

Bilingualism represented in *How to tame a wild tongue* by Gloria Anzaldúa

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Abstract | This study aimed to analyse Gloria Anzaldúa's identity representation through her writing in *How to Tame a Wild Tongue* (Anzaldúa, 1987), where she uses English and Spanish alternately. It also aimed to collect non-Spanish speakers' impressions on this writing style. This study includes a summary of the analysed text and reports on a 2-question survey with non-Spanish speakers to examine their impressions regarding the use of Spanish in an English text. The study aimed to answer the following research questions: 1) How does Anzaldúa's writing style show her identity? 2) Why does she employ code switching in her writing? 3) What are the impressions of non-Spanish speaking speakers of English while reading Anzaldúa's text excerpts written in English and Spanish? Results indicated that Anzaldúa's writing represents her identity as someone not belonging to one, but to different cultures represented in her *Chicana* identity, as well as in the use of both English and Spanish to navigate the English and Spanish-speaking worlds. Furthermore, results indicate that the use of Spanish in her writing represents the need to connect to her Spanish-speaking audience. Participants indicated both positive and negative impressions related to their understanding of Anzaldúa's code switching between English and Spanish in her writing.

Keywords | bilingualism, identity, codeswitching, lexical transfer, language and culture.

1 INTRODUCTION

In our everyday life we do not always express our ideas directly. We often use figurative language, that is, we express certain ideas indirectly using figures of speech, or if we are bilingual, we may occasionally switch languages when communicating with our bilingual peers. Gloria Anzaldúa represents an example of a Spanish/English bilingual writer who embraced her identity, showing this through her writing. Some aspects of her style, more specifically her use of lexical transfer in her writing to mark her identity will be explored in this paper. According to Hoffmann (1991) bilingualism should be considered in two ways: bilingual individuals and bilingual communities. Bilingual individuals are proficient in more than one language, while bilingual communities are communities that are proficient in more than one language. For the purpose of this research, bilingualism is regarding someone's proficiency in more than one language, which includes Anzaldúa as well as the individuals in her audience who are speakers of both English and Spanish. Considering that this article focuses on Anzaldúa's writing style, bilingual books are understood to be books written in more than one language, regardless of whether the information is presented in all represented languages, or bilingualism is present using lexical transfer from one language to another, without translation.

In this paper the aim is to analyse Anzaldúa's writing style in *How to Tame a Wild Tongue* (Anzaldúa, 1987) and discuss what influenced the code-switching in her writing, marked by the use of Spanish words and phrases in her English texts. The term code-switching is defined as the switch from one language to another while communicating, influenced by the context in which the communication is taking place (Morrison, 2023). Though the term is used to refer to conversational settings, Anzaldúa's writing exemplifies how code-switching appears in writing. The research aimed to answer the following questions: 1) How does Anzaldúa's writing style show her identity? 2) Why does she employ code switching in her writing? 3) What are the impressions of non-Spanish speaking speakers of English while reading Anzaldúa's text excerpts written in English with Spanish? The methodology used to answer these three research questions included two main steps. First, other authors comments on Anzaldúa's writing were reviewed. Second, non-Spanish speaking speakers of English were asked to answer two questions,

Bilingualism represented in *How to tame a wild tongue* by Gloria Anzaldúa | Donzília Soares in writing, regarding an excerpt from *How to Tame a Wild Tongue*, to examine their impressions on reading a text written in English and Spanish.

The first part of this article introduces the text. The second discusses other authors' views of *How to Tame a Wild Tongue* by Anzaldúa. The next section describes the methodology and analyses responses collected from non-Spanish speakers who were given a short paragraph of *How to Tame a Wild Tongue*. The participants were asked two questions: 1) Are you able to understand the text written in English with the presence of Spanish words/sentences with no translation provided? 2) Why do you think the author wrote in that specific style, using two different languages? Finally, the results and discussion are presented and limitations of the study mentioned.

1.1 How to tame a wild tongue by Anzaldúa: A short summary

In *How to Tame a Wild Tongue*, a chapter in her autobiography *La Frontera/Borderlands*, Anzaldúa (1987) talks about her dilemma of not having her language and culture recognized and valued as it should be and living in a country (USA) and speaking a language (English) that is not hers. As a *Chicana*, a Mexican born in the USA, Anzaldúa, a speaker of more than five languages (varieties of Spanish and English), struggles with the various expectations of belonging to the different worlds that surround her. At school she is required to speak English, with her *Chicano* friends she is required to speak *Chicano* Spanish, whilst in other environments she is required to speak standard Spanish. *Chicano*, Anzaldúa's first language is considered a poor version of the Spanish language by many, and *Chicanos* feel like they do not belong anywhere; they do not belong to the English-speaking group, they do not belong to the Spanish-speaking group. As Anzaldúa explains, "In childhood we are told that our language is wrong. Repeated attacks to our native tongue diminish our sense of self...Racially, culturally, and linguistically *somos huerfanos* – we speak an orphan tongue." (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 75). Therefore, every opportunity is taken in her writing to show her roots, her identity, her language. In *How to Tame a Wild Tongue* she points out how her language and culture are important to her, and how she continues to fight to keep them alive inside her.

2 HOW TO TAME A WILD TONGUE BY ANZALDÚA: THE ANALYSIS

Anzaldúa was born in Texas, and "...is an educator and activist who presents herself as a *Chicana*, feminist, and lesbian" (Kellman, 2003, p. 100). Among her publications there is an autobiographical novel, a bilingual children's book, and a mixed genre collection. Anzaldúa passed away at the age of 61 and is well known because of her autobiography *Bortherlands/La Frontera*, published in 1987. This autobiography combined genres such as prose, poetry, history, fiction, and was written in two languages: English and Spanish. Anzaldúa grew up in South Texas, and even though her family, of Mexican heritage, struggled with poverty, she was able to receive a college education (Stone, 2004).

In *How to Tame a Wild Tongue* Anzaldúa explains that *Chicano* is a language that is not Spanish nor English; it is more of a fusion of these two languages and is spoken by the *Chicano* people (Kellman, 2003) in the USA. Phrases like "...un lenguaje que corresponde a un modo de vivir...neither espanol ni ingles...patois..." (Anzaldúa, 1987, pp 35-36) are examples of her use of Spanish words to describe the language. As a speaker of a variety of languages which translate into different varieties of English and Spanish, she described the difficulties of being a *Chicana* and not identifying with either the American or Spanish language. She also used different figures of speech, with metaphor being the most common one. For instance, she talked about "linguistic terrorism" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 80) and she used a number of Mexican sayings, as for instance "*Quien tiene boca se equivoca*" [He who has a mouth makes mistakes], and "*Dime con quien andas y te dire quien eres*", [Tell me who your friends are and I will tell you who you are], amongst others (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 81).

Anzaldúa switched from English to Spanish in her writing as a way of showing her identity. As stated by Peregoy et al. (2013), "because the language we speak is so interwoven with our early socialization to family and community, it forms an important element of our personal identity..." (p. 245). In other words, the environment that surrounds us, the culture, the language, play an important role in who we are and who we identify ourselves to be. For someone who does not speak Spanish, it may not be possible to understand a text like *How to Tame a Wild Tongue* because Spanish words and phrases are often used and are not always followed by a translation in English.

Anzaldúa's writing is thoroughly influenced by this use of Spanish, and this is a product of the environment she grew up in, where she was surrounded by English, Spanish, and *Chicano*, and often had to switch between these languages to interact with others. Though Anzaldúa's bilingual writing style may not bring a positive experience for all readers, considering that not everyone may be able to understand her message, in her writing she found a way to use both Spanish and English to state her identity as a speaker not of one or the other language, but a speaker of all, intertwined with American and Mexican/*Chicano* cultures.

Bornstein-Gomez (2010) analyses *La Frontera/Borderlands* and how it is related to social, cultural, political, and individual power in his study entitled *Gloria Anzaldúa: Borders of Knowledge and (re)Signification*. This study defends that Anzaldúa indicated ideas of the self and culture as human constructs destined to develop a transformative perspective of the dominant social order and the human experience. Anzaldúa's collection is analysed also from a political point of view. Some of Anzaldúa's discourse strategies discussed by Bornstein-Gomes (2010) are inversion, multiple linguistic codes, mixture of genres, and subject construction. Donadey (2007) also presents an analysis of Anzaldúa's autobiography, *Borderlands* in her study. As discussed by Donadey (2007), "In *Borderlands*... Anzaldúa makes her argument bilingually, constantly code-switching between the two colonial languages (English and Spanish) ...in doing so, she beautifully enacts linguistically the mestizo space she is calling for." (p. 15). With this statement Donadey also points out Anzaldúa's strong desire to emphasise her identity as a *Chicana*. This example of code switching shows the power of figurative language as well as the use of foreign terminology to show her identity. Anzaldúa's use of these strategies is what made her writing so rich, and what shows the world who she was and how she valued her roots.

Ramsdell (2004) focuses on the linguistic autobiography of three "latino" writers in the United States: *Hunger of Memory* by Richard Rodriguez (1983), *Heading South, Looking North: A Bilingual Journey* by Ariel Dorfman (1998), and *How to Tame a Wild Tongue* by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987). When discussing Anzaldúa's writing and identity, Ramsdell emphasizes the power of language and how Anzaldúa expressed her awareness of that with examples from her childhood. Indeed, language has the power to enable us to

communicate concepts and meaning, but it also allows us to show cultural aspects of our lives. Through language, we are able to understand not only the words being spoken or written, but we can also learn about identity and culture.

In an interview conducted by Reuman (Reuman & Anzaldúa, 2000), Anzaldúa talked about her own perspective of *La Frontera/Bortherlands* (1987). From the different audiences who read the book, to the different critics and compliments, this extensive interview touches so many points of Anzaldúa's writing, most specifically in *La Frontera/Borderlands* and the message she wanted to convey as a *Chicana*. When talking about her audience, Anzaldúa stated that her primary audience was women, feminists, *Chicanas*, as well as people who were willing to open their minds and explore new things. During the interview, she pointed out that "Some poems...in Spanish...have particular audiences...Mexican and *Chicano*, Spanish-speakers, white people who can read Spanish" (Reuman & Anzaldúa, 2000, p. 18). This statement answers the question as to why Anzaldúa used Spanish in her writing. She used her language to connect with people by sharing her culture through language. Anzaldúa also stated in this interview that when using Spanish or even poems in Spanish, they are for a particular audience; for those of Mexican heritage that can read Spanish. This is how Anzaldúa selected her audience, and limited some of her works to those who were connected to her through Spanish language and culture. Anzaldúa also pointed out how difficult it was for her to stay true to her roots and at the same time be realistic about the world around her. In her own words: "...if I allow the Eurocentric part of me too much space, it means that I have turned my back on my race, the *Chicanos* and *Mexicanos*. If I stick too much to the nationalism, then it means I'm not being realistic..." (Reuman & Anzaldúa, 2000, p. 20). Pressure is very evident here, and that could be another reason for Anzaldúa's style of combining both languages. Even though she understood who she was, her heritage and identity, we see how Anzaldúa would struggle to stay true to her roots while at the same time living in a different world and culture. The argument here is that Anzaldúa wasn't only *Chicana*, or only American. She was a mixture of both. Perhaps due to her concern to stay true to her *Chicano* heritage, she failed to recognize that she also belonged to the American culture, and that embracing both sides of her identity made it possible for her to navigate the two worlds surrounding her.

Language is very powerful, and someone's identity is connected with the number of languages they speak, and when we talk about speaking different languages, we must also understand what that means regarding belonging to or having a working understanding of the different cultures connected to these languages. Fernsten (2008) reported on a case study conducted with a student, Mandy (pseudonym) who was born in Korea but travelled to the USA as a child. Mandy attended school in the USA from kindergarten but was still placed in an English as a Second Language (ESL) class in elementary school because her parents spoke Korean at home. This study addresses Mandy's self-constructed identify as a writer identity, and her idea of not being a good writer. This is of relevance in this study because identity is very important when it comes to speakers of more than one language. Just like Anzaldúa, Mandy spoke more than one language, and saw her writing influenced by this factor. In Mandy's case, she always perceived her writing in the English language as inferior because of the influence of the Korean language. However, her writing shows who she is and the background she comes from, and the same happens with Anzaldúa.

Anzaldúa was able to use her writing skills to show her thoughts, who she was, and her own identity. In *La Frontera/Bortherlands*, she not only talked about the difficulties of cultural and identity oppression, but she also talked about the physical difficulties that *Chicano* people faced when they were driven off their own land. Also, through lexical transfer she was able to select her audience, making a statement on how we can connect with others through language and culture.

In *La Frontera/Bortherlands*, Anzaldúa also discussed many of the political issues that caused Mexico to lose part of its territory to the USA, leaving many Mexicans trapped on the other side of the border. Texas, Arizona, and California are some of the places where *Chicanos* are found because those were some of the territories that belonged to Mexico (Anzaldúa, 1987). This may be one of the reasons why *Chicanos* have had problems being identified as both North Americans and Mexicans. Because of a fight for power, they saw themselves separated from their motherland, Mexico, having to fight to keep their own identity in a land that politics says is no longer theirs.

3 METHODS AND RESULTS: A DISCUSSION OF NON-SPANISH SPEAKERS'**PERCEPTIONS OF ANZALDÚA'S WRITING**

This study aimed to analyse Anzaldúa's identity representation in *How to tame a wild tongue* (1987), as well as collect information on non-Spanish speakers' reactions while reading Anzaldúa's bilingual writing. The following research questions were asked: 1) How does Anzaldúa's writing style show her identity? 2) Why does she use code switching in her writing? 3) What are the impressions of non-Spanish speaking English speakers while reading Anzaldúa's text excerpts written in English with Spanish? To find the answers, a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis was implemented. A two-question questionnaire was designed based on an excerpt of *How to tame a wild tongue* to collect information on non-Spanish speakers' understanding of the message. The excerpt selected included Spanish words and phrases in an English text, specifically to test non-Spanish speakers understanding of the text. Furthermore, the two questions were designed considering the aim of the research in understanding their reaction and feedback regarding their contact with a text containing words and phrases in a language they do not speak.

For the data collection procedure, participants were first given an explanation of the purpose of the research as well as an explanation on the study procedures and their role in answering the questions to the best of their ability. Seven individuals participated in the study, and data was collected individually. All seven participants were American, non-Spanish speakers, with ages ranging from 23-51, and all were females. Having all completed a college degree, they studied one or two semesters of Spanish as a foreign language but considered themselves to have very little knowledge of the Spanish language, placing them at the beginner proficiency level. The data collection procedure took place as follows: first, they were instructed to read a short passage of *How to tame a wild tongue* by Anzaldúa (1987) written in English and containing Spanish words and phrases; then they were given the two following questions: 1) Are you able to understand the text written in English despite the presence of untranslated Spanish words/sentences? Why or why not? 2) Why do you think the author wrote in that specific style, using two different languages? Answers were recorded in writing and collected by

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the researcher immediately after participants finished answering the questions. Each participant went through the procedure individually, and the data was collected from all participants over the course of one week. The passage provided read as follows:

I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess- that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler. I remember being sent to the corner of the classroom for "talking back" to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do was tell her how to pronounce my name. "If you want to be an American, speak 'American.' If you don't like it, go back to Mexico where you belong."

"I want you to speak English. *Pa' hallar buen trabajo tienes que saber hablar el ingles bien. Que vale toda tu educacion si todavia hablas ingles con un 'accent.'*" My mother would say, mortified that I spoke English like a Mexican.

(Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 34)

Inductive coding was used (Fielding & Verd, 2021) to categorize the data into three categories:

Category 1 - understanding of the text;

Category 2 - attitudes towards the writing style, and finally

Category 3 - opinions regarding the writing style.

Answers to the first question provided data regarding categories 1 and 2, whilst data from the second question provided data for category 3. Regarding the three categories, it was interesting to see how the participants formulated their response. The two tables below summarize the responses obtained:

Question 1	Understanding of the text	Attitudes towards the text
<p>Are you able to understand the text written in English despite the presence of untranslated Spanish words/sentences? Why or why not?</p>	<p><i>Participant 1</i>- a little bit, something about speaking English well, having an accent, and education.</p> <p><i>Participant 2</i>- it has to do with good work, speaking English well, no accent.</p> <p><i>Participant 3</i>- the importance of not having an accent to have a good education.</p> <p><i>Participant 4</i>- how bad it is not to be able to speak English.</p> <p><i>Participant 5</i>- It has to do with speaking English, but I don't know exactly what it means.</p> <p><i>Participant 6</i>- I have absolutely no clue.</p> <p><i>Participant 7</i>- It's difficult to understand.</p>	<p><i>Participant 6</i> - it's annoying that you can only understand parts of it.</p> <p><i>Participant 7</i> - I could not read a whole book like this.</p>
Question 2	Opinions towards the text	
<p>Why do you think the author wrote in that specific style, using two different languages?</p>	<p><i>Participant 1</i>- So that we could relate to her and feel how she's feeling since it's probably hard for her to communicate without speaking English very well.</p> <p><i>Participant 2</i>- She's angry and cannot translate so she speaks Spanish.</p> <p><i>Participant 3</i>- She tries to hold on to her heritage while demonstrating to the reader the difficulties of learning a new language and being forced to adapt and others can't understand.</p> <p><i>Participant 4</i>- Maybe she didn't know how to say that in English.</p> <p><i>Participant 5</i>- She probably does not speak English well enough.</p> <p><i>Participant 6</i>- I think it is because she is a native Spanish speaker.</p> <p><i>Participant 7</i>- No response.</p>	

Results indicated that 60% percent of participants had some understanding of the Spanish parts of the text and did not show any objections to this writing method. On

the other hand, those who were not able to understand the text were annoyed by this fact and showed a negative attitude towards this writing style. The data shows a correlation between understanding the texts and having a positive attitude towards it, versus not being able to understand and expressing frustration at not being able to understand, which reflected in a negative attitude towards the text. In answering the first question - Are you able to understand the text written in English despite the presence of untranslated Spanish words/sentences? participants who were able to grasp an idea of the information in Spanish centred their answers around the ability to speak English without an accent and the effects it has on one's education, which was related to the information represented in Anzaldúa's Spanish words in the passage provided, as read in the excerpt: "*Que vale toda tu educacion si todavia hablas ingles con un 'accent.'*" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 34), which in English means: What is your education worth, if you still speak English with an accent. The following excerpt: "My mother would say mortified that I spoke English like a Mexican" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 34) may also have had an influence in participants understanding the Spanish excerpt, as it provided them with context, in English, as to how speaking English and "sounding" like a Mexican was perceived to be negative. The expression "sounding" like a Mexican may be interpreted as having a Spanish accent while speaking English. The passage provides information not only about Anzaldúa's writing style, but it also provides insight into her command of both English and Spanish as a child, suggesting she may have had a Spanish accent when speaking English growing up.

Regarding question two - Why do you think the author wrote in that specific style, using two different languages? , 57% of participants believed the reasons were related to the author not being able to speak English correctly and being unable to translate Spanish into English. This was also interesting to observe because, in fact we know that Anzaldúa spoke different languages, including English, but from the participants' perspective, the inability to speak English could have been the reason for using Spanish in her writing. Going back to the excerpt of the passage where speaking English with an accent might be perceived as having a negative effect on one's success, we also infer that this information might have also influenced participants opinion on the text. Though one participant did not provide an answer to question two, 40% of participants were able

Bilingualism represented in *How to tame a wild tongue* by Gloria Anzaldúa | Donzília Soares to understand the complexity of languages and heritage and gave more detailed answers. From reading the passage, they expressed the understanding that the author may have used Spanish in her writing on purpose, for the following reasons: 1) to allow readers the opportunity to connect through the experience of not being able to understand or speak a language well; 2) to express her own needs (the author's needs) to stay connected to her bilingual and bicultural heritage. They also understood that the author wanted to bring to the attention of the readers how difficult it may be to learn to communicate in another language. Though we know Anzaldúa's use of Spanish in her writing had nothing to do with her ability to express herself in the English language, participants' views give insight into how non-Spanish speakers may relate to Anzaldúa's writing style. As the data shows, the participants who were unable to understand Spanish naturally felt annoyed and disengaged with the text. Furthermore, the data also capitalizes on the fact that Anzaldúa wrote in Spanish for people who could, in fact, understand Spanish. We infer that Anzaldúa may have believed that people who spoke Spanish were able to relate to her reality in a different way than people who didn't, so she reserved part of her writing to those who could relate to it.

The data described above suggests that Anzaldúa's strategy to select her audience may have been successful. Those who were able to understand both English and Spanish would be those who in some way would have something in common with Anzaldúa, this being the two languages, even if they did not share the same Mexican background as Anzaldúa.

4 FINAL THOUGHTS

Language is very powerful, and a writer's identity relates to the number of languages they speak. Anzaldúa was able to show her sense of self and identity in her writing by code-switching between English and Spanish. This was also a way she found of selecting her audience, which means it was intentionally done. Fernsten's (2008) study of Mandy is just an example of how bilingual writers can perceive themselves and how their identity relates to the languages they speak.

According to the data collected, and regarding the three research questions stated at the beginning of this paper, we conclude that Anzaldúa used Spanish phrases/sentences and figurative language to show the readers her identity as an English and Spanish speaker, as well as to select her audience through the use of Spanish in her English writing. Concerning question two, the bibliographical data shows that Anzaldúa used Spanish words in her writing as a way to not only select, but also connect with her bilingual audience, possibly opening space for her audience to connect with her as well as through their own bilingual identity. Finally, it can be seen that the participants who could understand some Spanish had a better understanding of why the author wrote in the style that she did, while those who were not able to understand the message experienced a level of frustration. Anzaldúa selected which readers she wanted to be able to understand certain messages that she shared. Even though we understand that she targeted mostly women and feminists, as previously discussed, she decided what she wanted to share with English speakers, Spanish speakers, *Chicano* speakers, and bilingual speakers of both languages.

This study certainly contributes to the research on bilingual identity despite the following aspects: First, participants were not provided with background information about Anzaldúa, and no discussion about the topic took place apart from a short explanation of the objectives and procedures related to the research. Additionally, the number of participants was small, which prevents the findings from being generalized. However, it is believed that this study provides insight into bilingual identity and bilingual writing. Thus, it can potentially support research on bilingual studies, providing insight into three different perspectives: first, the perspective of the bilingual writer that chooses to code-switch between languages, second, the perspective of the bilingual reader who is able to relate to this type of writing style, and finally, the perspective of the non-bilingual reader who is unable to relate to this type of writing style. Ultimately, this study shows how we can learn to look at code-switching in writing not only as the use of language, but an expression of identity and as a strategy for audience selection.

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