Spanish-English Code Switching in Slam Poetry\textsuperscript{1}

Madison Garcia

Swarthmore College - January 2, 2014

\textsuperscript{1}I would like to thank Anisa Schardl for her advice and guidance through the writing process, as well as K. David Harrison for helping me form the initial idea for this thesis. I would also like to thank Grace Leonard for providing feedback in the early stages of the writing process and Frank Chien for his advice on data analysis. All errors are my own.
Abstract

Slam poetry is a type of poetry that sprang up in the last 20 years in which poets perform their poems for a non-academic audience, often in competitions, rather than seeking to be published for the academic community. As a result, slam poets represent a more diverse group than typical academic poets (Somers-Willett 2009). One of the main goals in writing and performing slam poetry is the creation and performance of an “authentic” identity, both as a matter of self-expression (by trying to portray one’s everyday identity accurately) and as a tactic in competition, since “authentic” identities (often equated with marginalized identities) are typically rewarded in competition (Somers-Willett 2009). Because code switching is a part of the linguistic identity of many bilingual speakers, it is natural to expect that bilingual slam poets would incorporate code switching into their poems. However, due to the nature of slam poetry, it is impossible for a speaker to code switch in the unconscious way that he or she would in casual speech: slam poems are almost always written, revised, and rehearsed before performance, so any code switching during performance must necessarily be the result of conscious intention by the poet.

This paper seeks to answer the question of how Spanish-English code switching in slam poetry differs from that in casual speech by analyzing a corpus of data pulled from recorded performances posted on YouTube. In particular, this paper examines code switches into Spanish in otherwise English poems, performed in the United States in the last 5 to 10 years.

The revision and rehearsal process preceding a slam performance eliminates the need for crutch-like code switching, in which the speaker doesn’t know or has momentarily forgotten the desired lexical item in one language. Clarification switching, in which the speaker feels that one language is somehow insufficient to get the point across, is less prevalent than in casual speech, likely due to the lack of conversational interaction that would normally let the speaker know that the addressee is confused. Instead, clarification switching is a compromise that allows poets to perform their code-switching identity without alienating audience members who don’t speak Spanish. The conscious construction of cultural and linguistic identity through code switching also favors the insertion of single lexical items (most frequently nouns and noun phrases), as well as the use of Spanish phonology for names (especially the poet’s own name).
Contents

1 Introduction ........................................ 2
  1.1 Hypotheses and results .......................... 2
  1.2 Structure of this paper ......................... 4
  1.3 Transcription conventions ...................... 5

2 Background ....................................... 5
  2.1 Slam poetry .................................. 5
  2.2 Code switching ................................. 6

3 Categorization of code switches .................. 9

4 Hypothesis 1: Crutching ......................... 15
  4.1 Data collection ................................ 16
  4.2 Findings ..................................... 17
  4.3 Analysis ..................................... 18

5 Hypothesis 2: Clarification switches ............. 19
  5.1 Data collection ............................... 20
  5.2 Findings ..................................... 20
  5.3 Analysis ..................................... 20

6 Hypothesis 3: Single lexical items ............... 21
  6.1 Data collection ................................ 22
  6.2 Findings ..................................... 22
  6.3 Analysis ..................................... 23

7 Hypothesis 3.5: Phonology of names ............ 24
  7.1 Data collection ................................ 25
  7.2 Findings ..................................... 25
  7.3 Analysis ..................................... 26

8 Further work ...................................... 28

9 Conclusion ....................................... 29

A Sample transcription: “Spanglish” (Castello) .... 31
1 Introduction

This thesis seeks to answer the question of how Spanish-English code switching in slam poetry differs from that in casual speech. On one hand, the poet must give much conscious consideration to his or her poem in preparation for performing it, and so cannot code switch in the natural and unconscious way that he or she would in everyday speech. On the other hand, however, many poets seek to express an authentic identity in their poems (often the poet's own identity, though not necessarily – see "Recognize" for an example of the poet portraying an identity arguably not his own (LeFebre 2008)), so code switching in slam poetry performances should seek to mirror what poets think of themselves and their everyday code switching.

In order to answer this question, I analyzed data pulled from recorded performances posted on YouTube. A total of 28 poems by 13 poets comprising 291 instances of code switching were analyzed, looking at different types of code switching – crutching, clarification, control, and footing switches; and intersentential and intrasentential switches – which will be defined in Section 2.

1.1 Hypotheses and results

I had 3.5 hypotheses regarding the types of switching occurring in slam poetry, motivated by the necessary differences in slam poetry versus casual speech in both form (e.g. rehearsed, non-interactive) and function (e.g. winning over an audience). All hypotheses were supported to some degree.

Hypothesis 1 No crutch-like code switching. In preparation for perform-
ing a slam poem, the poet will write, revise, and rehearse the poem; it is rare (though possible) for slam poems to be improvised. This eliminates the need for crutching within the performance, so I expected to not see any. Analysis shows that crutch-like code switching is indeed absent from performed poems. This is not to say that it could not occur; however, it seems unlikely.

**Hypothesis 2** Much less clarification code switching than in casual speech, though not a total absence. There is no conversational interaction between the poet and the audience as there would be in ordinary speech, but the poet may still want to convey the idea of clarification even if its actual effect isn’t to clarify his or her words. Additionally, the poet cannot expect all audience members to be Spanish-English bilingual, so there may be some actual need for clarification in order to not alienate audience members. Analysis shows that clarification switches do occur at a lower frequency in slam poems than in casual speech.

**Hypothesis 3** Frequent insertion of single lexical items for which an English equivalent doesn’t exist or isn’t adequate, or for which a distinction in phonology indicates that the speaker wants to use the original Spanish rather than the assimilated loanword in English (e.g. *tortilla* ‘tortilla’). In expressing an “authentic” identity, English terms may not exist for discussing certain topics, or may not have the same connotations to a bilingual speaker. Analysis shows that insertion of single lexical items is indeed very frequent, accounting for over half the
switches in this data set. However, relatively few of these were items for which an English equivalent doesn’t exist or isn’t adequate, suggesting that there may be other reasons why poets switch single lexical items.

Hypothesis 3.5 As an extension of Hypothesis 3, phonology of names is important to slam poets. Even in an almost entirely English poem, poets referring to their own names use Spanish phonology as an intentional reinforcement of bilingual identity and membership in a Spanish-speaking community. Analysis shows that names of poets and other individuals associated with a Latino community or heritage are predominantly (though not exclusively) pronounced with Spanish phonology.

These results will be further discussed and compared to existing data on code switching in ordinary conversation.

1.2 Structure of this paper

Background information and an overview of existing research are presented in Section 2. Section 3 will detail the syntactic and motivational categories used in this paper. Sections 4 through 7 each discuss one hypothesis. Each of these sections presents a hypothesis, data collection methods, data and findings, and analysis. Topics for further work are presented in Section 8, and Section 9 will conclude.
1.3 Transcription conventions

These transcription conventions are taken from Zentella (1997).

- Spanish words are italicized.
- \(-\text{last part of word follows hyphen, enclosed in parentheses}\) indicates deleted word-final phoneme(s) in Spanish (e.g. \(pa(-ra)\) ‘for’).
- \((\text{beginning of word precedes hyphen enclosed in parentheses-})\) indicates deleted word-initial phoneme(s) in Spanish (e.g. \((es-)t\)á ‘is’).
- [words in brackets] indicate commentary or clarification from the transcriber and are not part of the original speech act.

2 Background

Though both slam poetry and code switching have been extensively researched, little has been done to investigate their overlap. This section will introduce both topics and offer a brief overview of existing research in these areas.

2.1 Slam poetry

Slam poetry is a type of performative poetry that sprang up in the last 20 years or so. In contrast to traditional poetry readings, slam poetry is non-academic and doesn’t seek to be published, instead reaching the audience primarily through performance, particularly competition.\(^1\)

\(^1\)Some scholars and many non-scholars use the terms “slam poetry” and “spoken word poetry” interchangeably. However, Somers-Willett distinguishes between the two by char-

5
Because slam poetry is focused on performance and competition, one of the main goals in writing and performing it is the presentation of a “good” poem. “Good” poems win competitions, which requires that a poet win over an audience of their peers rather than a group of academics. As a result, it is often the case that poems deemed “good” are those that present an “authentic” identity that the audience finds believable. What constitutes “authentic” is ultimately up to the audience, but “authentic” identities are often correlated with marginalized identities (e.g. people of color and women) (Somers-Willett 2009).

The expression of linguistic identity, through word choice and other dialectical variation, contributes to the creation of an “authentic” identity. Because code switching is a part of the linguistic identity of many bilingual speakers, we may expect to see it reflected in bilingual poets’ poems. However, poets cannot reasonably expect their audience to have the same bilingual proficiency, so we may also expect to see code switching treated differently and more carefully in order to not alienate a monolingual audience.

2.2 Code switching

In its simplest definition, code switching is the intermingling of two or more languages in a single utterance, as in Example (1).^2

^2Linguists also use “code mixing” and “borrowing” to refer to some instances of code switching. None of the terms have strictly agreed-upon definitions, so I will use “code switching” exclusively. Code switching between English and Spanish may also be referred to as Spanglish, but as this term may have negative connotations, I will avoid it.
He was sitting down *en la cama, mirándonos peleando*, and really, I don’t remember *si él nos separó* or whatever, you know.

‘He was sitting down in bed, watching us fighting and really, I don’t remember if he separated us or whatever, you know’ (Poplack 2007:219).

Code switching may occur intersententially, as in Example (2), or intrasententially. Intrasentential switching can be further broken down into switches of single lexical items, phrases, and whole clauses, as in Example (3).

(2) *Sí, pero le hablo en español.* When I don’t know something I’ll talk to her in English.

‘Yes, but I talk to her in Spanish. When I don’t know something I’ll talk to her in English’ (Zentella 1997:81).

(3) a. *Mi papá es muy protective.*

‘My father is very protective’ (Pfaff 1979:306).

b. *Lo puso under arrest.*

‘He put him under arrest’ (Pfaff 1979:310).

c. *No voy tanto como iba pero I still believe in it, you know.*

‘I don’t go as much as I went but I still believe in it, you know’ (Pfaff 1979:312).

The reasons behind code switching can generally be grouped into three categories: footing, clarification/emphasis, and crutching (Zentella 1997). Footing may indicate a change in the speaker’s role, such as in the shift from speaker to quoter in Example (4-a), or may try to manipulate the
listener’s behavior by intensifying or reinforcing a command, or by softening a command, as in Example (4-b).

(4)  
   a.   Él me dijo, “Call the police!” pero yo dije, “No voy a llamar la policía na(-da).”
   ‘He told me, “Call the police!” but I said, “I’m not going to call the police nothin’”’ (Zentella 1997:94).
   b.   Victoria Jenine go over there! Jennie vete pa(-ra) (a-)lla.
   ‘Victoria Jenine go over there! Jennie go over there’ (Zentella 1997:95).

Where a monolingual might repeat a phrase, perhaps more loudly, more slowly, or more carefully, or offer a change in wording in order to ensure that the addressee understands the utterance, a bilingual speaker may utilize code switching for the same effect, as in Example (5). As in monolingual clarifications, a clarification switch may simply repeat the information, or it may expand on it in some way.

(5)   ¿No me crees? You don’t believe me?
   ‘You don’t believe me? You don’t believe me?’ (Zentella 1997:96).

Crutch-like code switching often occurs when the speaker doesn’t know or has momentarily forgotten the desired lexical item in one language, as in Example (6).

(6)   Look at her lunar. My brother’s got one on his nalga.
   ‘Look at her mole. My brother’s got one on his buttock’ (Zentella 1997:98).
A discussion of the specific categories used in this paper is presented in Section 3.

3 Categorization of code switches

Each instance of code switching is categorized into both a syntactic category and a motivational category. Most instances fall into one category of each type; however, there are exceptions in both types of categorization. This paper will only deal with instances that fall into these categories. We will first discuss categorization by syntactic type, followed by categorization by motivation.

Categorization by syntactic type is relatively straightforward, though not perfect. The majority of switches fit into a single category, though there are exceptions and ambiguities. The categories are based on Pfaff’s categorization (1979) with the addition of a Name category and an Other category.

- **Name**: Switch for the duration of a name. A name may refer to a person (e.g. Ángela) or to a place (e.g. Argentina)

  (7) She tells me stories of her beloved México.

  ‘She tells me stories of her beloved Mexico.’

  (“Janitor” – LeFebre 2008)

- **Inter**: Switch at a break between sentences. The switch may be ambiguous because a sentence in the context of a poem may not be
a syntactically complete sentence, even though there is a clear break between the “sentences.”

(8) I’m your brother. Tú eres mi hermano.
   ‘I’m your brother. You are my brother.’
   (“How To Fight” – Gómez 2012)

- **Clause:** Switch for a full clause.

(9) Si no entiendes, that’s because you are so dense.
   ‘If you don’t understand, that’s because you are so dense.’
   (“De La Espina Y El Dolor Crece La Flor” – Hernandez 2011)

- **Phrase:** Switch for a phrase. Most typically a prepositional phrase, but may also be a particularly complicated or long noun phrase.

(10) En la comunidad Latina, you have to be hard.
    ‘In the Latino community, you have to be hard.’
    (“De La Espina Y El Dolor Crece La Flor” – Hernandez 2011)

- **Item:** Switch for a single lexical item. Drawing the line between a single lexical item and a phrase becomes ambiguous with poetic run-on sentences. The rule of thumb for my classification is that an item is generally no more than about three words long. Items are further categorized by their part of speech (noun, adjective, verb, preposition, and adverb). Names are not included in this category.
We need to put down our bags to free up our arms for *abrazos.*

‘We need to put down our bags to free up our arm for hugs.’

(“For Seth” – LeFebre 2008)

**Other:** Anything else. These items may simply not meet the criteria for any other category (e.g. the intra-word switch in Example (12)).

(12) I am a...*puta-*ologist.

‘I am a...*hooker-*ologist.’

(“El Barrio” – Fernández 2008)

Categorization by intention is trickier than by syntactic role, since it is much more subjective. The categories here are taken from Zentella (1997) with slight modifications.

**Crutch:** The speaker is at a loss for words in one language. This is often the point where a monolingual speaker would use filler words like ‘Umm’ until finding the word he or she wants.

(13) Look at her *lunar.* My brother’s got one on his *nalga.*

‘Look at her mole. My brother’s got one on his buttock.’

(Zentella 1997:98)

**Clarification:** The speaker feels that the utterance only in one language is insufficient to get the point across.

- **Repetition:** The same information is translated and repeated.

In the case of slam poetry, this may be for the benefit of the
audience (i.e. the poet thinks the audience may not understand without a direct translation) or it may be directed at the addressee of the poem, which is not the performance audience.

(14) No resume, please, por favor.

‘No resume, please, please.’

(“El Barrio” – Fernández 2008)

- Expansion: Additional information is offered in the other language.

(15) Rosalina, how old was she? ¿Cuántos años tuvo tu madre cuando se murió?

‘Rosalina, how old was she? How old was your mother when she died?’

(“What’s Genocide?” – Gómez 2011)

• Control: The speaker seeks to manipulate the listener in some way by switching languages. This generally refers to code switches that soften, intensify, or reinforce commands.

(16) Mira, mira. Here, I’ll give you a little free appetizer.

Look, look. Here, I’ll give you a little free appetizer.

(“El Barrio” – Fernández 2008)

• Footing: The speaker seeks to convey a change in alignment (e.g. from narrator to evaluator of narrative, from speaker to quoter).
- **Quotation:** The switch is meant to mimic the original speaker’s language use. It may be a direct quotation or an indirect quotation (meant to convey the overall patterns of speech).

(17) She said, “Agárrame por los hips.”
    ‘She said, “Take me by the hips.”’
    ("Spanglish" – Flores 2011)

- **Nonexistence:** The speaker knows (or thinks) that the particular word they want only exists in one language.

(18) I know santeras clean people of negative energy...
    ‘I know priestesses of Santeria clean people of negative energy...’
    ("What I’ve Learned" – Monet 2012)

- **Loanword phonology:** The speaker is choosing between phonology for well-established loanwords.

(19) Then they continue eating their enchiladas which they ordered in English.
    ‘Then they continue eating their enchiladas which they ordered in English.’
    ("Ambidextrous Tongues" – LeFebre 2008)

- **Connotation:** The speaker may know a translation of the word, but it may have different connotations in the two languages.
My parents did not leave their barrio so that I could live trying to die in one.

'My parents did not leave their lower-class neighborhood so that I could live trying to die in one.'

("Remind Me" – Acevedo 2008)

- **In group**: The switch is meant to convey intimacy or other belonging to an in group, using especially the associations of Spanish = home and English = out. (Names often fall here.)

Querida niñita, many times I’ve remembered the day that changed our perception of life.

'Dear little girl, many times I’ve remembered the day that changed our perception of life.'

("Querida Niñita" – Rosado 2009)

- **Narrative**: The switch is meant to evoke something particular about a person, character, or narrative.

Blue-eyed Cubans who spit poetry about revolución and mean it.

Blue-eyed Cubans who spit poetry about revolution and mean it.'

("Juan Valdez" – Gómez 2010)

As mentioned at the start of this section, most instances of code switching can be placed into one syntactic and one motivational category. Excep-
tions to these categories are outside the scope of this paper. For the purpose of my hypotheses, a given switch was used in analysis as long as it could be categorized as needed for that hypothesis, even if it did not fit a category of the other type. For example, a switch could be considered in analyzing single lexical switches (Section 6) even if its motivation was unclear.

4 Hypothesis 1: Crutching

Hypothesis 1 posed that crutch-like code switching would be absent from slam poems. Crutch-like code switching generally indicates that the speaker is at a loss for words in one language. Where a monolingual speaker would often use filler words (‘umm’ or ‘uhh,’ for example) until finding the word, bilingual speakers have the option to switch languages to find the word they want. This is common in casual speech when the speaker is choosing words on the spot, but in preparing a slam poem, the poet will almost always write, revise, and rehearse the poem many times before performing it. This means that there should be little need for crutching during a performance, so I anticipated seeing an absence of crutching in slam poems.

This section will present and discuss the data and findings with regards to Hypothesis 1. Section 4.1 will discuss data collection methods, Section 4.2 will present the data relevant to this hypothesis, and Section 4.3 will re-examine the hypothesis in light of these data.
4.1 Data collection

All data were taken from recordings of 28 poems by 13 poets comprising 291 instances of code switching. All recordings are publicly available on YouTube.3

All poems were first transcribed with indications of where code switches occurred.4 Some poets have a written version of their poems, either in the description of the YouTube video or on a personal blog or other website. In some other cases, other individuals have provided transcriptions, often in the comments section of the YouTube video. When these written versions were available, they were cross-referenced with the actual performance to provide an accurate transcript including code switches, as a poem may vary each time it is performed. However, a majority of poems did not have any kind of written version and were transcribed by me.

After transcription, each instance of code switching was tagged with contextual information and was categorized both by its syntactic type (i.e. intersentential, clause, phrase, or single lexical item) and by its apparent intention (i.e. footing, clarification, or crutching, with subtypes when appropriate). Details on categorization by syntactic type and intention and a full summary of types and subtypes used in this paper are available in Appendix 3.

Categorization by syntactic type is relatively straightforward, though not perfect. The majority of switches fit into one category or another, although there is some overlap and some ambiguity. The categories are based on

---

3 See Primary Sources for a full list of poems and YouTube links.
4 See Appendix A for a sample transcription.
Pfaff’s categorization (1979) with the addition of a Name category and an Other category.

Categorization by intention is much trickier than by syntactic type, as it is not strictly objective. While there are guidelines for deciding which category a switch belongs to, it is not always clear where a switch belongs. Further, the same switch may have a different effect on different addressees (e.g. different audience members may have different views on a given switch) or even the same addressee at different times (e.g. the same person listening to the same poem in different circumstances). Zentella compares the difficulties in such a categorization to the difficulty of trying to explain why a monolingual would use one synonym over another – not every switch has an identifiable function, some switches have multiple functions, and a given function may be accomplished without switching (1997:99). As much as possible, however, each switch was assigned to a single category. The categories are based on Zentella’s categorization (1997) with some small modifications.

The amount of metadata (e.g. performance date, venue) available for each performance varies, so some poems and therefore some code switches have more contextual information than others.

4.2 Findings

Notably, there were no instances of crutch-like code switching in my data (0/291). In contrast, Zentella reports crutch-like switches as accounting for at least 10% and up to nearly 45% of all categorized switches, with high interspeaker variation (1997:104).
4.3 Analysis

The universal absence of crutch-like code switching supports Hypothesis 1. The pre-performance process of revision and rehearsal seems like a likely explanation for why poets do not use crutching in performance. Since slam poets must know their poems inside and out to perform well enough to win, it seems unlikely that poets would forget or stumble over their poems.

However, it is certainly possible for poets to err in performance. The poems studied in this paper are mostly performed by experienced poets; almost all videos used here show poets who have performed before performing poems that have been performed before. It is possible that examining more novice poets or newer poems would turn up instances of poets stumbling and perhaps using crutching. Such an examination must also explore the boundary between the performance of the poem and commentary on the performance – should all utterances on the stage be considered an equal part of the performance or poem?

In addition, it is possible that a poet may try to mimic their natural crutch-like code switches in the way that a monolingual poet may intentionally include filler words like ‘umm.’ However, once the switch becomes scripted in this way, it may not truly belong in the crutching category; this sort of characterization may be more appropriate as an instance of a footing switch.

These further considerations serve to support the original hypothesis that crutch-like code switching should not occur in slam poetry: even if switches that look like crutches did occur, they would almost certainly either be
outside the performance or be too intentional to truly be a crutch.

5 Hypothesis 2: Clarification switches

Hypothesis 2 posed that there would be few instances of clarification code switching, though not a total absence as there is with crutching. (See Section 4 for a discussion of crutching.) Clarification code switches are used when the speaker feels that one language is insufficient to get their point across. This may exhibit as pure repetition, where the same information is simply translated and repeated; as an expansion on the first utterance, where additional information is presented in the other language; or a combination of repetition and expansion.

Since there is no conversational interaction between the poet and the audience, there is no way to detect and respond to a listener’s lack of comprehension as there is in ordinary speech. Still, the poet cannot expect all audience members to be Spanish-English bilingual, so there may be preemptive clarification switching so as not to alienate monolingual audience members. Not alienating the audience is especially important with regard to the competitive aspect of performance, since a poem that the audience can’t understand is unlikely to win. This raises the question of why a bilingual poet would ever code switch for a monolingual audience. The poet must find a balance between portraying their code-switching identity “authentically” and making that identity accessible to monolinguals; clarification switching seems to be a common compromise.

Additionally, the poet may use clarification switches to convey the idea
of clarification even if the actual effect of the switch isn’t to clarify the poet’s words to the audience (perhaps clarifying to an addressee other than the audience).

This section will present and discuss the data and findings with regards to Hypothesis 2. Section 5.1 will discuss data collection methods, Section 5.2 will present the data relevant to this hypothesis, and Section 5.3 will re-examine the hypothesis in light of these data.

5.1 Data collection

The same data and collection methods were used as for Hypothesis 1 in Section 4. See Section 4.1 for more information.

5.2 Findings

Clarification switches accounted for a relatively small portion of switches overall (19/291 or 6.5%). 12 of these were repetition switches (63%); 7 were expansion switches (37%). The small total number of clarification switches makes it hard to draw more detailed conclusions about their use.

5.3 Analysis

These data suggest a low overall frequency of clarification switches, as they account for only 6.5% of all observed switches. In contrast, clarification switches account for 25% or more of the code switches used in everyday speech, though with variation by speaker (Zentella 1997:104). It is hard to draw further conclusions about the slam poetry data set with so few total occurrences. Further research could attempt to analyze how repetition and
expansion switches are used differently from each other and how clarification switches are distributed across different syntactic types of switches.

I hypothesize that the majority of occurrences of clarification switches are for the benefit of the audience. Interviewing poets regarding their conscious intentions may also contribute valuable insights into the motivation of these clarification switches. Nonetheless, regardless of motivation, the data support the original hypothesis that clarification switches occur less frequently in slam poetry than in everyday speech.

6 Hypothesis 3: Single lexical items

Hypothesis 3 posed that the insertion of single lexical items would be very frequent relative to other syntactic types of switches. This hypothesis also predicted that these single lexical item switches would use items for which an English equivalent doesn’t exist or isn’t adequate. For the purpose of this hypothesis, these switches may also appear as using the original Spanish phonology rather than the phonology of the assimilated English loanword (e.g. *tortilla* ‘tortilla’). In trying to express an “authentic” identity, English terms may not exist to discuss certain topics (e.g. *mangu* ‘mashed plantains’), or may not have the same connotations to a bilingual speaker as an apparently equivalent term. For example, *el barrio*, which strictly translates to ‘the neighborhood,’ is a specific reference to a community, whereas ‘the neighborhood’ is a generic term.

This section will present and discuss the data and findings with regards to Hypothesis 3. Section 6.1 will discuss data collection methods, Section 6.2
Table 1: Summary of occurrences of different syntactic types of code switching in slam poems versus everyday speech. Occurrences in slam poetry are out of 291 total switches. Occurrences in everyday speech are out of 1685 total switches.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Inter</th>
<th>Clause</th>
<th>Phrase</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Slam Poetry</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday (Zentella 1997:118)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

will present the data relevant to this hypothesis, and Section 6.3 will re-examine the hypothesis in light of these data.

6.1 Data collection

The same data and collection methods were used as for Hypothesis 1 in Section 4. See Section 4.1 for more information.

6.2 Findings

Insertion of single lexical items accounted for over half of all switches (153/291 or 52.6% – see Table 1).\(^5\) The majority of these were nouns or noun phrases (138/153 or 90.2% – see Table 2). Adjectives and adjective phrases accounted for another 6.5% (10/153); the remaining 3.3% (5/153) was made up of verbs, prepositions, and adverbs.

In comparison, single lexical items account for slightly less than half of all switches (738/1685 or 43.8%) in everyday speech (Zentella 1997:118).

---

\(^5\)Note that names are not included in counts of single lexical items. Zentella doesn’t consider names as switches per se and so does not include them in her counts of single lexical items. They are kept separate here as well for equal comparison. See Section 7 for a discussion of code switching names in slam poetry.
Table 2: Breakdown of switches of single lexical items by part of speech (excluding names) in slam poems versus everyday speech. Each of these categories also includes the corresponding phrase (e.g. Noun includes both nouns and noun phrases). There are a total of 153 single lexical item switches in slam poetry and 738 switches in everyday speech.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Adj</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Prep</th>
<th>Adv</th>
<th>Conj</th>
<th>Det</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Slam Poetry</td>
<td>90.2%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday</td>
<td>50.5%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again, the majority of single lexical item switches are nouns or noun phrases, though much less so than in slam poems (only 373/738 or 50.5%) (Zentella 1997:118).

### 6.3 Analysis

In both slam poetry and in everyday speech, single lexical items represent the largest syntactic category of code switches. Slam poems do exhibit a higher rate of single lexical item switches than everyday speech, though it is not apparent with a data set this size whether it is generally true that slam poems use more single lexical item switches.

What is most interesting about single lexical item switches in slam poems versus everyday speech are the dramatic differences in the parts of speech that are code switched. In slam poems, nouns and noun phrases make up an overwhelming majority of single lexical item switches (90.2%); in everyday speech, nouns and noun phrases are still the majority, but far less so (50.5%) (Zentella 1997:118).

It is possible that this is because in everyday speech, a bilingual speaker
can assume that the addressee is equally likely to understand a code switch regardless of what part of speech the switch incorporates. In contrast, a slam poet may think that their audience is more likely to be accommodating of unknown nouns than of other parts of speech. Additionally, many of the noun switches involve loanwords (e.g. *adobe* ‘adobe’) or cognates (e.g. *revolución* ‘revolution’). Like with clarification switches in Section 5, it would be interesting to discuss with slam poets their conscious intentions in using single lexical item code switches.

The original hypothesis of high frequency of single lexical item switches relative to other syntactic types of switches is supported by the data here. Switches of single lexical items are widely used in slam poems and are overwhelmingly switches of nouns and noun phrases, much more so than in everyday speech.

7 Hypothesis 3.5: Phonology of names

As an extension of Hypothesis 3, Hypothesis 3.5 posed that the phonology of names is important, especially in creating a multilingual identity in slam poetry. Many names have equivalents in both English and Spanish (e.g. ‘John’ and *Juan* are technically translations of each other) and may even be spelled identically in both languages (e.g. ‘Erica’ and *Erica*); additionally, any name may be (mis)pronounced in the language it didn’t originate in.

This section will present and discuss the data and findings with regards to Hypothesis 3. Section 7.1 will discuss data collection methods, Section 7.2 will present the data relevant to this hypothesis, and Section 7.3 will re-
Table 3: Summary of occurrences of names in English and Spanish phonology. There are a total of 116 occurrences of names of people and 167 occurrences of names of places, for a total of 283 names.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English/English</th>
<th>English/Spanish</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>50.9%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Places</td>
<td>55.7%</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>53.7%</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.1 Data collection

The same data and collection methods were used as for Hypothesis 1 in Section 4. See Section 4.1 for more information.

7.2 Findings

Occurrences of names were tabulated separately from other data to explore the relative frequencies of each language in discussing both people and places and the choice of language when either would be feasible. Summary data may be seen in Table 3.

In Table 3 English/English denotes names spoken using English phonology that have little motivation to be spoken in Spanish in a predominantly English poem (e.g. ‘Zach Morris’ in “Juan Valdez” (Gómez 2010)). English/Spanish denotes names spoken using English phonology that could equally well be spoken with Spanish phonology but may have other contextual reasons for using English phonology (e.g. ‘The Alamo’ in “Speaking in Tongues” (Zihuatanejo 2010)). Spanish denotes Spanish names spoken with Spanish phonology (e.g. Benny Moré in “Spanglish” (Flores 2011)).
Table 4: Distribution of occurrences of originally Spanish names in slam poetry. There are a total of 57 names of people that Spanish phonology would be reasonable for and 74 names of places, for a total of 131 Spanish names.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Places</td>
<td>51.4%</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>42.7%</td>
<td>57.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in Table 3, English/English names make up the majority of name instances (152/283 or 53.7%), which is not surprising since the poems studied here are primarily in English and are performed in the United States for English-speaking audiences. However, when just the originally Spanish names are considered in Table 4 (i.e. considering only the columns English/Spanish and Spanish from Table 3), there is a tendency toward using Spanish phonology (75/131 or 57.3% of all Spanish names use Spanish phonology), especially with names of people (39/57 or 68.4% of people's names use Spanish phonology).

7.3 Analysis

As expected, phonology of names appears important. In cases when either English or Spanish phonology is possible and reasonable for a name, poets generally tend toward the (usually original) Spanish phonology: 75/131 or 57.3% of all Spanish names use Spanish phonology, and 39/57 or 68.4% of Spanish names of people use Spanish phonology. Place names seem less important, as the split between English and Spanish phonology is nearly even (38/74 or 51.4% English versus 36/74 or 48.6% Spanish).
I hypothesize that the more frequent use of Spanish phonology for people’s names is due to its use as an indication of membership in a Spanish-speaking or Spanish-English bilingual community. Such implicit declarations of group membership may serve to reinforce the poet’s “authentic” identity. This would explain the much higher rate of Spanish phonology than English for names of people, since one’s own name would be important in demonstrating membership.

However, the nearly balanced use of English and Spanish phonologies for names of places suggests that place names may not be as important in creating identity in slam poems. The difference is only by two utterances (2.8 percentage points), suggesting that the difference is simply due to chance. It may be the case that since the studied poems are performed in the United States to English-speaking audiences, it makes more sense with respect to both audience and topic to use English phonologies in cases that don’t explicitly deal with one’s own identity or heritage (e.g. ‘Scandinavian’ versus Argentina in the same clause in “Juan Valdez” (Gómez 2010)). Comparing these data to similar data on place name phonology in other geographic areas or with primarily Spanish-speaking audiences may confirm the influence of the surrounding language in choosing phonology when identity isn’t a clear motivator.

These observations support the original hypothesis that switching to Spanish phonology for names is an important piece of creating a bilingual identity in slam poetry. Code switching names of people reinforces the membership of the speaker and the named people in a Spanish-speaking community and culture.
8 Further work

The results of this research suggest a variety of questions and extensions that remain to be answered about Spanish-English code switching in slam poetry. Comparative research with other languages may offer additional insight into how and why bilingual poets make use of code switching in their performances. Similarly, research into Spanish-English code switching in other countries or in predominantly Spanish poems may reveal useful complementary information. Comparative research with novice versus experienced slam poets may show how differences between unrehearsed and performed speech develop. Where possible, examining drafts of the same poems in different states of completion or performances of the same poem with the poet having increasing familiarity with it may also give insight into how conscious and intentional code switching arises.

There are also many opportunities presented by conducting interviews with bilingual slam poets about their work. Since all of the word choice in slam poems is to some degree intentional, interviews could reveal how speakers' conscious ideas of code switching translate into conscious language use, as well as whether these ideas are effective in communicating with both bilingual and monolingual audiences. Such interviews could also reveal whether audiences (or linguists!) are able to correctly identify the motivations behind individual code switches.
9 Conclusion

As an integral part of many bilingual speakers’ linguistic identity, it is hardly surprising that code switching appears in slam poems by bilingual poets. Unlike code switching in casual speech, code switching in slam poetry is conscious and intentional, and makes use of a different balance of types of switching, with regard to both syntax and intention.

This paper presented 3.5 hypotheses regarding code switching in slam poetry as compared to code switching in everyday speech, all of which were supported to some degree.

Result 1 Crutch-like code switching is indeed absent from slam poetry.
In preparation for performance, the poet will revise and rehearse the poem, which eliminates the need for crutching within the performance.

Result 2 Less clarification code switching is used in slam poetry than in everyday speech, but it is still present. There is no conversational interaction between the poet and the audience as there would be in ordinary speech, but a competing poet cannot risk alienating audience members who can’t be reasonably expected to be Spanish-English bilingual. Poets may use clarification switches as a compromise, allowing the use of words and phrases that establish their bilingual identity while ensuring that the audience isn’t lost.

Result 3 There is frequent insertion of single lexical items in slam poetry, relative to both other types of syntactic switches and everyday speech. In trying to express an “authentic” identity, English terms may not
exist when discussing certain topics, or may not have the same connotations to a bilingual speaker; even when English terms do exist, the use of Spanish words may reinforce bilingual identity. In contrast to everyday speech, single lexical item switches in slam poetry are almost exclusively nouns or noun phrases, rather than verbs, adjectives, or other parts of speech.

Result 3.5 In connection with Hypothesis 3, the phonology used for names is important. Even in almost entirely English poems, poets referring to their own names as well as to those of other members of Spanish-speaking or Latino culture or communities will use Spanish phonology as a reinforcement of identity and membership in a Spanish-speaking community. Names of individuals are very likely to be spoken with the original Spanish phonology, though the same is not true for place names.

In addition to these findings, this paper presents a variety of directions for further work in this area, with deeper and broader examination of similar data, as well as in collaboration with slam poets to discuss the creative intents and effects of code switching.
A Sample transcription: “Spanglish” (Castello)

To my eighth grade Spanish teacher:
On the first day of your class with new notebooks and fading summer tans, I refused to choose a “Spanish name” because I first learned this language from my loved ones, who named me. *Erica* is a name in Spanish, *me entiendes y parece que tu respuesta es no porque* you went ahead and called me *Ángela* instead so I gathered that this was a place where we were expected to play pretend. But I failed to successfully blend in and you ended up calling me a black hole of distraction, “Your name is *Ángela* and you are no longer allowed to sit in the back, you are front row center.” In a desk surrounded by empty desks, I took your test, but I stopped listening. *Por eso, lo siento y ojalá que tu me estés escuchando en este momento, por favor por lo menos ojalá que te sientes este duende,* I’m trembling. I’m attempting to do justice to the singsong syllables that slip from the lips of my grandfather. When he speaks in español [English phonology], his well-worn words tumble smooth like river rocks plucked from the *San Joaquín* and haphazardly stacked into teetering monuments atop sweet-smelling mud, and a generation later I’m left with a tongue that is reluctant, but gifted with eyes that are gradually widening in wonder after so many years spent at the center of a black hole where you took my poems, overflowing with Spanglish, decorated hastily before you could say to me, “No doodling,” and replace them with clean sheets of paper, textbooks and grammar lessons, “Pay attention” and “No more pointless questions” unless I felt like stepping outside so I sat, in my one-size-fits-all desk, absorbing everything, reflecting nothing. I did not sign the name you gave me on the thin tattoo trees. I could not bear the barrenness of branches detached and stripped of their leaves. But now I beam black hole wisdom like there isn’t a culture of silence in the public school system. I take back my right to name the world and this, this is an act of practicing freedom for all my black holes of distraction, kickin’ it, casually complacent in the back of some classroom, yo, remember how to listen, in case you unwittingly dismiss the lessons of the revolutionaries. Liberating education consists in acts of cognition and they are wrong when they claim that you need a new name to gain your freedom.
References


Primary sources

   featuring at LaTiDo. Online: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=
   0oHYIR8m4RA Accessed Oct 17, 2013.

   by Elizabeth Acevedo. Online: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=

   STANFORDSPOKENWORD. Uploaded Apr 23, 2012. CUPSI 2012 —
   Erica Castello – Spanglish. Online: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=
   iZqDOxW7aG4 Accessed Oct 17, 2013.

   FRUTAEXTRANA. Uploaded Jul 27, 2008. EL BARRIO – MARIPOSA
   – PART 2. Online: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrLWD1Ldh2E

   Dreams. Online: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hhttoJwALoA

   EMIKO OYE. Uploaded May 4, 2011. Paul Flores Spanglish. Online:
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EmKNuf6UnK8 Accessed Oct
   17, 2013.

   CHRISTOPHER LEE. Uploaded Apr 17, 2013. “Being Hispanic” by Greg
   García. Online: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wf048F9wgds Accessed

---

To my knowledge, there is no standard format for citing a performance in a YouTube
video rather than just the creator/poster of the video. I have instead used my own stan-
dard here. The format is:
PoET, NAME OF. Performance year. Title of Poem.
POSTER’S USERNAME. Uploaded Jan 1, 2012. Title of Video. Online: youtube.com/


