

## Translating the Watcher's Voice: Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* into Spanish

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Résumé de l'article

Le présent article fait état d'une analyse de la traduction espagnole du roman *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* de l'auteur dominico-américain Junot Díaz. Nous examinerons comment la traduction de l'auteure cubaine Achy Obejas affecte la situation narrative, et notamment la relation de solidarité entre le narrateur et le narrataire. Dans le texte source, cette relation de solidarité s'établit par plusieurs formes d'hétéroglossie intra- et interlinguistique, qui déterminent la voix du narrateur comme une voix racialement et ethniquement marquée. Bien que la traduction neutralise dans une certaine mesure cette voix narrative, nous voulons souligner que l'effet produit par la version espagnole n'est pas tant la réduction mais plutôt le déplacement de la relation de solidarité entre le narrateur et le narrataire vers une relation entre l'auteur et le lecteur du texte cible. De plus, nous attirerons l'attention sur quelques différences entre les deux éditions existantes de la traduction d'Obejas, qui sont destinées, respectivement, à l'Europe et à l'Amérique latine (Mondadori) et aux États-Unis (Vintage Español). Il est surtout étonnant que cette dernière édition ait recours à plusieurs insertions paratextuelles, ce qui construit un lecteur impliqué paraissant aliéné à l'environnement bilingue dans lequel se situe le roman, lequel est pourtant très familier à de nombreux lecteurs hispanophones aux États-Unis.

# Translating the Watcher's Voice: Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* into Spanish

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## RÉSUMÉ

Le présent article fait état d'une analyse de la traduction espagnole du roman *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* de l'auteur dominico-américain Junot Díaz. Nous examinerons comment la traduction de l'auteure cubaine Achy Obejas affecte la situation narrative, et notamment la relation de solidarité entre le narrateur et le narrataire. Dans le texte source, cette relation de solidarité s'établit par plusieurs formes d'hétéroglossie intra- et interlinguistique, qui déterminent la voix du narrateur comme une voix racialement et ethniquement marquée. Bien que la traduction neutralise dans une certaine mesure cette voix narrative, nous voulons souligner que l'effet produit par la version espagnole n'est pas tant la réduction mais plutôt le déplacement de la relation de solidarité entre le narrateur et le narrataire vers une relation entre l'auteur et le lecteur du texte cible. De plus, nous attirerons l'attention sur quelques différences entre les deux éditions existantes de la traduction d'Obejas, qui sont destinées, respectivement, à l'Europe et à l'Amérique latine (Mondadori) et aux États-Unis (Vintage Español). Il est surtout étonnant que cette dernière édition ait recours à plusieurs insertions paratextuelles, ce qui construit un lecteur impliqué paraissant aliéné à l'environnement bilingue dans lequel se situe le roman, lequel est pourtant très familier à de nombreux lecteurs hispanophones aux États-Unis.

## ABSTRACT

This article offers an analysis of the Spanish translation of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Dominican-American author Junot Díaz. We look at how the translation by Cuban author Achy Obejas affects the narrative situation, and in particular the solidarity relation between narrator and narratee. In the original, this solidarity relation depends on various forms of intra- and interlingual heteroglossia, which define the narrator's voice as ethnically and racially marked. While the translation does to some degree neutralize this narrative voice, we argue that the Spanish version does not so much reduce as displace the solidarity effects embedded in the ST onto the relation between the implied author and reader of the TT. We further point attention to some of the differences between the two editions of the translation, directed at European and Latin American markets (Mondadori) and the North American market (Vintage Español) respectively. Surprisingly, the latter uses various paratextual insertions to construct an implied reader at some remove from the bilingual milieu in which the novel is set, and with which many Spanish-language readers in North America are highly familiar.

## MOTS-CLÉS/KEYWORDS

Traduction littéraire, littérature dominico-américaine, hétéroglossie intra- et interlinguistique, voix narrative, ethnicité

Literary translation, Dominican-American literature, intra- and interlingual heteroglossia, narrative voice, ethnicity

## 1. Introduction

The translation of heterolingual literature has proven a particularly fruitful area of research for translation studies. Particularly challenging are those translations where a literary work is translated into one of the languages that make up its original fictional universe (Grutman 2006; García Vizcaíno 2008; Stratford 2008). In general, it is assumed that the translation process tends to reduce the interlingual tensions present in the ST (Grutman 2004; Lewis 2003; Stratford 2008). As translation scholars have pointed out, the translation often not only homogenizes the original, but sometimes also inverts its values by familiarizing what was supposed to remain foreign (the embedded language or languages) and, vice versa, by defamiliarizing what was supposed to remain familiar (the surface language). In this article, we examine the effects of such homogenization or inversion processes on the narrative situation through an analysis of the Spanish translation of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by the Dominican-American author Junot Díaz.<sup>1</sup>

We wish to stress beforehand that our analysis is not primarily concerned with the supposed 'untranslatability' of heterolingual literary texts (Derrida 1988; Berman 1985; Berman 2004), but rather approaches heterolingualism from a decidedly functionalist perspective. As Meylaerts (2006a; 2006b) has emphasized, making the identification of translation problems the core business of translation studies betrays the lingering presence of a predominantly equivalence-based conception of translation, which exaggerates the monolingualism of both source and target cultures. We agree that the question as to whether there is *more* or *less* heterolingualism in the TT must be complemented by the more encompassing one as to which functions are realized by heterolingualism, and, above all, whether these functions undergo significant shifts between ST and TT.

Further, it is important to note that our analysis centers on but is not restricted to the phenomenon of heterolingualism, or what Grutman (2006: 19) describes as the "foregrounding of foreign languages" in a literary work, rather than merely a mimetic rendering of multilingualism or diglossia. In what follows, we will analyze how heterolingualism (Spanish-English code mixing or Spanglish) functionally interacts with other phenomena, such as nerd talk or African-American English, and even with mechanisms of addressing the narratee. For this reason, we regularly resort to the notion of heteroglossia as coined by Mikhail Bakhtin. In his well-known essay "Discourse in the novel," Bakhtin defined heteroglossia (**raznorečie**) in terms of "a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized" (Bakhtin 1981: 262). As this definition indicates, using different languages is but one means by which a novel can highlight the interplay of "voices," next to, for instance, the use of dialects, jargons, generic languages, languages of authority, and so forth.<sup>2</sup> Drawing in these elements will allow us to widen the scope of the conclusions, and relate the translation of heterolingualism to the more general issue of identity construction in literary texts (not just the identity of characters but also narrators and narratees, and even the implied author and implied readers).<sup>3</sup>

### 1.1. *Translating Nontranslation*

*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (henceforth BWLOW) came out in 2007 to great acclaim and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 2008. The book tells the tragicomic life story of Oscar de León, an aspiring science fiction writer of Dominican descent living in New Jersey who cannot find his way in society and eventually decides to go back to the Dominican Republic to find true love, but instead dies an untimely death at the hands of the cruel dictatorial regime of Rafael de Trujillo. The title of the book already underscores Oscar's outsiderhood by mixing in elements of fantasy writing into the usual format of the ethnic novel. BWLOW would be in the same league as any up-from-the-ghetto narrative if it were not for the adjective *wondrous*, which somehow suggests superhuman interference, an element that does not normally fit in well with the reality claims of ethnic literature.<sup>4</sup> As we learn in the novel, the name Oscar Wao refers to the way a Dominican-American would (mis-) pronounce Oscar Wilde, the notorious literary outcast with whom the title character is derisively compared. As we will argue, BWLOW is a book that ingeniously plays on the generic frame of ethnic fiction and the legitimacy of the ethnic insider perspective associated with it.

This has important formal implications. Díaz adopts a strategy of what literary critic Evelyn Ch'ien calls "assertive nontranslation" (2004: 209), which means that he refuses to explain or contextualize non-English elements, but rather integrates them into the discourse without the use of brackets or italics, thus deliberately offsetting the cadence of the English sentences. As a result, the reader gets the impression of being pulled into the bilingual dynamic of the immigrant community, without necessarily understanding everything that is going on between the interlocutors. In an early interview conducted on the occasion of the publication of his short-story collection *Drown* in 1996, Díaz himself specified his method of nontranslation as follows:

I feel I'm not a voyeur nor am I a native informer. I don't explain cultural things, with italics or with exclamation marks or with side bars or asides. I was aggressive about that because I had so many negative models, so many Latinos and black writers who are writing to white audiences, who are not writing to their own people. If you are not writing to your own people, I'm disturbed because of what that says about your relationship to the community you are in one way or another indebted to. You are only there to loot them of ideas, and words, and images so that you can coon them to the dominant group. That disturbs me tremendously. (Céspedes 2000: 900)

Díaz's refusal to write *to* an outside group should not be understood to mean that he is writing exclusively *for* Dominican-Americans. His remarks concern the kind of mechanisms of address encoded in mainstream fiction, which uses ethnic themes without necessarily exploring them in depth. His strategy of aggressive nontranslation is thus a way of resisting easy assimilation into and marketization by a dominant, Anglo-American culture, which 'domesticates' ethnic voices through translation (Venuti 1995). It goes without saying that all this poses peculiar challenges for the translator of Díaz's prose. There are, however, broader socio-cultural implications as well. Rather than focusing all attention on what inevitably gets lost in translating a text that itself defies translation, our aim is to highlight the cultural significance of a poetics of nontranslation, and what happens if such a poetics is transposed into another language.

## 1.2. *Methodological Remarks*

Our approach builds on recent research on multilingual literature (or, what we define more broadly as heteroglossic literature) in translation. Since Lewis (2003: 412) has pointed out “l’absence d’une réflexion adéquate sur les défis que posent [les langues métissées] à l’égard des conceptions conventionnelles de la langue et de la traduction”, several advances have been made. Regarding the functions of literary multilingualism, García Vizcaíno (2008: 213-216) distinguishes in rather general terms between foregrounding an element (e.g., the illocutionary force of the sentence, or part of its propositional content) and creating a humoristic effect. Stratford (2008: 461) gives a more detailed account, referring to the taxonomy of Horn (1981: 226), which distinguishes the following functions (our translation):

1. Linguistic characterization
2. Accentuate the illusion of reality
3. Establish an authorial voice
4. Contribute to the unification of heterogeneous elements
5. Produce a comical effect
6. Transmit language-specific concepts
7. Function as a purely aesthetic factor
8. Function as a quote

Furthermore, diverse methods or techniques for the translation of linguistic multiplicity have been discussed. García Vizcaíno (2008: 216-221) distinguishes between explicitation (rendering the pragmatic effect of heteroglossia in a more explicit way), compensation (making up for the loss of linguistic multiplicity elsewhere in the text), and the use of code switching. This third strategy (which, as García Vizcaíno acknowledges, sometimes overlaps with the second) can take several forms: switching between languages through nontranslation of certain elements of the ST’s main language (see also Grutman 2006: 37), the introduction of different regional varieties of the target language, or the use of different registers of the target language. In the latter two cases, interlingual variation in the ST is replaced by intralingual variation (the insertion of different varieties or registers of the same language) in the TT. On the other hand, authors like Berman (1985) or Koster (1997) have adopted a more normative perspective by rejecting the use of dialect in the TT to render the heteroglossia of the ST (Grutman 2006: 20).

In our analysis we will use these insights and elaborate on them by applying them to narratological categories. First, we will focus on one function of ST heteroglossia in particular, which comes close to the first function of Horn (1981), namely a way of characterizing a speaker. Importantly, heteroglossia is here not only a way of characterizing the narrator as an individual, but also a way of characterizing the relation between the narrator and the narratee(s). Concretely, we will describe heteroglossia as a solidarity-enhancing mechanism. As such, heteroglossia also fulfills a narratological function, as it affects the relation between the narrator and the narratee(s).

Second, with respect to the translation techniques used in the Spanish-language versions of *BWLOW*, we will argue that the substitution of interlingual variation by intralingual variation (specifically the use of Dominican Spanish) constitutes a dominant strategy. Interestingly, this strategy also seems to imply a shift in the main

function fulfilled by heteroglossia. One salient difference is that the narrative voice becomes less ethnically or racially marked in translation.<sup>5</sup> But on the other hand, translated heteroglossia clearly fulfills Horn's third function, the identification of the voice of the author Junot Díaz, who has Dominican roots. As we shall argue, the solidarizing functions are directed away from the relation between the narrator(s) and the narratee(s) and towards that between the author and the implied audience of the translation.

## 2. Textual characteristics of the ST

BWLOW is a mosaic of linguistic varieties and registers. The book confronts the reader with all kinds of English: Spanglish, nerd talk, ghetto talk, African-American English, and colloquial English. In our analysis we will be less concerned with multilingualism or heterolingualism per se than with heteroglossia in Mikhail Bakhtin's sense of the co-existence of a number of socially codified registers or styles (which may or may not be approached in terms of "foreign languages"). First we give a succinct overview of the various types of heteroglossia in BWLOW. In a second step, we will discuss the broader significance of these types for the narrative as a whole.

### 2.1. Types of Heteroglossia

#### 2.1.1. Spanglish

A first instance of heteroglossia is the use of Spanglish, or the insertion of Spanish expressions and idioms into the English text to convey ethnically marked discourse. Díaz's use of Spanglish is quite experimental, as the following examples attest.

- (1) Everybody noticed his lack of game and because they were Dominican everybody talked about it. His tío Rudolfo [...] was especially generous in his tutelage. Listen, palomo: you have to grab a muchacha, y méteselo. That will take care of *everything*. Start with a fea. Coje that fea y méteselo!  
(Díaz 2008a: 24)
- (2) In October a bunch of freshman girls I knew on Livingston got busted for dealing coke, four of the quietest gorditas around. Like they say: los que menos corren, vuelan.  
(Díaz 2008a: 196)
- (3) Even those nights after I got jumped she wouldn't let me steal on her ass for nothing. So you can *sleep* in my bed but you can't *sleep with me*? Yo soy prieta, Yuni, she said, pero no soy bruta.  
(Díaz 2008a: 169)

The use of Spanish in example (1) is fairly conventional: it occurs in a dialogue and highlights loaded concepts or taboo words, which somehow suggest a bond between members of the same group or express the voice of a collectivity. In example (2), an entire proverb is rendered in Spanish (literally: *those who run least may fly*, meaning *still waters run deep*), which is already less obvious for the Anglophone reader with a weak grasp of Spanish. Example (3), finally, contains some regionally inflected words (prieta, meaning swarthy, dark-skinned) which are peculiar to the Dominican context, and which may not be directly intelligible even to readers who know some Spanish.

Importantly, Díaz does not offer any translation of the Spanish words or sentences. There is no glossary, nor are there explanatory English paraphrases in the text. Compare this with an example of the Mexican-American writer Sandra Cisneros, quoted in García Vizcaíno (2008), where the author has decided to both italicize the Spanish expressions *lárgate* and *me das asco* and supplement them by the paraphrastic English expressions *I don't ever want to see you again* and *you disgust me*:

- (4) I don't ever want to see you again. ¡*Lárgate!* You disgust me, *me das asco*, you *cochino!*

(Cisneros, *Caramelo* 2002: 11,  
quoted by García Vizcaíno 2008: 214)

As we already pointed out, Díaz's refusal to translate or contextualize does not therefore mean that he only writes for members of his own ethnolinguistic community.<sup>6</sup> If these elements are not explained, it is because the narrator judges or suggests that his narratee(s) understand(s) what he or she is saying. Thus, the use of these non-English elements creates an in-group effect, which the actual reader can observe from a distance.

### 2.1.2. African-American English

Example (3) in the above section shows that Díaz frequently sprinkles his prose with expressions borrowed from African-American English (for a discussion see Green 2004). Second-generation Dominican-Americans identify strongly with their African American peers because they are often in a similar socio-economic position and because outside observers often categorize them as African-Americans on the basis of their skin color. At the same time, many Dominican-Americans try to resist this binary black-white racial classification, which differs from racial taxonomies in the Dominican Republic, where dark skin is associated with a Haitian background, by insisting that they (also) speak Spanish (Bailey 2000: 556-557). In the quote, Oscar's big sister Lola, whom Yunior is unsuccessfully courting, appears to defy the expectations thrust upon her because of her very dark skin by resisting Yunior's (and the narrator's) communicative frame. Phrases like *I got jumped* or *let me steal on her ass* can be interpreted as typical instances of African-American English. By switching to Dominican Spanish, Lola asserts her agency by blocking this code choice.

The racial characterization of the narrator's voice is reaffirmed by other elements as well, such as the use of *nigger* in the sense of *somebody*. Although this word has a generic meaning, it is clear that only a member of the ethnic in-group can safely employ such identifying labels in a non-derogatory fashion:

- (5) Sometimes [fukú] works patiently, drowning a nigger by degrees. (Díaz 2008a: 4)
- (6) Perth Amboy – an urban swath known to niggers everywhere as Negrapolis One. (Díaz 2008a: 26)
- (7) Every Dominican family has stories about crazy loves, about niggers who take love too far. (Díaz 2008a: 5)

The frequency of generic *nigger* testifies to its effectiveness in circumscribing a specified community. As we will show, there is no Spanish equivalent for generic

*nigger*, since this concept is intimately tied to the strict black-white dichotomy built into the U.S. racial lexicon.

### 2.1.3. *Nerd Talk*

Oscar, the protagonist of *BWLOW*, tries to escape (or transcend?) his miserable life by immersing himself completely in science fiction, comic strips and role-playing games, an inclination which underwrites his “un-Dominicanness,” his outsiderhood in his own ethnic group, where a man is supposed to be “fly bachatero” (*party animal*) chasing Dominican girls. The following quote ironically juxtaposes Oscar’s fluency in various science fiction languages with his inability to function in real life and talk the language of his fellow ethnics. Although it is not Oscar himself who is speaking here but the narrator, the latter seems to adopt the former’s nerd speak:

- (8) In these pursuits alone Oscar showed the genius his grandmother insisted was part of the family patrimony. Could write in Elvish, could speak Chakobsa, could differentiate between a Slan, a Dorsai, and a Lensman in acute detail, knew more about the Marvel Universe than Stan Lee, and was a role-playing game fanatic. [...] Perhaps if like me he’d been able to hide his otakuness maybe shit would have been easier for him, but he couldn’t. Dude wore his nerdiness like a Jedi wore his light saber or a Lensman her lens. Couldn’t have passed for Normal if he’d wanted to.

(Díaz 2008a: 21; our underscores)

Note that in Díaz’s prose the nerd-speak is neither highlighted nor explained, so that the non-initiated reader has to infer the underlying meanings from the context. In this way, we are made to feel outsiders in Oscar’s universe, which reinforces our sense of the latter’s alienation from his community. Oscar’s “otakuness” (*otaku* is a Japanese term referring to people who show excessive interest in video games and comic strips) or “nerdiness” is in a way inversely proportional to his Dominicanness, or better, his Dominican-Americanness.

### 2.1.4. *Footnotes*

A final instance of (genre-specific) heteroglossia that we would like to address is Díaz’s inventive use of footnotes. Footnotes (like glossaries, bibliographies, asides, and the like) are a common feature of most ethnic fiction, as they function to explain to the non-initiated reader elements that are peculiar to the in-group. Such formal elements belong to the shared repertoire of ethnic writers, who willy-nilly become “translators of ethnicity” for the outside world (Sollors 1986: 250). As Sollors indicates, however, this enforced translational capacity on the part of the ethnic author can be turned into an instrument of willful deceit, whereby the reader is denied the usual explanatory gesture or is given the wrong or incomplete information. In this way, the ethnic writer can play with the conventions of a genre that may appear constrictive. We claim that this is precisely what is at stake in *BWLOW*.

Instead of clarifying things to the reader, Díaz’s footnotes mock the authority of a supposedly neutral voice mediating between cultures, mixing (pseudo-)earnest discourse with vulgar or colloquial speech. The footnotes are used to both feed and thwart the reader’s expectations about the progression of the narrative. One of the many uncharming epithets cast upon Oscar by those around him is that of the “neighborhood parigüayo.” This expression is accompanied by the following footnote:



- (9) The pejorative *parigüayo*, *Watchers agree*, is a corruption of the English neologism “party watcher.” The word came into common usage during the First American Occupation of the DR, which ran from 1916 to 1924. (You didn’t know we were occupied twice in the twentieth century? Don’t worry, when you have kids they won’t know the U.S. occupied Iraq either.) During the First Occupation it was reported that members of the American Occupying Forces would often attend Dominican parties but instead of joining in the fun the *Outlanders* would simply stand at the edge of dances and *watch*. Which of course must have seemed like the craziest thing in the world. Who goes to a party to watch? Thereafter, the Marines were *parigüayos* – a word that in contemporary usage describes anybody who stands outside and watches while other people scoop up the girls. The kid who don’t dance, who ain’t got game, who lets people clown him – he’s the *parigüayo*. If you looked in the Dictionary of Dominican Things, the entry for *parigüayo* would include a wood carving of Oscar. It is a name that would haunt him for the rest of his life and that would lead him to another Watcher, the one who lamps on the Blue Side of the Moon.

(Díaz 2008a: 19-20, footnote 5)

This footnote is very different from an objective encyclopedic footnote. The narrator addresses the narratee directly and uses rhetorical questions and colloquial language.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, it is telling that this footnote itself could use a footnote. The first and the final line contain a reference to the fictional race of Watchers in Stan Lee and Jack Kirby’s *Marvel* comics. These characters, who live on the blue side of the moon, compile information about the universe and in doing so help to defend the earth against such supervillains as Galactus. Díaz uses this *Marvel* universe as an intertext to visualize Oscar’s predicament as an “Outlander” among his peers, whose tragicomic death can be said to symbolize the Dominican Republic’s unsuccessful working through of the dictatorship of that other “supervillain” Rafael Trujillo, who in an earlier footnote is described as “a personaje so outlandish, so perverse, so dreadful that not even a sci-fi writer could have made his ass up” (footnote 1, p. 2).

The irony of the footnote apparatus in *BWLOW* derives from the fact that it offers “objective” historical background information on the Dominican Republic, even while questioning the validity of such knowledge by drawing on sources that either do not exist (the Dictionary of Dominican Things) or belong to a fictional universe (“Watchers agree”).<sup>8</sup> Rather than attesting the historical accuracy of things and events described in the main narrative, the footnotes thus draw attention to the difficulties involved in representing traumatic events. Instead of filling the gaps, Díaz’s footnotes draw the reader’s attention to the impossibility of telling the entire truth.

## 2.2. Mechanisms of Address

Part of the originality of Díaz’s prose derives from the solidarity effects it creates between the narrator and the narratee, the “you” addressed in the text. Both the narrator and the narratee remain somewhat mysterious throughout. Only half-way through the book, the reader realizes that the main narrator of the book is actually one of the characters, namely Yunió, a typical Dominican womanizer who has his eye on Oscar’s big sister Lola, and who has resolved to take the maladjusted

protagonist under his wing. Apart from a short chapter in which Lola tells about how she ran away from home in her adolescence and ended up in the Dominican Republic, it is Yunior who appears to narrate the bulk of the story of Oscar's downfall.<sup>9</sup> The characteristics of this narrator gradually come into sharper focus as specific narratees are addressed.

The fact that most of Oscar's life story is told by Yunior, who has little in common with the estranged anti-hero, is of considerable importance. Although he clearly sympathizes with Oscar, Yunior makes sure not to lose credibility among his macho college friends. As the following passage indicates, however, Yunior is more familiar with Oscar's mental universe than he is willing to acknowledge:

- (10) Do you know what sign fool put up on our dorm door? *Speak friend, and enter.* In fucking Elvish! (Please don't ask me how I knew this. Please.) When I saw that I said: De Léon, you gotta be kidding. Elvish?

(Díaz 2008a: 171-172)

As the rhetorical question between brackets indicates, the *you* addressed in this quote is clearly a person for whom knowledge of Elvish is a sign of social weakness. Yunior's literally entering into Oscar's world compromises his standing among his Dominican-American friends who like to go to parties, chase girls and pump iron in the gym, a community from which the otherworldly Oscar is excluded.

This results in a conflict of codes: Oscar's sci-fi language contrasts sharply with the African-American English and slang expressions (deletion of the definite article before *fool*, *fucking Elvish*, *gotta be kidding*) which Yunior uses among his friends. Sometimes, Yunior addresses his peers quite explicitly, as in the following example:

- (11) Players: never never *never* fuck with a bitch named Awilda. Because when she awildas out on your ass you'll know pain for real.

(Díaz 2008a: 175)

The word *players* and the slang phrases *fuck*, *bitch*, *ass* suggest a very strong emotional bond between the narrator and his addressees. This bond is created mostly through a shared interest in sex. Oscar also shares this interest, but because of his shyness he is unable to get a girl. This makes him an outsider among Dominican-Americans (a watcher among players). Although Yunior makes some half-hearted attempts to share his "playerly wisdom" with Oscar, he is anxious not to fall out with his peers (p. 173). It is only after Oscar's death that Yunior develops a lasting fascination for Oscar, whose downfall seems to confront him with a suppressed part of his identity linked to the dictatorship of Trujillo.

Yunior's function as narrator changes in those sections of the book where the orbit is widened to include Oscar's family relations and Dominican history as a whole. Here, Yunior's voice seems to merge imperceptibly with that of one of Oscar's science fiction characters, namely a "Watcher" observing our earthly doings from a safe distance. This Watcher may embody an older, more mature version of Yunior fulfilling a "cosmic duty" to tell Oscar's unfinished story to the "future generation of de Leóns and Cabrals" (explicitly addressed on p. 115). This sense of responsibility is emphasized by the fact that Yunior consistently refers to himself as *your* Watcher, thus suggesting that he feels responsibility towards the narratee:

- (12) Let me, your humble Watcher, reveal [...]  
(Díaz 2008a: 4)
- (13) Even your humble Watcher, reviewing her old pictures, is struck by what a fucking babe she was.  
(Díaz 2008a: 92)
- (14) Even your Watcher has his silences.  
(Díaz 2008a: 149)

The kind of narratees the Watcher addresses are very different from those addressed by the “playerly” Yuniór with whom Oscar shared a room in college. Whereas the latter tends to refer to “us niggers” to suggest an affectionate bond among Dominican-American friends who like to act cool by borrowing slang words and phrases from African-American English, the former sometimes ironically uses the anachronistic “Negro” to evoke a hypercorrect or overeducated narratee. Thus, at one point, the narrator is talking about the so-called “Fukú,” the curse that would have descended on the western hemisphere ever since Columbus set foot on shore there. This “Great American Doom,” as it is called in the novel, creates an ironic contrast with the American dream scenario in immigrant fiction. In the following quote, Yuniór half-jokingly reprimands the narratee for being unaware of the ways in which the fukú is to blame for some of the major disasters in the history of the Americas:

- (15) Why do you think the greatest power in the world lost its first war to a Third World country like Vietnam? I mean, Negro, please.  
(Díaz 2008a: 4)<sup>10</sup>

The use of the capitalized *Negro* here evokes an addressee who is presented as being out of touch with his own community. This is more or less in line with another context of address, where the narratee is explicitly situated in the university world with which the more mature Yuniór (perhaps a kind of alter ego of Díaz himself?) is highly familiar:

- (16) [...] legend has it when he came out of his chloroform nap he found himself naked, dangling from his feet over a cauldron of *boiling oil*, El Jefe standing nearby with a copy of the offending dissertation in hand. (And you thought *your committee* was rough.)  
(Díaz 2008a: 97, footnote 11)

Irrespective of the kind of narratee that is addressed, whether Yuniór’s friends, Oscar’s family, university students and teachers, or the Dominican people as a whole, in each case there are strong solidarity effects generated by the narration. As we will indicate, these solidarity effects will undergo significant changes in translation.

### 2.3. *Heteroglossia as a Solidarity-Enhancing Mechanism*

To conclude our section on the ST, we would like to emphasize that textual heteroglossia and the narratological I-you relation (which can be said to be two of the most salient phenomena in the text, given their unconventional and comical effects) are closely interlinked. Both the narrator and the narratees are difficult to grasp: on the one hand, very little information is given (for example, the narrator remains anonymous up to page 169, and it is impossible to pin down the narratee as a specific individual). But on the other hand, in a more indirect way, the text is also very

informative. Thus, the narrator's voice is far from being a depersonalized voice: Yunió's heteroglossic way of speaking is constitutive of his sociological and ethnic/racial identity. With respect to the narratee, we find various textual hints (*Negro, players, future generation, us niggers ...*) which suggest that the textual *you* cannot be constructed as a generic audience.

Heteroglossia interacts with this narratological structure by reinforcing the solidarity between the narrator and the narratee: Spanglish, African-American English, nerd talk, as well as the footnotes suggest an in-group or several in-groups, which are defined through the exclusive knowledge of certain codes and forms of address. Heteroglossia thus not only constitutes the narrator's voice, but also the relation between the narrator and the narratee: the use of specific registers enhances the solidarity between these textually encoded positions.

### 3. BWLOW into Spanish

Having sketched how BWLOW creates solidarity by mixing various registers and vernaculars, we now turn to what happens to these solidarity effects in translation. There can be no doubt that anybody who takes it upon herself to translate BWLOW faces an enormous challenge. This applies *a fortiori* to those who attempt to translate the work into Spanish, as this language already constitutes a vital component, an embedded code, of Díaz's prose. As Nuria Barrios writes in *El País*, "¿Cómo transmitir el juego, la sorpresa y la verdad de un idioma donde es posible decir 'Then you will be mi negra bella?'" (*How can one convey the playfulness, the inventiveness and the truth of a language which allows one to say 'Then you will be mi negra bella'*; Barrios 2008).<sup>11</sup> The publishers of the Spanish translation took special care in selecting a translator by involving Díaz directly in the screening process. Eventually, the task was entrusted to Achy Obejas, a Cuban author whose artistic sensibilities guaranteed a bold usage of the idiomatic turns of the Spanish language. Given her Caribbean background, moreover, Obejas was able to tap into the regionally inflected expressions and idioms from which Díaz's writing draws its energy.

Obejas's translation was well received by critics. One reviewer goes so far as to suggest that the translation of BWLOW can provide a spur for contemporary Spanish authors to break free from the traditional strictures of their language and to integrate more slang or street language into their writings:

[...] a pesar de ser una traducción del inglés, suena inusitadamente libre en español: mezcla jergas, mezcla idiomas, mezcla tonos, mezcla vulgarismos y cultismos, arcaísmos y corrupciones [...]; en suma, uno recibe el ruido de la calle [...]. (Gándara 2008)<sup>12</sup>

*Despite being a translation from English, it sounds unusually free in Spanish: it mixes jargons, idioms, tones, vulgar and learned expressions, archaisms and corruptions...; in sum, you get a sense of the language of the streets. (Translated by author)*

In drawing attention to this review, we wish to emphasize that our analysis of the relative normalization of the heteroglossic density of Díaz's original should not be read as a critique of Obejas's undeniable skills as a translator. What concerns us, rather, is how this – perhaps inevitable – normalization process affects the narrative structure of the ST, and in particular the effectiveness of certain solidarity mechanisms.

### 3.1. Differences between the Spanish-Language Editions

Soon after the publication of BWLOW, two Spanish-language editions of BWLOW came onto the market, one published by Vintage Español for North-America and the other by Random House Mondadori for Europe and South-America. Both these editions draw on Achy Obejas's translation of Díaz's original. The two versions are not identical, however.

A first difference concerns the title. While Mondadori translates BWLOW as "La maravillosa vida breve de Óscar Wao," the Vintage edition carries a slightly altered title, namely "La breve y maravillosa vida de Óscar Wao." This difference probably has to be attributed to copyright matters, and is of no further consequence for our analysis.<sup>13</sup>

Second, while both editions make use of Obejas's translation, the Vintage edition makes explicit mention of an editor, María Teresa Ortega, who helped in preparing the book for publication.<sup>14</sup>

Third, there are a number of textual differences between the two versions, which however are few and far between. To give an idea, the first 700 words of the ST yield no more than five divergences between the two Spanish editions.

- (17) [...] the fukú ain't just ancient history [...] the fukú was real as shit, something your everyday person could believe in [...] it was clear he and it had an understanding, that them two was *tight* [...] the Warren Commission's question, Who killed JFK? [...] Where in coñazo do you think [...]?

(Díaz 2008a: 1-4)

[...] el fukú no es solo historia antigua [...] era algo tan enconjonadamente verdadero que cualquiera podía creer en él [...] estaba claro que entre ellos había un acuerdo, que eran panas [...] la Comisión Warren sobre quién mató a JFK [...] ¿De dónde coño piensan que [...]?

(Díaz 2008b: 15-17, Mondadori edition)

[...] el fukú no es sólo historia antigua [...] era algo tan real como la mierda, algo en lo que cualquiera podía creer [...] estaba claro que entre ellos había un acuerdo, que eran panas [...] la Comisión de Warren sobre quién mató a JFK [...] ¿De dónde coñazo piensan que [...]?

(Díaz 2008c: 1-4, Vintage edition)

There are no systematic textual discrepancies to hint at fundamentally opposed translation strategies.

Fourth, the Vintage volume contains an inserted paratext, which is absent from the Mondadori edition, and which we here cite in full:

- (18) nota sobre la traducción

Nuestras notas al pie de página se encuentran entre corchetes [] para distinguirlas de las del autor. También se ha tratado de preservar el español del texto original lo más posible.

*Our footnotes appear between brackets [] to distinguish them from those of the author. We also tried to preserve as much as possible the Spanish of the original text. (Translated by author)*

(Díaz 2008c: iv, Vintage edition)

Finally, probably the most important difference between the Vintage and Mondadori editions concerns the footnote apparatus. Whereas the Mondadori

retains the footnotes of the ST, the Vintage adds no less than 115 footnotes, which are set off from those of the author by means of square brackets (as indicated in the translator's note), but which are not numbered separately. We will discuss the function of the Vintage footnotes below.

### 3.2. *Translating Heteroglossia*

Let us now turn to a discussion of the various translation techniques used in the Spanish editions of *BWLOW* to convey the various forms of heteroglossia present in the ST.

#### 3.2.1. *Spanglish*

Since Díaz sprinkles his prose with Spanish phrases and expressions, the Spanish-language version has to recreate the plurilingual situational context in different ways. One strategy has been the reintroduction of English elements in the TT. However, the arsenal of English elements, some of them phonetically transcribed to convey the Hispanic background of the speaker, remains fairly limited: *fokin* (45 instances in 200 pages), *bróder* (16 instances), *loser* (7 instances), or such internationally recognized phrases as *my apologies* or *slam*. These words have to be approached as conventionalized keys, which serve to indicate variations in register and tone. It is safe to say that the English of the TT is much less functional than the Spanish in the ST.

Interestingly, when the English from the ST is left untranslated, it is normalized, as in the following example, where the ungrammatical negative imperative is turned into a correct English clause:

- (19) Breaking up with her, he would remember, hadn't felt like anything; even when she started crying, he hadn't been moved. He'd said, No be a baby.  
(Díaz 2008a: 15)

Recordaba que cuando se pelearon no sintió nada; incluso cuando ella comenzó a llorar, no se había conmovido. Le dijo: Don't be a baby.  
(Díaz 2008b: 27, Mondadori edition)

A dominant strategy for conveying the interlingual variation is its substitution by intralingual variation, i.e., the insertion of Dominican or Caribbean words, such as prieto/a, maco, tígueres, papichulo, rapar, or singar. This use of regional forms offsets on a lexical level what gets lost on a syntactic level, where the disruptive grammar of the original is to a certain degree flattened out through the use of idiomatic Spanish sentences. The following example illustrates the frequent lexical innovations of the TT:

- (20) She stared at the young bravos on the bus, secretly kissed the bread of the buenmosos who frequented the bakery.  
(Díaz 2008a: 88)

Miraba sin pena a los tígueres en la guagua, besaba en secreto el pan de los buenmosos que frecuentaban la panadería.  
(Díaz 2008b: 91, Mondadori edition)

On the one hand, we can observe how lexical elements from the ST are rendered by locally marked variants. Not only is English *bus* translated by means of the

Caribbean word guagua rather than the less regionally marked autobús, but also the Spanish bravos is not retained (which violates the translator's note in the Vintage volume) but is replaced by the local equivalent tígueres. Note that, in this way, the alliterating structure of the ST (bravos on the bus) falls away, but this is compensated for by the rhythmic stress pattern and colorful word choice of the TT. On the other hand, we should note that buenmosos is corrected as buenmosos in order to conform to standard spelling.

In general, the Spanish syntax of the translation is much closer to the norm than the English syntax of the ST. Where Díaz makes plenty of use of incomplete sentences, negative concords, and the like, to give the reader the impression of being drawn into the Dominican-American community, Obejas's translation does not tinker with Spanish sentence structure. The vernacular dimension is restored by lexical means, through the insertion of local words and phrases. Further, Obejas reconnects to vernacular discourse through phonetic renderings of recurring words or morphemes: pa instead of para (me fui pa mi casa), -ao instead of -ado (ese afeminao), or na instead of nada (te dije que esa negrita no servía pa na).

### 3.2.2. African-American English

A good example of African-American English in the ST is the use of the invariant *be* in "No be a baby" quoted above, which becomes "Don't be a baby" in the Spanish translation. In the original, the use of "bad" grammar is associated with lower social class status, while at the same time suggesting toughness, a deliberate violation of educational norms as a measure of street credibility. In this particular instance, it suggests Oscar's (imposed) masculinity and insensitivity while breaking up with one of his early infatuations. By correcting the "bad" English, the TT loses this double connotation of social inferiority and superiority. The normalization of the "bad" English in translation to some degree results in a levelling out of the ascribed and assumed identity positions of the characters in the novel.

The narrative voice becomes less racially marked as well. This is evident if we consider the translation of the word *nigger*. For example, in the following scene, where Oscar's mother throws him to the floor because he's crying over a girl, screaming that if he wants the "puta" to respect him, he should give her "un galletazo," a cuff on the ears.

(21) If he'd been a different nigger he might have considered the galletazo.

(Díaz 2008a: 15)

Si él hubiera sido otro tipo de varón, habría tomado en cuenta lo del galletazo.

(Díaz 2008b: 26, Mondadori edition)

The implication is, of course, that Oscar is not man enough to subdue his girlfriend, which once again reveals his inability to observe the male-dominated social codes of Dominican culture, to the distress of his own mother, who, ironically, is a victim of that culture. In the Spanish edition, the word *nigger* is replaced by the much less loaded tipo de varón, which does not carry any racial undertones. In other examples, *nigger* is translated by impersonal constructions such as uno, cualquiera, the impersonal construction with se or hyperonymic forms such as los tipos or un muchacho.

In the few instances where the racial usage is not neutralized, this seems to happen for aesthetic or formal reasons more than anything else, as when the young Oscar is described as “the first nigger to learn the perrito.” In the Spanish version, this becomes “el primer negrito que aprendió el perrito.” Here, the diminutive not only takes the sting out of the slur, it also creates a smooth rhyme.<sup>15</sup>

Another racialized form of address is *Negro*. Even though the word was created to avoid slurs like *nigger*, here too the racial inflection is entirely lost:

- (22) Why do you think the greatest power in the world lost its first war to a Third World country like Vietnam? I mean, Negro, please. It might interest you that just as the U.S. was ramping up its involvement in Vietnam, LBJ launched an illegal invasion of the Dominican Republic.

(Díaz 2008a: 4)

¿Por qué creen que el país más poderoso del mundo perdió su primera guerra contra un país tercermundista como Vietnam? Por Dios, mi gente, por Dios. Quizá resulte interesante el hecho de que mientras Estados Unidos se involucraba más en Vietnam, LBJ pusiera en marcha la invasión ilegal a la República Dominicana.

(Díaz 2008b: 18, Mondadori edition)

Clearly, the neutral mi gente does not carry the same ambiguous connotations of racial uplift and betrayal associated with capitalized *Negro* in English. Instead, it identifies the narratee in the translated text with the Dominican people in general. Also interesting to note is that the indefinite article in *an illegal invasion* is substituted by a definite article in la invasión ilegal. In this way, the invasion is redescribed as part of the shared knowledge of Dominican people rather than one of the American interventions in the Caribbean.

A final example brings together some of the translation strategies discussed above:

- (23) Couldn't play sports for shit, or dominoes, was beyond uncoordinated, threw a ball like a girl. Had no knack for music or business or dance, no hustle, no rap, no G. And most damning of all: no looks. He wore his semi-kink hair in a Puerto Rican afro, rocked enormous Section 8 glasses – his “anti-pussy devices,” Al and Miggs, his only friends, called them – [...].

(Díaz 2008a: 20)

No podía practicar deportes, ni jugar al dominó, carecía de coordinación y tiraba la pelota como una hembra. Tampoco tenía destreza para la música ni para el negocio ni para el baile, no tenía picardía, ni rap, ni don pa na. Y lo peor de todo: era un maco. Tenía el pelo medio malo y se lo peinaba en un afro estilo puertorriqueño, usaba unos enormes espejuelos que parecía que se los proporcionaba un oculista de asistencia pública – sus aparatos «antivaginales», les decían Al y Miggs, sus únicos panas – , [...].

(Díaz 2008b: 31, Mondadori edition)

No podía practicar deportes is much less strong than *Couldn't play sports for shit*. The slang expression *no G* is replaced by ni don pa na, which has some of the colloquial flavour of the original (through the phonetic transcription of spoken language) but is still more neutral and less (ethnically) marked. Something similar can be said about the substitution of sus aparatos «antivaginales» for *his anti-pussy devices*. Although the adjective antivaginales is put between brackets to suggest that this is



something which Oscar's friends might have literally said, the phrase seems to present us with a sanitized version of the vulgar sexual slur directed at the protagonist. On the other hand, this process of neutralization is counteracted by daring lexical choices, which restore some of the narrative exuberance characteristic of Díaz's prose. Thus, *girl* is translated by *hembra* (a sexist slur), and not by the more neutral *chica*. The Caribbean words *maco* and *panas* are not only more colloquial than their ST equivalents, they also add a further regional dimension.

### 3.2.3. Nerd Talk

As regards the nerd talk, the conclusion can be fairly transparent: here, the translator has made use of neologisms and calques from the English language. This is how Mondadori conveys the passage we discussed at the beginning of section 2.1:

- (24) Era solo en estas cosas que Óscar demostraba el genio que su abuela insistía era parte del patrimonio familiar. Podía escribir en *élfico*, podía hablar *chakobsa*, podía distinguir entre un *slan*, un *dorsai* y un *lensman* en detalle; sabía más sobre el universo Marvel que el mismo Stan Lee, y era un fanático de los juegos de rol [...] Quizá si –como yo– hubiera podido ocultar su *otakunidad*, la cosa hubiera sido más fácil, pero no podía. Llevaba su nerdería como un *jedi* lleva su *sable láser* o un *lensman* su *lente*. No podía pasar por Normal no importaba cuánto lo hubiera deseado.

(Díaz 2008b: 32, Mondadori edition)

The Vintage volume does not differ fundamentally from the Mondadori: *elvish* is left untranslated rather than hispanicized and *fanático* is substituted for the perhaps somewhat more informal *fan*. What really sets apart the two editions, however, is that Vintage offers no less than six footnotes to accompany the passage, explaining the following terms to the TT reader: *elvish*, *chakobsa*, *lensman*, *Marvel*, *Stan Lee* and *otakunidad*.

### 3.2.4. Footnotes

Above, we noted that the Vintage edition includes a series of explanatory footnotes. The function of the inserted footnotes appears to be threefold.

A majority of them serves to explain the narrator's nerd talk or science fiction language:

- (25) In Oscar's version, I raised my hand and said, *Mellon*. Took him a second to recognize the word.  
Mellon, he said finally.

(Díaz 2008a: 200)

En la version de Óscar, levanté la mano y dije, *Mellon*.<sup>130</sup> Le tomó un segundo reconocer la palabra.

Mellon, dijo finalmente.

<sup>130</sup> [Amigo en elvish, idioma inventado por Tolkien]

(Díaz 2008c: 211, Vintage edition)

A second group of footnotes contextualizes cultural references, for instance to popular musicians (Sinéad O'Connor, Robert Smith, Lou Reed ...) or politicians (Kennedy). Apart from elements belonging to mainstream culture in North America,

Caribbean terms are explained too, such as *klerin* [“aguardiente haitiano”], or even specifically Dominican ones, as the following example attests:

- (26) the Fiat dealer, bald, white, and smiling, a regular Hipólito Mejía  
(Díaz 2008a: 109)

el dealer del Fiat, calvo, blanco y sonriente, un verdadero Hipólito Mejía<sup>88</sup>

<sup>88</sup> [Hipólito Mejía (1941- ), político dominicano fundador del Movimiento Familiar Cristiano y presidente de la República (2000-2004)]

(Díaz 2008c: 117, Vintage edition)

A third and final category of footnotes elucidates the relatively few cases where English words or phrases have been left untranslated in the main text, as is the case with the following pun:

- (27) ¿Ustedes saben lo que significa Pontiac? Poor Old Nigger Thinks it’s a Cadillac.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>55</sup> [El pobre negro cree que es un Cadillac]

(Díaz 2008c: 72, Vintage edition)

The non-translation of the second sentence was motivated by the realization that the word play would not come out in Spanish. Whether the joke is still funny when it needs to be explained in a footnote is another issue. Keeping in mind that the Vintage volume was produced for a North American audience, we can only conclude that its editorial policy of paraphrasing all “foreign” elements (including both Caribbean and North American cultural references) appears rather conservative or even patronizing, especially in view of Díaz’s poetics of nontranslation. What is also significant is that the Cadillac joke is told by one of Lola’s teenage boyfriends in a chapter narrated entirely by her and in all probability addressed to Yunior.<sup>16</sup>

### 3.3. Addressing the Narratee in Translation

Regarding the translation of the *you*-form, several observations can be made which point in the same direction, namely a tendency to make the *you*-figure less salient and more generic. First, when the *you*-form has a generic meaning in the ST, the Spanish translation frequently uses impersonal constructions such as *uno*, impersonal *se*, or a definite article, instead of the generic *tú*. In other contexts, the *you*-reference disappears. This is for example the case in Yunior’s self-references as *your (humble) Watcher*, which establishes a solidarity relation between the narrator and the narratee. In only one of the three cases discussed in 2.2, the expression is translated equivalently (*su humilde Observador*). In the other cases, *your* is substituted by a demonstrative modifier or a definite article. As a consequence, the solidarity between the narrator and the narratee decreases.

- (28) Even *your* humble Watcher, reviewing her old pictures, is struck by what a fucking babe she was.

(Díaz 2008a: 92)

Incluso *este* humilde Vigilante, repasando fotos viejas, se quedó estupefacto al ver lo tigróna que fue en su época.

(Díaz 2008b: 94, Mondadori edition)

(29) Even your Watcher has his silences.

(Díaz 2008a: 149)

Hasta El Vigilante tiene sus silencios.

(Díaz 2008b: 144, Mondadori edition)

The TT narratee becomes less specific as well. Whereas the ST deliberately exploits the singular-plural ambiguity of the *you*-form, the Spanish translation consistently addresses the narratee with the plural ustedes:

(30) Here at last is her smile: burn it into your memory; you won't see it often.

(Díaz 2008a: 114)

Al fin, una sonrisa: grábensela en la memoria, porque no la verán mucho.

(Díaz 2008b: 115, Mondadori edition)

Interestingly, even in those cases where a Spanish second person singular construction occurs in the ST, the translation replaces it by a plural equivalent:

(31) She cried out each time they struck her but she did not cry, entiendes?

(Díaz 2008a: 146)

Gritaba cada vez que le pegaban, pero no lloró, ¿entienden?

(Díaz 2008b: 142, Mondadori edition)

(32) Imagine: in those days El Hollywood was the It place to be in Baní,

(Díaz 2008a: 114)

Imagínensela: en aquellos días El Hollywood era el lugar de moda en Baní,

(Díaz 2008b: 114, Mondadori edition)

Where in the ST *you* is modified in expressions such as *you all* or *some of you*, the translation leaves out this qualification, thus giving a more generic meaning to *you*:

(33) I'm sure you all guessed that.

(Díaz 2008a: 138)

Estoy seguro que ustedes ya lo habían adivinado.

(Díaz 2008b: 135, Mondadori edition)

(34) As some of you know, canefields are no fucking joke.

(Díaz 2008a: 149)

Como ustedes saben, los cañaverales no son ninguna fokin broma

(Díaz 2008b: 145, Mondadori edition)

We already mentioned that forms of address such as *Negro* were translated by the more neutral mi gente. A similar mechanism is at work in the translation of *players*, of which we noted above that it creates a strong emotional bond between the interlocutors:

Players: never never *never* fuck with a bitch named Awilda. Because when she awildas out on your ass you'll know pain for real.

(Díaz 2008a: 175)

Socios: nunca, nunca, *nunca* se metan con un perra llamada Awilda. Porque cuando se ponga a awildar, van a saber lo que es dolor de verdad.

(Díaz 2008b: 166, Mondadori edition)

In most of these cases, although the translation does convey solidarity meanings, the in-group effect becomes weaker, and the TT often loses the racial and sexual undertones present in the ST.

### 3.4. Translation as a Solidarity-Displacing Mechanism

In section 2.3 we noted how textual heteroglossia and the narratological *I-you* relation interact with each other as solidarity-creating or solidarity-enhancing mechanisms in the ST. Our translation analysis has shown that in the TT textual heteroglossia and forms of address equally interact with each other, and contribute to a displacement of the solidarity mechanisms. In the ST, the occurrence of heteroglossia is very closely connected with the identity of the characters, which are Dominican-American, but also represent and question certain stereotypes within that community, such as the macho versus the nerd. Spanglish, the “bad” English grammar, and racially inflected expressions such as *nigger* or *Negro* work together in creating an ethnically or sociologically defined in-group to which the narrator and the narratee belong. The relation between the narrator and the narratee is also often personalized in marked forms of address.

In translation, the heteroglossic elements are more geographically than socio-logically marked. Especially the sociological characterization of the narrator and the narratee appears to be very difficult to render in translation. The main forms of heteroglossia are now the shared nerd and sci-fi interest of the narrator and the narratee, and the use of Dominican Spanish. At the same time, we have seen that the narratee is less personalized and more generic. In fact, what happens is that the narratee moves somewhat closer to the implied reader of the TT. The use of plural *ustedes*, or of *mi gente* quite consistently evokes the idea of Dominican people in general, more than is the case with the often more personalized *you*, racial *Negro* or sexist *players* in the ST.

This leads to the question as to whether textual heteroglossia still has a solidarity-enhancing function in the translation. We think it still does, but now the solidarity affects perhaps less the relation between the narrator and the narratee, and more clearly the relation between the implied reader of the TT and the implied author of the ST. The use of Dominican Spanish becomes more of a feature of Junot Díaz, a Dominican-American writer, whose work defines itself within the Spanish-speaking world through language use. When the translators state in the editorial note of the Vintage volume that they have maintained the Spanish of the original, they seem to refer to an implied Dominican author. The use of Dominican Spanish still creates an in-group effect, but it does not just affect the relation between the protagonists of the novel, but also the relation between Díaz and his implied readers.

## 4. Concluding Remarks

According to May (1994: 4; quoted in Munday 2008: 16) translations have a tendency to reduce the heteroglossia present in the ST, i.e., “the heteroglossia ‘from below’” is often replaced with “greater literariness ‘from above.’” While these expectations were confirmed to some degree, a more complex picture emerged from our analysis of the Spanish-language editions of *BWLOW*. It is true that the *I*'s and *you*'s of the translation are underspecified in relation to the original, thus confirming the view that complex narrative voices are simplified in translation (Taivalkovski 2002, quoted in Chesterman 2004). As the binary racial regime of the U.S. proves difficult to export, the narrator and narratee are to some extent depersonalized or decharacterized, i.e., they are lifted from an intra- to an extradiegetic level, bringing them closer to the implied author

and reader of the TT. These, too, are less ambiguous than those of the ST. Both the Mondadori and the Vintage edition are directed towards a more stable, monistic audience than the original, which simultaneously addresses insider and outsider readers.

However, this does not therefore entail that the solidarity-effects in BWLOW are entirely neutralized or that the narrative voice is centripetally redefined “from above.” The Spanish-language versions of BWLOW have a decidedly regional inflection, perhaps even more so than the original. Rather than unifying the various voices “from below” in a more literary, authoritative standpoint “from above,” Obejas’s translation profiles Díaz as a typically Caribbean, or specifically Dominican, author through the insertion (and not just the retention) of local idioms and speech forms. Here, a marked difference emerges between the two Spanish editions. While Mondadori brings Díaz’s bestseller within the orbit of Spanish literary traditions, the Vintage edition has exported the author back to the North American context, which apparently required the insertion of an extensive footnote apparatus, explaining cultural references from both U.S. and Dominican culture. Quite ironically, therefore, the Vintage volume constructs an implied reader who is ignorant of the fluid, bilingual cultural background out of which Díaz’s novel emerged and which constitutes the shared heritage of a majority of Spanish-language speakers in the U.S.

#### NOTES

1. We will use the following editions/translations:  
DÍAZ, Junot (2008a): *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. London: Faber & Faber.  
DÍAZ, Junot (2008b): *La maravillosa vida breve de Óscar Wao*. (Translated by Achy OBEJAS). Barcelona: Mondadori.  
DÍAZ, Junot (2008c): *La Breve y Maravillosa Vida de Óscar Wao*. (Translated by Achy OBEJAS). New York: Vintage editions.
2. Grutman notes that the concept of heteroglossia has been mistranslated as referring to the literary representation of multilingualism, which is one reason why he introduced the concept of heterolingualism (Grutman 2006: 40, n. 2).
3. By the narratee of a text is meant “the agent which is at the very least implicitly addressed by the narrator” (Rimmon-Kenan 1997: 89). While a text can have several narratees or addressees, there is normally only one implied reader or authorial audience, which refers not so much to an actual reader or audience as to the “tacit assumptions, beliefs, and norms that organize what sort of information is revealed, withheld, accentuated, or downplayed during the telling of a story” (Herman 2002: 334). The process of translation leads to a reshuffling of these tacit assumptions, beliefs, and norms by adding to the text new layers of enunciation and reception. Most theories of narrative ignore this fact, even while drawing extensively on translated literature (see Schiavi 1996, Hermans 1996, O’Sullivan 2003, Bosseaux 2007, Munday 2008).
4. Ethnic writers are often called upon to be ‘authentic’ and ‘representative.’ Their works, even if they are purely fictitious, are often read as ‘true’ accounts. See Browder (2000). Although several U.S. writers now draw on comic strips and fantasy for their fiction (e.g., Michael Chabon), Díaz is pretty unique in his blend of ethnicity and science fiction.
5. In some definitions, race is seen as an aspect of ethnicity, in others the two terms are approached as mutually exclusive categories. There are limitations to both positions (Omi and Winant 1994). We consider such definitional issues to be part of our object of study. For most Dominicans, ethnicity and race are more or less the same thing. For Dominican-Americans in the U.S., however, their race (skin colour) is often perceived as something that is distinct from their ethnicity (culture and language). Hence, conflicts emerge between their assumed and ascribed identities. In what follows, we use the labels ethnicity and race interchangeably, unless the context suggests otherwise.
6. See Grutman (2004: 158) for a similar point on *chicano* literature.
7. In expository texts, the narrator and the narratee are usually invisible. This led early narratologists to conclude that these functions are optional elements of narrative communication (Chatman 1978). However, Rimmon-Kenan (1997: 88-89) takes issue with this view, arguing that the narrator and

- narratee should be approached as constitutive components of the communicative chain, even if they are not highlighted. Díaz's footnotes subvert the expectation of invisibility by anchoring the narrator and narratee intradiegetically, thus urging the reader to disidentify from what is being told.
8. The if-clause in the final paragraph of the quote can be described as an instance of hypothetically focalized narrative, which serves to counterfactualize the reference world of the novel (Herman 2002: 309-330). BWLOW is in this sense about the inability to speak out or for a group: like his grandfather Abelard's "Lost Final Book" about the supernatural roots of Trujillo's regime, Oscar's own version of that story – the "second package" – gets lost in the mail.
  9. Lola is also the narrator of an introductory section to Part II, where it becomes clear that she is directly addressing Yunior: "I wouldn't feel again like that until I broke with you" (p. 205). Apart from Lola and Yunior, there are two further characters that very briefly function as narrators: Beli's mother-aunt la Inca and Ybón, the prostitute who eventually takes Oscar's virginity.
  10. The same form is used in the following example: "Did you really think some street punk from Samana was going to reach the upper echelons of the Trujillato on hard work alone? Negro, please – this ain't a fucking comic book!" (p. 138). As Randall Kennedy has documented, many African-Americans in the U.S. now regard the use of the label "Negro," which was introduced as a positive alternative to the racial slur "nigger," as a form of self-denial on the part of blacks who want to blend into mainstream society (Kennedy 2003: 39).
  11. Barrios, Nuria (6 July 2008): Un lenguaje nuevo. *El País, suplemento Babelia*.
  12. Gándara, Alejandro (2008): "Junot Díaz." *Blog de literatura 'El escorpión'*, visited 27 November 2009, <<http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2008/07/08/escorpion/1215510619.html>>.
  13. As of February 2009, Vintage Español and Random House Mondadori have agreed to a joint venture for the distribution of books in the U.S.
  14. Obejas also consulted Moira Pujols to guarantee "la dominicanidad" of the translation (Gil (18 September 2008): En español novela de Pulitzer dominicano. *Al día*, 09/18/08. Visited 6 January 2011, <<http://www.pontealdia.com/philadelphia/en-espanol-novela-de-pulitzer-dominicano-2.html>>). Pujols is not explicitly credited in either of the two Spanish editions.
  15. One of the few counterexamples where the racial connotation is retained is the following: "niggers like him got ass *and* mouth raped in jail" (p. 47) becomes "a los negros como él los violaran por el culo y la boca en el presidio" (p. 55). Here, the ascribed identity of Dominican-Americans as part of the black community, which is perceived as being beset with social problems peculiar to the North-American context (gang violence in prisons), seems to predominate over their assumed identity as a distinct ethno-linguistic group of Caribbean descent.
  16. In the original, there are no footnotes in those sections where Lola is in charge of the storytelling. The footnotes thus serve a clear narratological function insofar as they bring into clearer focus Yunior's perspective as an intradiegetic – and therefore nonomniscient – narrator. In the Vintage edition, the translator's footnotes run through the entire narrative, including the chapters narrated by Lola, which blur the interplay of voices present in Díaz's original.

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