Fanfiction: Romance, Adventure, and Mock Spanish

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1. Introduction

In this paper, I hope to contribute to the literature on language ideology, or what a group of people thinks about language (Woolard and Shieffelin, 1994). The literature on language ideology, especially the ideology surrounding Spanish use (or use of any language other than English) in the United States is not small, e.g. Silverstein's (1998) discussion of the "monoglot standard," in which the use of languages other than English is seen as irrational. Lippi-Green (1994, 1997) discusses the ways in which speaking accented English can be a tool for discrimination as well as the court system's validation of such discrimination. There are also discussions of the way that people who are not speakers of a language, (Spanish, in this case), appropriate that language for their own purposes, as in Hill's (1998) discussion of Mock Spanish, a strategy in which "Spanish" words are used in order to index a funny and cultured personality on the part of the speaker, but the use of which, she notes, is funny only because the hearer and speaker both are accessing racializing images of Spanish speakers. Barrett (2006) describes another use of Mock Spanish, in which Anglo restaurant employees use Mock Spanish in a doomed attempt to communicate with Spanish-speaking employees and expect to be understood.

This paper discusses a study of ideologies about Spanish use as found in media, specifically a series of young adult novels and a collection of fanfiction based on those novels. I approach media following Spitulnik's (1993) call for ethnographic research when studying the ways that media reflects and shapes society. Therefore, I look not only at how the use of Spanish, or metalinguistic commentary on Spanish use or Spanish accents is used in a piece of media, but also how fanfiction writers pick up what is found in the books and recirculate that in their own stories. Although there is undoubtedly much to be said about what identities the writers are attempting to project by including Spanish in their stories, I do not touch on that here. Instead, I limit myself to analyzing what the writers make their characters do, and how that is representative of language ideology.

2. Data

Data comes from a series of young adult fantasy novels, collectively called the *Young Wizards* series, written by Diane Duane. The series follows the adventures of Nita and Kit, two teenage wizards who must, through the course of the series, save Manhattan, the

Texas Linguistics Forum 54:50-56 Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Symposium About Language and Society – Austin April 15-17, 2011 © Lawrence 2011 world, the ocean, Mars, and the universe from the forces of entropy, all while dealing with bullying, first love, and annoying siblings. The series is comprised of nine novels, the titles and original publication dates of which are shown below:

So You Want to Be a Wizard, 1983 Deep Wizardry, 1985 High Wizardry, 1990 A Wizard Abroad, 1993 The Wizard's Dilemma, 2001 A Wizard Alone, 2002 Wizard's Holiday, 2003 Wizards at War, 2005 A Wizard of Mars²², 2010

This series was chosen because although it is an English-language series written by an Anglo author, one of the main characters, Kit, is identified as Latino, and there is a sprinkling of metalinguistic commentary and Spanish found throughout the series. This seems to be a characteristic of the series that is fairly salient to readers. One reviewer, "M," says "The characters in this series are obviously chosen for their "diversity" and not their appeal, because they are both boring and one-dimensional," in her review posted on the Amazon.com page for the first book in the series, *So You Want to be a Wizard*. There are also many examples of Spanish use and metalinguistic commentary used in the fanfiction corpus, often taken either verbatim or reinterpreted from the Spanish use in the original series.

The use of a series penned by an Anglo author presents an interesting counterpoint to Callahan's (2000) study of metalinguistic reference in a corpus of novels written by Latino authors. By looking at this series, I hope to provide some documentation about the language ideologies found in media produced by the matrix, Anglo culture.

Other data comes from fanfiction stories based on the *Young Wizards* series. "Fanfiction" refers to the practice in which fans of a given media object write their own stories within the same universe, using either the characters found in the original media, or characters or characters they create themselves. Fanfiction stories range in length from a page or two to novel-length, with chapters normally published serially. These stories are then published at various internet sites, so that other people can read and comment on the stories. All the fanfiction studied here comes from the website fanfiction.net, which houses a huge number of fanfiction stories. These stories are based on the worlds found originally in books, anime, TV shows, movies, video games, comics, theatre and cartoons. There are also other fanfiction sites, often devoted to fanficition based on a specific media object (harrypotterfanfiction.com hosts over 65,000 stories, all based on the *Harry Potter* series). In this corpus, I included all fanfiction stories listed as "complete" as of February 20, 2009, on the website fanfiction.net, in the *Young Wizards* collection.

Fanfiction presents a unique way for people to engage with media. I assume that what writers make their characters do and say as they write fanfiction is reflective of their ideologies. That is, what people have their characters do in a piece of fanfiction is reflective of what they think about the way types of people should and do act. In the fanfiction world, one of the important "rules" is to write so that the characters are acting as they "should." Readers, if they feel that the character has been written to act uncharacteristically, will often leave a review noting that the character seems "OOC," or "out of character," asserting pressure on the writer to interpret a character in such a way as is normal or characteristic of that "type" of person.

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 $^{^{22}}$ Data from this book was not included, because it was not yet published at the time that I carried out the study in early 2009.

Fanfiction, in addition to being a concrete remnant of someone's interaction with a piece of media, is unique in that it then becomes a piece of media for consumption by others, which is interesting in itself. Fanfiction writers do read and review the stories written by others, so if a given piece of a story is salient to them, they can then recycle that in their own work. One example is discussed below in which it seems quite clear that part of one fanfiction story was quite impressive to another author--so much so that she uses nearly exactly the same words to describe a similar situation in her own story.

So, as fanfiction writers attempt to create new stories but keep the characters acting the way they "ought" to, writers are interpreting the characters. The words that writers put into those characters' mouths are emblematic of what writers think about the way that groups of people do or should talk and when they should talk that way—that is, they are emblematic of language ideology.

I specifically look at bits of language and metalinguistic commentary that are presented in the original series, and then recycled in the fanfiction stories, whether they are recycled verbatim or thematically. It is my assumption, therefore, that the pieces of language that are recycled represent the most salient parts of the media object—the parts that are both reflective of and acting to shape language ideology.

3. Spanish use

By far, most of the Spanish use or commentary about accents comes during highly emotional—most often romantic—scenes. Characters may use Spanish phrases in these scenes, there may be metalinguistic commentary on that Spanish use, or there may be a mention that a character's Spanish accent gets stronger. In addition, Spanish-based nicknames or endearments are used to index familial or romantic relations. These uses are presented in the core series and recycled in fanfiction.

3.1 Emotional Spanish Use

In the core series, Spanish words are several times used in emotional situations. In example (1) below, it is used to show frustration:

(1) (Nita to Kit)²³ "Yeah, but my mom's getting suspicious. And we have to be back by dark or it'll get worse."

Kit said something under his breath in Spanish.

"*Ay*!" Nita said back, a precise imitation of what either of Kit's folks would have said if they'd heard him (Duane, 2001b, p. 127).

In this example, Kit uses Spanish, presumably an expletive, judging from Nita's reaction, as a result of his anger or frustration. A similar example from the first book in the series, *So You Want to Be a Wizard*, is shown in (2):

(2) He let out what looked like a breath of irritation and put his hands on his hips. *"Cojones,"* he muttered, shaking his head... (Duane, 2001a, p. 48)

These two examples both show Spanish use in frustrating situations. In the fanfiction based on the series, Spanish is again often used in emotional situations, such as in (3).

²³ I have kept the typography and spelling true to the original, adding the information necessary to identify speech participants in parentheses, where this is unclear.

(3) (Kit) "She seemed like she knew what I was talking about. So I figured she knew about wizards. "Ah por qué mi!"

By far, however, the most common use of Spanish in fanfiction is in "romantic" situations, rather than in other situations with heightened emotions, although this may be an artifact of the fact that one of the most popular themes (impressionistically) for fanfiction is developing the love story between the two main characters. The example below is from a scene in which Kit proposes to Nita from Yee Mun's story "Things are Going to Get Better."

- (4) Inside the box was a yellow gold ring with a simple diamond. Around the band was "yo amar tu, para siempre"...
 - (Kit) "Yo amar tu. Tu eres el amar por mi vida."
 - "Si, tu es mi amar, mi amigo, mi novie, y mi amante." Nita said.

In addition to the above examples, where Spanish itself is actually used, there are several examples in which Kit's Spanish accent is portrayed as "coming out" in emotional situations, as shown in (5), where Nita and Kit are talking about their future together, from the story "Imagine," by polka-dotted-penguins.

(5) "What if we're not meant to get married, eh?" His accent becoming more and more rich the more agitated he became, a thick blend of Spanish and New York all twisted into one. Deep and comforting. Utterly unique.

Again in examples (6) and (7) from opera nerddd's "Staying Home," both from a scene in which the characters are visiting a grave, Kit's accent is portrayed as getting stronger.

- (6) "You manage to look up once you've finished talking to yourself in that rich Spanish, spun with the flavor of an obvious New York accent, making a dark tone all your own. Another sigh before you begin."
- (7) "You (sic) accent became thicker, richer, the more distressed you became."

The above examples are especially interesting because there is an obvious similarity in the language used to describe Kit's accent in examples (5) and (6). In both, it is described as "unique," and "rich," along with other positive adjectives. It is also described as sort of blend of Spanish and a New York accent. However, these two examples are not from stories written by the same author. Instead, it appears that the author of example (6) found the description in (5) striking and memorable, and chose to use similar words in her own story.

In the above examples, either Spanish is used in an emotional situation, or the character's accent is described as getting stronger. While this is presented in the original series, the fanfiction writers have picked up the strategy and used it in their own work.

3.2 Endearments

Spanish is also commonly used in endearments, which also seems to fall under the broad category of "emotional" speech. This practice used in the core series and then commonly encountered in fanfiction as well. The following examples show various endearments found in the books:

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- (8) "Kit, *querido*," Kit's mama said, "if you feed that dog so many dog biscuits, you'll spoil his appetite for dinner" (Duane, 2003, p. 148).
- (9) "'El Niño, ' Nita said, under her breath, grinning. It was what Kit's family called him sometimes, a pun—both the word for "the baby" and the name for a Pacific current that caused storms that could devastate whole countries. The name made Kit crazy and Nita loved to use it on him" (Duane, 2001b, p. 35)
- (10) (Nita) "Watch it El Niño-" (Duane, 2001b, p. 176)
- (11) (Kit's mother) "Okay, brujito." (Duane 2002, p. 334)

Again, endearments are picked up and reused in fanfiction—at times, the nicknames *El Niño* and *bruj(it)o* '(little) wizard' are used. At other times, however, it is the *strategy* of using Spanish as a source for nicknames that is picked up. In example (12) below, Shima and Tempis has picked up the specific nicknames that are used in the books for use in her story "A Wizard's Pet."

(12) "Hey, *El Niño*, why aren't you helping?" Dairine asked impatiently, and Kit shot Nita a glare for teaching her sister the god-awful nickname.

In other examples, however, writers use Spanish as a source for nicknames, as in the examples in (13)-(15), where the author "The Magic Bringer" has taken the English "partner" and translated it into Spanish, giving *pareja* as an endearment in his story "Brightening the Sun."

- (13) (Kit to Nita) "Sure are, pareja."
- (14) (Kit to Nita) "What is it, pareja?"
- (15)(Kit to Nita) "It's alright, pareja. You'll be fine, I promise."

The same strategy is apparent in example (16), where both Kit (Christopher) and his mother make use of Spanish phrases that are used as endearments in Marixoxella's story "The Absolute Only Thing Magic CAN'T Do."

(16) "Oh, *niño, mi niñito*, Christopher darling, you look gorgeous!" Mrs. Rodriguez exclaimed.

"*Mama, yo se*, I know, you said the same thing through all my years." Kit muttered as his father straightened his bowtie he had made Kit wear.

As the above examples show, the use of Spanish in emotional situations, and the use of Spanish as a source for endearments, is a commonly-used strategy in the corpus. These are presented in the main series, but, more interestingly, they are seized upon and recycled by authors of fanfiction, suggesting that these strategies are reflective of the way in which readers of the series think about Spanish use within American culture--as a sort of tendency that "bubbles up," given the right emotional circumstances, when one's guard has been let down.

4. Mock Spanish

Interestingly, there are very few examples of Mock Spanish in the corpus. Mock Spanish, as originally described in Hill (1998), is the use of Spanish words or morphology in such a way as it attributes a jocular, cosmopolitan persona to the speaker, but is inherently racializing, since the hearer must have access to racist images of Spanish speakers in order to get the joke.

Although Mock Spanish is prototypically a discourse that takes place between two Anglos speakers, Barrett (2006) discusses the use of Mock Spanish at a restaurant, finding that Anglo employees used Mock Spanish with Spanish-speaking employees and actually expected to be understood. That is, the Anglo employees seemed unaware that Mock Spanish and "real" Spanish were not the same thing. Interestingly, in this corpus the use of Mock Spanish is fairly rare, occurring only once in the main series (and recycled once in fan fiction).

Hill (1998) identifies four strategies of Mock Spanish. Hyperanglicization, or using Spanish words with (overly) English pronunciation, is the relevant strategy here. In Hill's example, *gracias* is pronounced as "grassy-ass." Barrett (2006) also has such an example, where an Anglo employee tries to ask a Spanish-speaking employee to fill the ice (*hielo*) by asking for "yellow." In (17), Nita (short for Juanita, although the character isn't identified as having Hispanic heritage), is tormented by her enemy Joanne, after showing up at school in a short skirt.

(17) Nita headed for the gate, ignoring the voices behind her, even the loudest one. "Hey, Miss WAH-neeta, where'd you send away for those legs?" (Duane, 2002, p. 216).

In this example, I understand the spelling "WAH-Neeta" to represent a hyperanglicized pronunciation of "Juanita," a traditionally Hispanic name, and an example of Mock Spanish. To understand the joke in this example, one has to understand that Joanne is calling Nita promiscuous, especially in light of the short-skirt context, and the rest of the insult ("where'd you send away for those legs?"). Promiscuity is exactly one of the "racializing images" that Hill says one must have of Spanish speakers in order to "get the joke" in Mock Spanish. Interestingly, however, while Hill (1998) notes that Mock Spanish attributes positive character traits to the speaker, in this example it is used as a strategy to underscore the antagonism of the speaker. Joanne has already been established as an antagonist, and the racializing function of Mock Spanish serves to underscore her general nastiness. In the example below, a fan fiction writer identified as Sofricus Aurora Zakuro has picked up the Mock Spanish version of "Juanita," and put it into her own story, *LoveSpell*.

- (18) "Hey, Miss WAH-Neeta," a familiar voice grated in Nita's ear. Already fed up with her bad day, Nita glowered at her old nemesis, chief annoyance, and most popular girl in the high school, Joanne Virella.
 - "I said hello, WAH-Neeta" Joanne replied, louder, as she shoved the younger girls arm. "I expect a response!"

In this example, the writer has picked up on the antagonizing function of the discourse, and, interestingly, uses it to fortify Joanne's antagonistic character in her own story.

5. Conclusion

The use of Spanish words and phrases in this corpus show that there are certain elements of Spanish use presented in media—in this case, the main book series, that are picked up and recirculated by authors of fanfiction. The pieces of discourse that are used this way seem to be salient to the readers who then pen their own fanfiction stories, suggesting that these pieces are reflective of and serve to shape or reinforce their own ideas about language use. In the corpus, the use of Spanish or metalinguistic reference to Spanish is most commonly used in emotional situations. Accents, rather than being portrayed as a hindrance, are described as a positive character trait (although it should be noted that these accents only seem to come out under the emotional circumstances described above). Finally, rather than using Mock Spanish to index positive character traits, it is used as an antagonizing strategy.

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