa takes it upon herself to educate her monolingual readers and asks them to meet her halfway, she provides context for these cultural terms, to introduce their meaning and cultural significance (Anzaldúa, 1987, Preface).

Placing complex or unique terms in contexts that elucidate them to readers constitutes another common translation technique called "explicitation." Similar to the translation technique discussed above, explicitation also looks like code-switching; however, again, it is very different from oral practice. In the flow of speech bilingual speakers do not feel compelled to explain to each other the familiar terms they are using, no matter how complex. In Anzaldúa's written text, on the other hand, instead of experiencing the alienating chill of a fluent code-switching conversation, the monolingual reader becomes deeply engrossed in terminological analysis recommended for professional translators working with either new terms or terms that have no equivalents in the translating culture.

Many readers habitually glide over the words they do not know or do not understand as though the words were not there. Italicized words in a foreign language, as they are represented in Anzaldúa's text, beg to be ignored. This is why it is crucial to build confidence in our less experienced monolingual readers by teaching them how to use contexts and reinforcing the idea that they indeed can understand foreign words. Once again, terminological analysis with its categorization of various types of contexts comes to the rescue.

The passage below is an example of explaining through context. On first reading, a reader would probably just ignore four embedded foreign words. The paragraph can do without them:

*Soy nopal de castilla* like the spineless and therefore  
defenseless cactus that Mamagrande Ramona grew in  
back of her shed. I have no protection. So I cultivate

needles, nettles, razor-sharp spikes to protect myself from others (Anzaldúa, 1987, 45).

But Anzaldúa wants us to actually read her Spanish, Chicano, and Native American languages and to figure out what they mean. By page 45 one can rely on the author's efforts to accommodate the reader's lack of Spanish. In two out of three sentences in this paragraph she starts the sentences with "I." Let's try it with the first sentence as well: "I [am]... like the spineless and therefore defenseless cactus...." By page 45 we also know that Anzaldúa translates many of her terms and phrases within the same sentence; she has a system that she has trained us to be aware of. Is it possible then that "*nopal de castilla*" is the name for the cactus described? This is the moment where *my* brain links the foreign word to my personal experience: I suddenly recollect seeing an edible cactus in my local supermarket called "nopal" and not "cactus" for some reason. Now we have connected the dots—the embedded Spanish expression is a native name of a cactus. The meaning gleaned through personal experience of culture and exposure to its language is not a scientific method, of course; however, one has a sense that Anzaldúa relies on it anyway because she is not writing for specialists.

Of course, a reader who does not know Spanish will make mistakes. The readers' ability to understand Spanish (or any other embedded language) in this case will depend on the author-translator's skill to use the context and make the term transparent. Contexts vary from each other, they come in three different categories; therefore, explicitation of a term through context can also be done in three different ways (Dubuc, 1997, 71). And both writers discussed here use these tools to achieve various degrees of transparency.<sup>5</sup>

The first, most explicit context is called a "defining context." It contains the new term and sufficient semantic features (information) to provide a clear idea of its meaning. For example, "The *pocho* is an anglicized Mexican or American of Mexican origin who speaks Spanish with an accent characteristic of North Americans and who distorts and reconstructs the language according to the influence of English" (Anzaldúa, 1987, 56). In accord with her educational mission, Anzaldúa provides many definitions similar to this one. This, at times, gives her narrative the feel of a textbook.

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<sup>5</sup> I borrow this classification also from Robert Dubuc's textbook titled *Terminology: A Practical Approach*.

Here is a more complex (and more poetic) example of defining context from *Omeros*:

... I said, "Omeros,"  
and *O* was the conch-shell's invocation, *mer* was  
both mother and sea in our Antillean patois,  
*os*, a grey bone, and the white surf as it crashes  
and spreads its sibilant collar on a lace shore.  
(Walcott, 1990, 14)

As with other instances of linguistic uncertainty in our bilingual texts, this verse gives and takes away the meaning of the title term. One thought one knew it, and suddenly it falls apart before our very eyes, just like everything else has the potential to do in the interstices between languages.

Explanatory context is another, a bit less explicit, type of context. It gives the reader just enough information to understand the meaning of the term. It describes some characteristics of a concept, without necessarily defining it. For example, "If you get above yourself, you are *envidiosa*" (Anzaldúa, 1987, 18). Or, "I abhor some of my culture's ways, how it cripples its women, *como burras*, our strengths used against us, lowly *burras*, bearing humility with dignity. The ability to serve, claim the males, is our highest virtue" (Anzaldúa, 1987, 21). Even though one does not have the full definition or translation of the word *burras*, one has a sufficient number of characteristics of the creature it denotes to perceive the humiliating character of this name-calling and understand why the author "abhors" it. The cactus example above also engages explanatory context supplemented by translation of the word "nopal" as "cactus."

Still less explicit context is called "associative context." It does not contain any semantic features of the word with which it is engaged but allows the reader to link a term to the subject field through its association with the words around it. For example, "Those who make it past the checking points of the Border Patrol find themselves in the midst of 150 years of racism in Chicano *barrios* in the Southwest and in big northern cities" (Anzaldúa, 1987, 12). There is no definition or qualities assigned to the term in question, *barrios*. There are no characteristics that would describe the phenomenon, but it is clear that the word denotes a location of a certain type, perhaps an institution. One also knows *barrios* are terrible because they are associated with racism and the Border Patrol. The term is also associated with a geographical location (the Southwest) and a type of administrative or territorial unit, a big northern city. Therefore, *barrio* is not an institution but rather a

segment of a big city where immigrants from Mexico live. What a *barrio* is like can be determined either from the readers' personal experience of big cities or from the description of how poor Mexican immigrants live that immediately follows the quoted sentence.

Here is another example of associative context, this time from *Omeros*, engaging with a local name of a tree:

Once wind bring the news  
to the *laurier-cannelles*, their leaves start shaking  
the minute the axe of sunlight hits the cedars,  
because they could see the axes in our own eyes....  
(Walcott, 1990, 3).

From this associative context, the reader will have no trouble finding out that *laurier-cannelles* are special trees. They could be “cedars” mentioned in the next line or something else. Speakers with any sensitivity to Latin roots will recognize the genus as laurel—the associative context, the mention of “leaves,” cedars, and axes associated with tree cutting, points the readers' search for a cognate in the right direction. However, without looking the term up, such readers will not be able to tell that this particular laurel is a cinnamon tree, and the complex tragic symbolism of this Asian tree's presence in the Caribbean will escape them.

The employment of explanatory and associative contexts is much more sophisticated than the employment of defining context. Dealing with associative context, the reader has to actively engage with the writerly text and work very hard to wrestle new terms from the text and the culture that generated it.

Interestingly enough, the final stage of terminological analysis is standardization. A repertoire of methods such as those employed by Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La Frontera* allows her, and could allow a translator as well, to standardize and therefore normalize the initially alienating, if not shocking, experience of reading a bilingual text. Similarly, a foreignizing translation could become more “readable” if there is a consistent system to the method. In an able translator's hands, the arsenal of the terms that might be left in the original language together with the ability to recognize and manipulate or create explanatory and associative contexts is a viable tool for foreignizing translation. It is *the* tool for translating Anzaldúa and Walcott into other languages. Thus, the teaching of the same translation techniques can benefit both readers of writerly, difficult bilingual texts and foreignizing translators.

## Implications

The analysis of a multilingual text as outlined above has practical, theoretical, and pedagogical implications. The practical implication has to do with literary translation. If adopted for translation practice, the method of foreignizing a translation through code-switching will require that translators know their readers well so that they can help them to appreciate the words left in the original foreign language. Creating conditions for new readability, a translator will walk a narrow path between

- conveying the meaning of the original, both content and poetics;
- exposing the intensity of the cultural and linguistic interchange between the original and translating languages to a general public that, in its majority, does not know the language of the original; and
- creating linguistic support mechanisms for the monolingual reader that facilitate comprehension of the material with minimal interruption.

Most translators already practice the methods employed by Anzaldúa and Walcott, but not on such a grand scale. A beginning literary translator who might conduct the analysis that I have just detailed should be prepared to

- systematically identify terms and segments of text that could be embedded in translation in their original form;
- know the basic principles of code-switching and therefore understand the principles of well-formedness, i.e., the mechanics of how to embed foreign language into translation; and
- possess techniques of making embedded segments comprehensible to readers.

The last condition, again, implies that one knows the linguistic profile and aptitude of his or her readers well. Reading and analyzing Anzaldúa's, Walcott's, and similar works proves to be a concise, applied way to train students of translation in certain elements of literary translation that generally shies away from prescriptive rules.

Theoretical implications have to do with adjusting our understanding of differences between oral and written code-switching and with introducing or describing code-switching in a

written idiom as a literary device. Such adjustment broadens the repertoire of methods for foreignizing translations outlined by Venuti and enriches our experience of a resisting translation and resisting text. On a broader scale, code-switching and similar foreignizing techniques that render translation *writerly* embed relatively new translation theory within the more established literary paradigm of semiotics. This similarity between writerly translation and writerly text, more than any insistent rhetorical arguments, shows that literary translation *can become* original creative work akin to that of the best creative writing known to us.

The pedagogical implications for a monolingual student body are probably the most important. The first encounter with a foreign language in these texts can be taught effectively to monolingual students. It is thrilling to understand or decipher a language you do not know or had thought you did not know. Further, encountering foreign languages in bilingual contexts makes it surprisingly easy to learn them. After reading *Borderlands/La Frontera*, students might think, “I can do it. Spanish is easy!” Well, they don’t know what they are in for, but it is a start.

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