

**Longing for Identity: Language
Representation**

in

The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo

by Oscar Zeta Acosta

&

The Hate U Give

by Angie Thomas

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<p>Language and identity go together in an inextricable manner, and this thesis examines two novels which have tried to depict the complicated lives of characters who use more than one language, as they face discrimination for doing so, and even for lacking skills in one of their languages. I compare and contrast the uses of Chicano English in <i>The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo</i> by Oscar Zeta Acosta (1989) and of African American English (also known as Vernacular English) in a recent novel, <i>The Hate U Give</i> by Angie Thomas (2017). The protagonists in both novels frequently engage in code-switching, and both characters reflect on their language choices as they seek to find their identity. Borrowing insights from Sociolinguistics, this literary analysis focuses on life changing situations for the characters, where they are depicted as being in an “in-between” space, banished from both cultures. I propose that it is this banishment, which initially acts as a source of shame for the characters and thus prevents them from having a clear identity, that ultimately leads them to question themselves into defining who they are. Both of the protagonists learn to turn the source of shame into a source of pride.</p> <p>In spite of the fact that the novels were written nearly thirty years apart, the analysis reveals that they have much in common, thus acting as a reflection of the struggles people from minorities have to go through in today’s society. Therefore, it is fundamental that we teach future generations about such struggles and create a world where bilingualism—even imperfect bilingualism or multilingualism—is readily accepted, making it easier for people to embrace all sides of themselves.</p>		
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Language and identity are inextricably mixed, and recent novels have attempted to depict the complicated lives of people who live with more than one language, and the discrimination they face as a result of doing so, or indeed failing to adequately do so. In particular, this thesis compares and contrasts the uses of Chicano English in *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* by Oscar Zeta Acosta (1989) and of African American English (also known as Vernacular English) in a recent novel, *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas (2017). The protagonists in both novels frequently engage in code-switching, and both characters reflect on their language choices as they seek to find their identity. Both characters are part of two cultures, yet at the same time feel that they don't really belong anywhere. Both books demonstrate the ways that society and mainstream media create an idea of what minority groups in the United States should be, act, and talk like. As a consequence, both protagonists find themselves socially pressured to fake an identity to fit a role, which naturally leads them to reflect on and question their own language use in order to find their own identity, one that would allow them allow them to feel whole.

My approach in this thesis is to borrow tools from Sociolinguistics and apply them to a literary analysis, as discussed in Chapter 2. I look at the depiction of what Guldin has called linguistic “in-betweenness” or “elsewhere” (54). This concept is understood here as the “banishment” a person gets from his or her possible cultures; hence, they are left in an “in-between space” among these cultures, not being able to be part of any of them. Indeed, Rainer Guldin defines it as “not the intersection of two or more cultural allegiances, but the banishment from all cultures into an empty or neutral space without an identity of its own” (55). Despite focusing on two different minority groups, Chicanos and African Americans, and being written nearly thirty years apart, the two novels are remarkably similar in their treatment of linguistic in-betweenness, and the protagonists' strategies for finding their voice, the topic which I analyze in Chapter 3. The character Oscar Acosta, who has been forbidden from speaking Spanish in his American school, feels shame for not speaking Spanish fluently, and must come to terms with his Mexican-American heritage, becomes the Brown Buffalo who combines both sides of himself. Starr Carter, the young protagonist of *The Hate U Give*, by contrast, is fully bilingual but finds it hard to keep the two sides of herself separate, the one who speaks Standard English at her white school, and African American English (AAE) with her Black friends. Both characters succeed in

finding their voices through being drawn into activism, and code-switching becomes more a mark of honor than a symbol of shame. In addition to helping to illuminate the ways code-switching becomes a way for the authors to depict their main characters' longing for identity, it also functions on a broader level to create an in-group among readers, i.e. those who understand Oscar's use of Spanish, and those who sympathize with—and/or learn from—Starr's meticulous wish to keep her languages separate. Both novels thus provide their readers with a deeper appreciation of the costs—linguistic and otherwise—minority groups face in the US.

There are many means of representation and analysis for this issue, and as this is a qualitative research, I will follow John Creswell as he defines it: “qualitative methods rely on text and image data, have unique steps in data analysis... requires educating readers as to the intent of qualitative research” (232) Therefore, my approach is primarily a linguistic one, as specific attention is paid to the use of different varieties of English and codeswitching.

I analyze the differences and implications on the main characters' chosen languages, the social, cultural, gender, and historical meaning this carry. In this manner I shed light on the construction of identity and the use of code-switching, as they are built up from different events and experiences not only the characters have been through, but also their whole community.

Furthermore, it is fundamental that we take into account that these minorities and communities have been strongly influenced by their mother tongue; therefore, it is very frequent that speakers engage in code-switching and code-mixing, concepts that will be clarified and deepened in Chapter 2. This thesis focuses on how changes in the language of the main characters become emblematic of their more integrated identities. I am especially interested in the concept of “in-betweenness” or “elsewhere” (Guldin 54). This concept is understood here as the “banishment” a person gets from all possible cultures; hence, you are left in an “in-between space” among these cultures not being able to form part of any of them. Indeed, Rainer Guldin defines it as “not the intersection of two or more cultural allegiances, but the banishment from all cultures into an empty or neutral space without an identity of its own” (55). I show how both main characters feel excluded as they belong to a minority, and being a minority is a constant reminder for both of them of how they seem not to be enough according to society's expectations.

Literature provides important insights into how minorities experience the world. Martin Doherty argues that literature is the means or way to understand what it feels like to live in the circumstances of others (4), while Raymond Williams refers to literature as a “structure of

feeling” allowing readers to gain considerable insights about the protagonists’ experiences. Previous literary analysis and criticism have been done on such minorities; nevertheless, they tend to focus on one minority only and in recent or older novels; this means that connections between older and newer are infrequent. These specific novels have been chosen due to the facts that the main characters from both novels belong to a different minority in the United States (US), both have to face and deal with society’s stereotypical image of them, as they are expected to act and behave in a certain way, that is to say, to be someone they feel they are not. In this dynamic of authenticity and socially-induced behavior, we are able to see how both characters struggle to find their identity, facing inner conflicts and constantly codeswitching and using their languages in different ways as they try to find their true self. Finally, we can see how two different individuals, from two different minorities within the US, and separate time frames, still face the same issues regarding stereotypes in today’s world.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Sociolinguistics

Within the field of Linguistics, Sociolinguistics focuses on the study of how human society makes use of language. Moreover, it gives special attention to social class, sex, gender, ethnicity and race, among others. This field of research started as “the study of language, culture, and society, which subsumed diverse approaches to studying language in sociocultural contexts in 1960s and 1970s” (Spencer vii).

This area of study analyses how people put language into practice and “turn it” into theory; thus, there is a lot of empirical data. The discipline itself has a duty through its history to raise and foster awareness of what happens in terms of language and society, since “As language users, we are all theorists” (Coupland 1).

The “Theory of Linguistic Relativism” is central to the Sociolinguistic field. This theory claims that the speaker’s world view and cognition are affected by their structure of language. Consequently, people’s perception of the world and line of thought depend on their spoken language (Kay and Kempton 66). Just as Brown states, “The structure of anyone’s native language strongly influences or fully determines the worldview he will acquire as he learns the language” (qtd. Kay and Kempton 66). In other words, the intellectual system that is embodied by anyone through their language will greatly shape their thought.

Some linguists have also defined the theory as the “reaction to the denigrating attitude towards unwritten languages” (Kay and Kempton 65). Hence, we can state that from the beginning linguists have done work which is nonetheless involuntarily biased in some shape or form; as consequence relativists have waged a long battle seeking a view for some languages which is rational and in unprejudicial.

As a result, if we want to study and understand today’s society regarding minorities, with all its issues such as sex, race, ethnicity, class, etc. language use becomes a fundamental subject of study. It is widely known that minorities have been historically discriminated against in the United States of America.

Firstly, we have Spanish-speaking immigrants, who in some cases became “immigrants” in one day when their house and neighborhood which they had known all their life became part of the US when the this country annexed Texas in 1845, and gained further Mexican territories in the Mexican-American War of 1846-48:

Americans took nearly half of Mexico’s national territory, or what became the states of New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah, and Colorado. To this day, when Mexicans hear American rants about Mexican immigrants illegally invading sovereign American space, their retort is that American Texans were really the first illegal immigrants who invaded Mexico and began the US-Mexico War. (Gutiérrez 4)

These people spoke their own language, had their traditions and culture, and did not take it anywhere else; henceforth, their language has shaped itself into Chicano, as a result of language contact, creating a new variety of English that stands for a certain stereotype in the US. To better understand this minority we must study it through a sociolinguistic aspect.

Secondly and in a similar way, we have African Americans, whose history has been marked by the slave trade, more than three hundred years of slavery, the fight for emancipation, human rights, and the famous Jim Crow laws which discriminated against, segregated, and dehumanized them. Later on, characters in history like Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr, Emmet Till, among many more, are fundamental for understanding social and linguistic norms in the United States of today.

These minorities and their history with the United States of America are key for understanding the social behavior we have nowadays. For example, why some words are socially unacceptable when referring to African Americans, which terms are allowed by some groups of people but not by others, and why such minorities have developed different varieties of English. These are a result of social experiences and history in the US. Linguistics researchers have demonstrated this, and studying them allows us to understand society’s behavior, their language change, and future changes in society, as “The most obvious way that language contact can affect and change a speech community is by leading to bilingualism” (Di Paolo and Spears 13). Therefore, it can be argued that this can be seen now in 2021, with the “social crisis” that has affected the US across all states. To better understand these crises, I claim we need to understand

the history of segregation, stereotyping and discrimination minorities have faced throughout the years, and which sadly are still very present in day-to-day life.

2.2 Varieties of English

An important factor in language varieties is that language speakers of any kind can be distinguished regionally, by their gender, interests, by their ethnicity, and social class; this also applies to the English language. On the one hand, we have the English native speakers, who are set as the example presented to the non-natives, this being anyone in the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle from the Three-Circle Model of World Englishes by Braj Kachru. This phenomenon is a result of language standardization, and these people belong to the Inner Circle. It is important to mention that within the history of the “standardization” of English, the form it took was through “educated” speakers, such as politicians, professors, artists, doctors, engineers, preachers, activists, journalists, teachers etc. Therefore, in white western culture, men were considered the main users, and promoters of this standard English.

Moreover, there is constant exposure to the language throughout many years if not during all their lives, as “students are engaging in social activities where they use English, meaning they are actively producing English through computer-mediated communication such as online games, forums, YouTube, or other forms of social media, or they are engaging in English through films, music, reading, and so on” (Peterson 4). But what we encounter when non-natives, such as migrant families living in the USA, students from Latin America or Asia, become English language users is very interesting. As throughout all their educational lives and through mainstream media they are presented with a native-like accent and pronunciation, which can very frequently be unreachable for students, thus their English has certain characteristics that today's society and the non-linguist sees as a type of “broken English” or “Bad English” due to language attitudes or ideologies, just as Peterson defines the former as “(a related concept to language ideology) beliefs or judgments people have about certain social styles of language, features of a language, or varieties of a language”(8) and the latter as “language ideologies: preconceived

notions, beliefs and/or emotions that people hold about certain social styles, varieties, or features of a language” (7).

Going back to the idea that speakers can be distinguished by many factors, this is what happens with migrants and their families in the US, who as I have mentioned earlier have been historically discriminated against, and their language, this being a variation of English, just like Chicano or African American English is, it is just another form in which they are segregated in many ways from society. Yet, it is only natural that these second language users “prefer structures which are easier to produce; and through failure to communicate, they learn to avoid structures which are difficult to understand” (Dabrowska 67) Nevertheless, is it the fact that it is different from standard English that makes it “bad”? When did different become something negative in language? Scholars have been able to prove that a healthy language is a changing one; moreover, as Rosalina Lippie-Geen states, “all living languages change. This is not a matter of faith or opinion or aesthetics, but observable fact” (Lippi-Green 7).

Consequently, what a linguist nowadays defines as Chicano English, African American English (also known as Vernacular English), or any other variety of English that deviates from the standard English, is what a non-linguist and most of society see as “bad English”. Even though researchers have been able to prove this misconception wrong, it is still something widely accepted and believed by society, this is mostly due to the heavy history and cultural aspects these varieties carry. For instance, African Americans have been segregated and discriminated against since the beginning of slavery in 1619, and even after the Civil War Jim Crow laws made sure things did not change much, and even decades after, the concept and idea in people's mind of what and how African Americans are, is still rooted in their minds, thus they still face discrimination and racism nowadays, as we can see in the “social crisis” that happened in 2020, with all the racial profiling against African Americans which lead to an extensive sense of injustice.

2.2.1 Code-Switching

“Speech Community” is the term used by Sociolinguists when studying a certain group of people, this refers to “a group of speakers who share the same language varieties or speech repertoires” (Davies 5).

Moreover, as these communities have such a strong language influence by their mother tongue, it is very frequent that speakers do code-switching and code-mixing. The former being described by Trudgill as “a process whereby bilingual or bidialectal speakers switch back and forth between one language or dialect and another within the same conversation” (qtd. in Davies 5) and the latter being the case when “speakers use different languages even within single utterances” (Davies 5). These two are very frequent in multilingual and bilingual communities, so much so, that it is almost impossible to know when the speaker will use a certain language, as they constantly change. The explanation sociolinguists have come to give this phenomenon is that code-mixing is a powerful way and strategy for its speakers to be able to project two identities at once, Trudgill once again sets the example “of a modern, sophisticated, educated person *and* that of a loyal, local patriot [. . .]” (qtd. in Davies 5).

Codeswitching has been the topic of interest by many researchers as it breaks the expectations and assumptions that only one language will be used in the communicative episode. Therefore, as the use of one language is seen as normal, being this the common and expected, when there is use of two or more languages in a communicative episode “It is seen as something to be explained” (Heller 1). Yet the people who codeswitch can be so unaware of it, that they do not recognize their use of it, they even deny it.

Further on, Heller explains that the language contact phenomena has many forms, thus, acting as an umbrella term, with codeswitching being underneath it (2). She also states that to understand its social significance, and how it takes its particular discourse and linguistic forms at specific times in history and with specific communities, it is fundamental that we look at the community from a language contact phenomena perspective, and also its absence (2-3). Making these two different varieties of English so apart that some linguists consider them to be a different language, as they drift considerably far from standard English.

The link between identity and language involves an important meaning, this implies that we must understand the concept or what we refer to as “group” when exploring language variation in specific groups of speakers. Thus, analyzing how each language is represented in the two novels, which are used by minorities in the US, will allow us to look at them through a scope that involves a strong socio-cultural meaning.

2.3 Language Representations

In the following section, I will briefly explain how human beings perform what they choose to represent, which connects to the concept of identity, and the theory taken into account when analyzing language use and codeswitching in the novels. Both novel’s original language is English, nevertheless both make use of a variety of English, one being Chicano English in *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* and African American English (also referred to as AAE) in *The Hate U Give* (THUG). These varieties of English are considered nowadays by some to be another language, thus, making their users, like Starr from THUG, bilingual.

Under this light, it is important to take into account that just as Lippi-Green states, “we project our identities again and again to ourselves and everyone else, in an act that provides a kind of psychological cultural grounding” (265). The issue becomes clear when there are confrontational situations or discussions regarding race and ethnicity occur, as these now can and most likely turn emotionally intense, as this involves more than knowledge, it involves the individuals’ idea of themselves and their understanding of who they are is at stake. This will be shown in excerpts of the novels, as the main characters have to confront challenging situations in which who they are, is questioned and challenged by society. Under these emotionally charged situations the main characters code-switch as if it was the only way they can feel liberates them or simply burst out.

On the one hand, sociolinguists and researchers have established very well the relationship between the importance of language, identity, and ethnicity but, on the other hand, the relationship between solidarity and language choices is not as commonly known or taken into

account when discussing such issues. And yet, the choices we make in our language features represent and demonstrate “solidarity with one community” (Lippi-Green 266).

2.4 Chicano English

The Hispanic population is believed to be one of the fastest-growing in the US. Due to the segregation they face, they as other minorities were set to live in specific places or neighborhoods, which led them to form communities. Language in these communities has had an important role, as Davies states “language has a central role in our sense of ethnicity and can survive beyond national borders and where the sense of national identity has been undermined or lost” (60). Therefore, we can state that no matter the fact that the Mexican border changed, making some people who lived in Mexico from one night to another become “immigrants” living on US soil, the ones who stayed or have moved to the US have found a sense of community.

Nevertheless, and despite the big diversity within Hispanic speakers that live in the US, there is a wide misconception society has built about this community, this being one that has been also influenced and massified by mainstream media, popular shows, music, and the entertainment industry just as with social media. The misbelief that has been constantly nurtured by society is that this culture is “a homogenous community that refuses to learn English or speaks inferior or inadequate English” (Davies 73). In other words, while “Social scientists and politicians debate this issue of race, the public has come to its own conclusions. Anglos do see Mexicans as racially *other*: not white or black, but brown” (qtd. Lippi-Green 264).

It is worthwhile mentioning the difference between the commonly known concept of Spanglish, as it is completely different from speaking Chicano English. In spite of this, non-linguists get confused with the term Spanglish, and this term only undermines the Chicano language and the identity it has for its speakers, as Spanglish is the code-switching between English and Spanish.

As I will establish, Chicano is much more than this. Linguists have struggled for a long time trying to reach a consensus on how to define Chicano English: on the one hand, some believe it to be a transitory effect of language learning; on the other hand, others believe that it

should be thought of as an autonomous dialect and a third party believes it is both of the previously mentioned (Santa Ana 3). According to Santa Ana:

Chicano English is an ethnic dialect that children acquire as they acquire English in the barrio or other ethnic social setting during their language acquisition period. Chicano English is to be distinguished from the English of second- language learners. The latter learn English after the so-called critical age of language acquisition (15).

Nevertheless, and as a consequence of undermining the language, it seems that there is one common ultimate goal in society nowadays, which is “to devalue and suppress everything Spanish” (Lippi-Green 261) as calling the act of code-switching Spanglish is a reflection of the subordination of minorities and their history in the US against the “common” or American culture, as according to Lippi-Green, it is “to deny a language and its people a distinct name is to refuse to acknowledge them” (261).

In the same light, it seems that society has given these Spanish speakers only one option, if not they will face even more discrimination. That is, according to Lippi-Green that “there is only one acceptable choice: it is not enough for 44 million Spanish speakers to become bilingual: they must learn the right English and following from that, the right U.S. culture, into which they must assimilate completely” (261).

Additionally, it is the attitudes of the ordinary speakers, the people in power, policy makers, and educationalists (which tend to be a minority among the other groups) the ones who determine how much an English variety, which is associated with an ethnic minority, like the Chicano, can and will be supported or discriminated against in communities, schools, and workplaces in general. However, in a multi-ethnic context the tolerance towards these varieties can be higher, and “Evidence of strategic code-switching by school pupils in multi-cultural educational settings shows that Standard English norms are not necessarily preferred or advantageous, especially within youth culture, though not all teachers are prepared or sufficiently trained to deal with code-switching in the classroom” (Davies 74).

All in all, while in some places the standard might not be preferred, it is the official language taught all around the country, and the common scenario is that students who are native to these varieties get “punished” or corrected as their English is believed to be “bad” or “broken”

when in reality they just speak a different variety, thus becoming part of a system that segregates any variety that deviates from the Standard.

Therefore, we can state that as a result of language contact and attitudes, plus the mainstream media influences, Chicanos face constant discrimination, although this has changed over time, while there is still a long way to go if we want the attitudes towards Chicano English to change positively. This community and its speakers have had an important influence in the Inner Circle Englishes, as Baugh and Cable, state the most common borrowed words such as, “nachos, sangria, margarita” (qtd. Davies 74) are more and more common nowadays, there has also been more representation in politics, thus the contact among English and Spanish seem to be one that will bring more change in the future.

The *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* by Oscar Zeta Acosta (1989) is written in standard English, but as the main character is of Mexican descent, he makes use of Spanish vocabulary and code switches, at times feeling social pressure for looking Mexican, for his choice of words, and at others for not knowing enough Spanish. Thus, we will see how language is portrayed as the main character is ashamed of what he is and what he speaks while living in the United States and at other times while visiting Mexico.

2.5 African American English

Just as speakers of Chicano English are discriminated against in US culture, speakers of African American English are as well. This language has been studied more than any other American English dialect according to Wolfram and Natalie Schilling (217) Moreover, they state that this past century this dialect has gained more and more media attention and public criticism, as over the years many cases of linguistic profiling have gained even national attention (217). It is worthwhile mentioning that these cases are still relevant nowadays.

AAE has received many labels, and it has also been difficult to define as it involves issues directly linked with ethnicity. Moreover, AAE continues to be controversial because race and ethnicity in American society remain highly contentious and politically sensitive. Arthur Spears notes, “The Ebonics Controversy was a prime example of attitudes toward a group of people

channeled through remarks about its language” (qtd. in Wolfram and Schilling 218). As the Oakland School Board recognized that the African American youth of the school had their native language; thus standard American English needed to be taught through a specific program which required codeswitching among the two languages. The media portrayed it as if only AAE would be taught instead of Standard English (SE) causing a scandal.

Therefore, seeking the definition of AAE and Chicano English is not simply assigning labels and terms, as this has a considerable social consequences on how the speakers are characterized.

Hence, we must consider their historical aspect and today’s society. Nowadays when using the term African American it refers to “people of known African descent whose families have been in the U.S. for at least 150 years, since around the time slavery was abolished” (Di Paolo and Spears 101). It is believed that AAE has its roots in the Transatlantic slave trade, as this mainly involved people from the central coast of West Africa. It is believed that when these people were sold into slavery they were either separated if they spoke the same language (considering they spoke different languages in different parts of West Africa), or the different languages were not understood by the slave traders. Therefore, as they were not able to speak their language when put into contact with the English language they were exposed to certain registers and domains strictly related to working life and their livelihood. (Peterson 100)

Further on, many linguists argue that after the “Great Migration” in the United States, “African American English developed into an urban, inner-city phenomenon, growing even more distinct not only from mainstream American English, but from Southern US English, as well” (Peterson 102). Henceforth it is only reasonable that several features of Southern US English overlap with African American.

During all the history of the US, society has had a very “well” formed concept of language varieties or the different types of English to put it in other words, mainstream media has also had a big influence on the ideas and concepts people create regarding African Americans and AAE. Consequently, the term “dialect” is frequently used when discussing language varieties and is used in popular culture in two main ways, one being neutrally and the other way when referring to a “bad” or “corrupted” English variety. Therefore, Ralph W. Fasold, who states that “that the notion of “a language” is “*purely* a social construct and that linguistic criteria play no

role whatsoever” and that the role of linguistic factors “is an epiphenomenon” (qtd. in Wolfram and Schilling 219).

Further on, the author mentions that while it might be an extreme view, it does help to “differentiate dialect versus language as a sociopolitical issue rather than a simple linguistic one” (Wolfram and Schilling 219).

Taking into account that this is a sociopolitical issue, some facts should be stated, when we later analyze the novel *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas (2017):

- Not everyone who self-identifies as African American speaks African American English.
- Not everyone who speaks African American English is African American. It all depends on the circumstances in which people live and how they identify.
- Many (not all) speakers of African American English have the linguistic skill to shift into a more mainstream (in other words, “White”) way of speaking when the situation calls for it.
- Among people who identify as African American, African American English is an extremely divisive topic, to the point where even mother-tongue speakers may deny it exists.
- Within the US, African American English is probably the most stigmatized and misunderstood variety of US English, yet language scientists know a lot about it. Throughout the years, these scientists have become increasingly more successful in spreading their knowledge.
- African American English is a cover (i.e., general) term: it includes many sub-varieties, such as local versions of African American English (Peterson 102).

Once again, this will be important when looking into the novel, as the main character is an African American teenager who constantly changes from AAE to standard English to avoid social pressure and prejudice, this happens through a specific period of her life when she experiences extreme and intense situations which make her feel trapped and struggles with her own identity.

Hence, we can state that AAE is a rare cultural dominion of a US-specific population, this is a lively language system that relates its speakers with generations of them. Thus, it something that should not be aped or appropriated, as currently happens in today's society.

Having now identified the main features of Chicano and African American English, let us turn next to examining how these languages, and code-switching between them and Standard English, is depicted in the novels.

CHAPTER 3: LITERARY WORKS

3.1 Brown Buffalo Analysis

The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo (referred to in this paper as *Brown Buffalo* as the main character refers to himself) was written by Oscar Zeta Acosta and published in 1989 before his mysterious disappearance and probable death. This book deals with the life of Oscar Zeta Acosta, a North American lawyer of Mexican decent, who constantly finds himself being rejected by the American and by the Mexican people and culture. It is worth mentioning that the author was very well known as the Chicano “Robin Hood” lawyer, yet someone who was always living life on the edge, tempted by food and drugs among other vices. He writes about his life and self-discovery in a fictional way. The story itself is multilinear, as it jumps from past events to the present in the main character's life. The book covers most of his adult life, and also includes how he remembers and reflects upon his childhood experiences which have left some sort of imprint on him as he struggles to find a sense of belonging. Oscar Zeta Acosta shares how he resorts to drugs, alcohol, and therapy sessions until he is able to identify himself as a Chicano, more importantly, as an activist of the people he identifies with.

The story is set in Oakland, California, where he works in an antipoverty agency with a strong feeling of lack of purpose, and it begins when he decides to take the road as he leaves his job after finding out his secretary died of cancer, and he had not known she was so ill. Oscar visits some friends in San Francisco, drinks until passing out, faces harsh memories and heartbreaks from the past until he hits the road again, with Mexico as a final destination as he states “I decided to go to El Paso, the place of my birth, to see if I could find the object of my quest. I still wanted to find out just who in the hell I really was” (Acosta 184).

Throughout the story, Oscar shares insights of his upbringing in El Paso (Texas) and later in Riverbank (California) by his two Mexican parents, experiencing the hardships of being a new minority in the US. It is worthwhile mentioning that he only spoke Spanish while very young, but later on he was prohibited from speaking it. Thus over time, he has forgotten most if not all of it, hence he only demonstrates knowledge of basic words and terms. Moreover, the main Spanish

influences he had while growing up were his parents and relatives such as grandparents, cousins, and aunts, all of whom are now gone.

Therefore, throughout his life and due to his history and ethnicity, he is persistently expected to speak and act in specific manners by others but always seems to disappoint the rest as he does not fit in what they believe him to be: not Mexican enough or American enough. In this chapter I will focus on the main character's struggles, and how these situations and the language choices he makes reflect a constant dilemma and deconstruction of himself as he seeks to find his identity and the true meaning of what he considers to be a "Brown Buffalo" and a Chicano who is whom ultimately, proudly, he identifies with.

In this novel, language representation can be analyzed from three main perspectives: 1) short quotations and extracts from the novel which represent the main character's identity struggle; 2) single words or terms he decides to use in Spanish to refer to certain things; and 3) how the narration uses more Spanish than what he claims to be able to use. These I believe represent the social and cultural implications Oscar Zeta Acosta struggles to go through in order to find his true self.

There are numerous examples in the novel where Oscar is singled out by his ethnicity and the expectation people have of him, also regarding language:

"My shrink says, "And is it the same when you hear a new song in Spanish?"
"Fuck, I haven't heard a song in Spanish since I was a kid." "Oh? You don't like Mexican music?" he stabs it to me. But I don't have time for that racial crap now. In ten years of therapy the only thing the fucker has wanted to gossip about has been my mother and my ancestry. "Sex and race. It's one and the same hangup."
He doesn't seem to understand that my ulcers didn't arrive until I was around eighteen (19).

The phrase "he stabs it to me" right away tells the reader how hurt, and at times betrayed Oscar can feel by comments about his race and ancestry in a place where he should, in fact, feel safe to talk about anything and not be judged.

Even old acquaintances or strangers he befriends are rarely in concordance with the reality, or in other words who he is, as most people have what mainstream media and society

have created of a Mexican American image of a Man, and due to this, he is not enough American or not enough Mexican most of the time according to the situation, context and people he faces.

For instance, further in the book, Oscar is in Juarez, Mexico; he had been spending several nights drinking and doing illegal activities during his search for finding out “who in the hell I really was” (184). At one point, returning to his hotel room, he complains about the cold, but his lacking language skills in Spanish along with his looks, get him in more trouble than expected, accentuating his feelings of in-betweenness, of not fitting in:

I stomped to my room and felt the cold get under my skin. I returned to the clerk and his chess partner. “Hace mucho frio, it is very cold,” I said. The clerk, wearing a plastic reader’s cap made of a brim and string smiled. “Si, esta cabron.” I waited for some attention while he looked back at his chess. My head was reeling with tequila and cold anger. Undoubtedly the man doesn’t understand my needs, I thought. “¡Senor, tengo frio!” “Pues, yo tambien—me too,” the thin clerk said. I hiked up my green cords, stood tall in my fine boots and shot at him, “Sir, perhaps you don’t understand. I am cold. There is no heat in the room. I must have a heater.” The older man playing chess with the clerk looked at me, then at the clerk. He said to his chess partner, “¿Pues, parece mexicano, pero quien sabe?” Sure, who knows? Again the challenge! Just when I’d thought I’d become a Mexican in a bed of whores some pimply faced old man with a white brooch under a cracked, long nose questions my identity once again. The clerk said to the older man, “¡Dile que si no le gusta, que se vaya a la chingada!” “Well, fuck you too, you sonofabitch!” I shouted in my finest English (190-191).

Here we can see how he is criticized for lacking language skills, and consequently is undermined. In the first instance, Oscar tries to communicate and get his message across in Spanish, but as he fails, he proceeds to clarify in English by demanding the heater. This is a considerable effort for Oscar as he has felt ashamed of his lack of language skills in the past. At the same time, the old man indicates that even though Oscar does not speak Spanish, he looks as though he ought to: “Well, he looks Mexican, but who knows” since he couldn’t get his point across in Spanish when asking for a heater. Moreover, the clerk’s friend questions his looks and image in front of Oscar, speaking Spanish which he seems to assume that Oscar will not

understand: “Tell him if he doesn’t like it, he can fuck off!”¹ This is rude, and indeed given the fact that Oscar needed to use English to clarify his intention, the clerk’s response immediately dismisses him from their “inner” Mexican groups and culture, setting them in the position of enabling a level of disrespect and marking a sense of otherness with Oscar.

By assuming Oscar does not speak nor understand enough Spanish they also undermine him and thus, enable them to speak with more disrespect to his face. As Oscar says, just when he thought he had “become a Mexican” (191), they banished him from being one with these actions, thus filling him with resentment and bitterness.

Oscar shouts back exactly the same sentence the clerk said to him in Spanish, but in English. With this, he makes a statement in the light that he might not be fully Mexican, but he has or is something from the culture too, so he should not to be disrespected as nothing. He might not be within their specific in-group as a whole, but part of him is.

Further on, and as a consequence of the past incident, Oscar faces more and more situations where he is singled out by not being enough or part of the inner group. For example, shouting back at the clerk got him arrested and set to await trial in the same city. As he is a licensed lawyer, he decides to represent himself instead of taking a public defender, which was recommended to him. Oscar very anxiously rehearses what he would say to the judge in his head, explaining he was an American citizen, and such. Nevertheless, when he has to face the Judge, he is taken aback by the fact she is female, and he was being tried in Spanish. He pleads guilty to the charges, and the judge says to him, “Why don’t you go home and learn to speak your father’s language?” My father’s language? What does she mean? (193-194).

Earlier I noted there is a misconception that the Hispanic population in the US is seen as “a homogenous community that refuses to learn English or speaks inferior or inadequate English” (Davies 73). This is a similar but reverse phenomenon, where an American who comes to Mexico is accused of refusing to learn his “father’s language” (Spanish), entailing his roots, his heritage, and culture. There is a clear rejection and repudiation from the judge, as of the “*kind*” Oscar seems to be. Mexican looking, but an American?

Oscar is thus depicted as feeling banished from both cultures, his American one as well as his Mexican one, making him feel like an outsider and reinforcing the idea of “otherness.” Once again he is told, while he is on a desperate journey to find his true self, by a Mexican judge to go

¹ All translations are personal adaptations and will be unless specified.

and learn what he does not know, to learn what he has stated in other instances of his life and in the book, to be ashamed of not knowing, Spanish, but yet how could he when he remembers being prohibited from speaking it at school. How could he when he most wants to, has to face situations such as these, which reinforce the idea and feeling that he is not and will not ever be one of them.

As Oscar reflects on his childhood and how ashamed he is of not knowing Spanish, yet being Mexican, he reflects on the following memory when he was at school playing soccer with his friends:

Pásamela, cabron,” I shouted to Johnny Gomez in my best Pocho Spanish. “Que esperas, pendejo?” And when he threw it, I ran across the goal line. “Ain’t no good,” Floyd shouted with his red hair flying in his freckled face. “Why not? Every time we make one you say it’s no good,” I said. Wayne Ellis, whose brother spit on my cock a year later, said, “You guys are cheating. You can’t use secret messages.” “Isn’t that right, Mr. Wilkie?” Floyd shouted to the principal. “Yes, that’s right, boys ... I saw that,” the tall man said. “What do you mean ?” I demanded. “I can carry the ball, too. This is keep-away. Everyone can go for it.” He came right up close to me and whispered, “But you can’t speak Spanish, Oscar. We don’t allow it.” “What?... you say I can’t talk in Spanish here?” “That’s right. This is an American school ... we want you boys to learn English.” “Even when we play keep-away? Even here?” “If you want to stay in this school. Yes, you boys will have to speak only English while on the school grounds. (186)

By the same token Oscar is facing now as an adult the sense of otherness, and if being banished from part of his culture by not being enough, and speaking it in this specific case, has in the past brought him trouble for being able to speak Spanish, thus also being singled out at school, and being banished and creating the same feeling of otherness from the rest of the children playing keep-away by his language choices at the time. It seems to be that throughout his life any language choices he makes, or is forced to make due to his context, whether this is social, economic, ethnic, etc. never seem to be enough. As he is continuously expected to be more or simply different from what he is.

As a result, we inevitably find Oscar throughout the book expressing the huge distress and inner conflict that these experiences have arisen in him, experiences and language choices which have led him to what we learn he describes himself at the beginning of the novel, “I stand naked before the mirror. Every morning of my life I have seen that brown belly from every angle. It has not changed that I can remember” (11). These physical traits could potentially connect him to his roots, but the nakedness, I believe, represents his deep lack of purpose and meaning, and most importantly the identity he has been carrying most of his life, which has now led to this journey to find it.

While Oscar suffers from the lack of congruity between his looks and his language skills, the novel shows that Oscar himself has preconceptions about what Spanish-speakers look like which affect his interactions with others. For instance, during his stay in El Paso, on one of his many trips to the bars, he meets a light-skinned woman who he mistakes for an American even though she speaks flawless Spanish, and he gets angry at her for making assumptions about his ethnicity based on his physical appearance. But at the same time, we can also begin to see single-word code-switches where he also allows himself to take on a Spanish identity, thinking of himself as a “Mexicano,” not “Mexican”:

With the bass drum pounding into my brain, I ordered tequila for a quarter and soon I had a woman with red hair and peach skin in a purple mini-skirt asking me, “Me compra una copa?” What kind of jackshit is this? I wondered. They get American girls to fake Spanish so well they speak it better than I do. “What’ll you have?” I asked. She giggled and her tits hit my elbows. “Como?” “You can’t bullshit me. I know you’re from the States.” She called to a tall blonde with boobs hanging to her cup. “Oye, que dice este indio?” The blonde laughed and said to me, “She does not talk English.” “Y este, no me digas que no es Mexicano?” The redhaired lady with peach skin taunted me. In Panama I had met some light-skinned Costa Rican missionaries and in Riverbank we knew an Oscar Sandoval who had freckles and red hair. But I always imagined the Mexican as a dark-skinned person, a brown buffalo. So when she threw that same accusation in my face, questioning my blood, wondering from what Goddamn tribe I must have wandered, I wanted to give her the Samoan bit again as I had done all those years of my search for a reconciliation with my ancestry. But it would not come. I could

not joke about it as I had with the americanos. The woman had a legitimate question. For God's sake, she knew I was mexicano and yet I couldn't even offer her a drink in our language! (189-190)

In this situation, we can see how ashamed he is of what life has made of him, yet he chooses to say "Mexicano" over and over. While Oscar states he is ashamed of not knowing how to speak Spanish, almost at all, and speaks English as his first language and is speaking English in this context naturally as it has become his first language. Nevertheless, he chooses to say "Mexicano" instead of "Mexican" several times. This is quite an intriguing fact which I believe tells much about the outcome of the main character's journey, though he has not realized it. When one speaks English, naturally the common tendency is to use the English version of the name we are mentioning, in this case, Mexican. More importantly when Oscar in this specific case is expressing how ashamed he is of not knowing Spanish and having Mexican roots. Thus, the juxtaposition of the word choices and how he expresses is why I argue it to be what enables him to find his identity at the end of his journey.

Moreover, this kind of code-switching also creates an in-group for those readers who understand Spanish, and thus the reader is being invited to join this group. They might even have more empathy with the main character as they might identify with Oscar's struggles.

This allows us as readers to raise awareness of this contradiction, and thus make the connection between what the main character is ashamed of but also of what he is proud of, why make that choice, in other words, readers can pick up the "in-betweenness" Oscar is set in, and not only of cultures, but also of his identity.

From the evidence presented so far, it is clear that our main character is constantly being banished from both cultures, Mexican and American, not only by the judge, but also border control, women he flirts with, strangers he meets in bars, and friends of his friends. All doubt where he is from or ask for reassurance from a very early age, setting the main character in what we could call an uncomfortable position, once again as people do not believe what he is and what he identifies with, due to the fact of his appearance, physical traits and his language, or lack of distinguishable traits as we have now seen.

By the end of the novel, however, the main character finds a sense of belonging within the "banishment" of the two cultures; moreover, it is not only cultural but also professional, as he is

able to combine his profession and his longing for identity in one. We can see this when the main character has just learned about “La Raza,” a term used to refer to the Hispanophone population mainly in the Western part of the USA. It is believed to have started in California as a newspaper wrote about Latin Americans and called them “Latinos” as an abbreviation.

Latin American countries and Mexico, “La Raza” implies a mestizo heritage and it carries a sense of belonging to the Latino identity and community. Furthermore, by the time our main character discovers “La Raza”, it has also turned into a political movement and activism. As Mexican American identity politics quickly arose, the terms of Chicano and La Raza became strongly associated. Further on, “La Raza” became a newspaper of a Chicano community formed by political activists who also took part in the Brown Power movements, yet the lack of media coverage is argued to have contributed to the silencing of their political activities.

As mentioned earlier, sociolinguists have clearly established the relationships between language, ethnicity and identity, and this can be represented in how much solidarity is given to minorities. Moreover, as we have already established, the attitudes shown by non-linguists towards minorities such as Oscar’s do not represent solidarity with such communities. Therefore, as Oscar finds La Raza and a whole community that is ready to fight to be represented in political issues and social aspects in the US, he is able to find a group of his own which not only shows solidarity towards him but is like him in many ways. At the end of the novel this enables a change in our main character’s attitude as he continues to the end of his journey.

He can combine banishment and belonging, as he states while imagining the perfect scenario and speech to become the voice and representative for La Raza:

Ladies and gentleman ... my name is Oscar Acosta. My father is an Indian from the mountains of Durango. Although I cannot speak his language ... you see, Spanish is the language of our conquerors. English is the language of our conquerors.... No one ever asked me or my brother if we wanted to be American citizens. We are all citizens by default. They stole our land and made us half-slaves. (198)... My single mistake has been to seek an identity with any one person or nation or with any part of history.... What I see now, on this rainy day in January, 1968, what is clear to me after this sojourn is that I am neither a Mexican nor an American. I am neither a Catholic nor a Protestant. I am a Chicano by ancestry and a Brown Buffalo by choice. (200)

Thus, the main character is able to make the connection mentioned earlier, that is his choice of using Spanish words, his appearance, his language, everything he is, and at the same time what he is not, is melted into creating or “building him up to be the one and only Oscar Zeta Acosta, banished from two cultures, but it is this banishment that creates him, the uniqueness, in an in-between space. In other words, he is both and neither at the same time, that is who he is, that is what his language choices represent, his longtime of being ashamed of not knowing enough Spanish but speaking fluent English. All the time society expected more from him as he was constantly asked about whether he is either Mexican or American, speaks fluent Spanish or English, but it is the result of neither and both at the same time, that allows him to be a “Brown Buffalo”.

Just as activism helps Oscar learn to accept his in-betweenness and experience it as a resource and strength, in *The Hate U Give*, Starr Carter learns through her own forced activism to reject the divisions she has tried to maintain between the “hood” (AAE) and “suburban” (SE) sides of herself, and similarly embrace her multi-faceted self. While Oscar suffers for his lack of bilingualism, Starr suffers from her self-imposed code-switching, her wish to keep her two worlds carefully separate, the subject we will turn to in the next section.

3.2 *The Hate U Give* Analysis

The Hate U Give, (also referred to as THUG in this paper) was written by Angie Thomas in 2017, as a continuation from a short story she had written in college, inspired and as a reaction to the real-life case of the police shooting of the young African American Oscar Grant, in Oakland, California. The novel focuses on Starr Carter, who is also the narrator, a 16-year-old black girl, who comes from a poor neighborhood or what others refer to as the “hood”. The novel centers around a critical time in her life, as she starts attending a school that has more light-skinned students, making her one of the only black students. During this time, she expresses that there are two very different realities in her life, and thus, two different Starr’s in each context. Soon, she witnesses the murder of Khalil, a childhood friend, by a white police officer. Khalil was unarmed and was taking Star home after a fight had broken off at a party, making the police arrive and everyone else takes off. This led to a series of events that involve news outlets and

national TV attention in where they refer to Khalil as a “gangbanger”, “thug” and most likely to be a “drug dealer”. Protesters start to take to the streets claiming justice for Khalil. As consequence, both of Star’s realities seem to clash and generate an unbalance in her life. Everyone is trying to find out what really happened that night, and Starr is the only one who can tell the story. She becomes trapped between doing what she believes to be the right thing for her community or keeping her family safe from death threats as police and a local drug lord keep intimidating her and her family.

These series of events and the language choices she makes as she attends her “white” school and goes to her “black” neighborhood, lead her down a path of identity struggle, as she is constantly expected more from others, so much more, that she always tries to change her speech, manners and how she is perceived by the ones who surround her at the moment.

I argue that it is the constant questioning, “banishment” and not meeting society's expectations that lead to the final result of allowing this character to find her true self, as it is this what makes her whole. Therefore, in the following section, I will analyze some situations in the novel which represent and reflect the identity struggle Starr goes through by being caught between two different realities, and show how her language choices represent this struggle. Moreover, the language choices she makes are very conscious, self-determined, and aware as she sees them as necessary to not be perceived as what mainstream media or society has defined people like her to be. Therefore, the main character is caught between meeting expectations, being questioned and doubted for being or not being black enough and at the same time, and who she truly is.

From the very beginning, Starr starts emphasizing on how two different realities are part of her daily life, as she goes to her new school Williamson, compared to her old school Garden Heights. Both schools are in opposite parts of town, the latter being referred to as the “hood” several times by many outsiders and media outlets during the novel. One of the very first scenarios is when she decides to go to a party in Garden Heights, just as a need to prove to her friend she was still “hood” enough, in spite she was going to a mostly white school in Williamson. The social pressure of meeting ethnic expectations is already clearly shown as Star tells:

Kenya begged me to come to this party for weeks. I knew I’d be uncomfortable as hell, but every time I told Kenya no she said I act like I’m “too good for a Garden

party.” I got tired of hearing that shit and decided to prove her wrong. Problem is it would’ve taken Black Jesus to convince my parents to let me come. Now Black Jesus will have to save me if they find out I’m here. People glance over at me with that “who is this chick, standing against the wall by herself like an idiot?” look. I slip my hands into my pockets. As long as I play it cool and keep to myself, I should be fine. The ironic thing is though, at Williamson I don’t have to “play it cool”—I’m cool by default because I’m one of the only black kids there. I have to earn coolness in Garden Heights, and that’s more difficult than buying retro Jordans on release day. Funny how it works with white kids though. It’s dope to be black until it’s hard to be black (11).

Starr makes it very clear from the very beginning how she is positioned between two different realities, one where she has to earn respect, learn how to be cool, in other words, prove her worth. On the other hand, at Williamson it is a reality where she is “cool by default” for the particular reason of how her skin is darker than the rest. On the contrary at Garden Heights, she has to “earn their respect” or “play it cool”. Just as we stated previously, Starr is aware of how she has to project her identity in each cultural setting “in an act that provides a kind of psychological cultural grounding” (Lippi-Green 265)

In spite of being quite young, Starr is self-conscious of how it can be “dope to be black until it’s hard to be black” criticizing her new surroundings, and the white world which at times proves to take everything they might believe “cool” or “dope” from the black culture, to then ignore all the rest that comes along with it.

Shortly after setting the context, the inevitable happens in this story, as Khalil and Star are stopped by a police car, as the situation tenses, the police officer shoots, and Star watches Khalil fade away as she still has a shotgun pointing at her, while backup and emergency respondents show up.

After a few days, Starr has to keep on going, dealing with her “regular” life as she prepares to go down to the Police Station to give her testimony.

At this moment, we must take into account what was previously discussed in Chapter 1, as our main character is now facing confrontational situations in a daily aspect, situations and discussions regarding race and ethnicity occur in her school, household, TV, social media, etc.

These quickly turn emotionally intense, as this involves Starr's idea of herself, her understanding of who she and her community all of which are at stake. Once again, and in addition to the traumatic experience she has witnessed, in these emotionally charged situations, Starr becomes more aware than ever regarding how she *cannot* code-switch between AAE and Standard English but must use the proper one in that context. At the same time keeping her Starr from Williamson, and Starr from Garden Heights as two separate characters become harder and more hellacious:

I just have to be normal Starr at normal Williamson and have a normal day. That means flipping the switch in my brain so I'm Williamson Starr. Williamson Starr doesn't use slang—if a rapper would say it, she doesn't say it, even if her white friends do. Slang makes them cool. Slang makes her “hood.” Williamson Starr holds her tongue when people piss her off so nobody will think she's the “angry black girl.” Williamson Starr is approachable. No stank-eyes, side-eyes, none of that. Williamson Starr is nonconfrontational. Basically, Williamson Starr doesn't give anyone a reason to call her ghetto. I can't stand myself for doing it, but I do it anyway (71).

Is it evident that how aware and conscious the main character is of social expectations. Moreover, the power of language, image, and representation of one own's identity is so strong, that she changes her character completely, just to avoid being the stereotyped “black hood” girl mainstream media and society automatically believe she is. To a point she changes, language, attitude, voice tone (it seems). Once again, taking into account that these representations and language choices can be a source for solidarity within a minority, as well as a source of shame, the latter being the case for Starr.

As Starr enters the Police Station to give her statement, she immediately tries to “flip the switch” on herself:

I let go of my mom's hand to shake the detectives' hands. “Hello.” My voice is changing already. It always happens around “other” people, whether I'm at Williamson or not. I don't talk like me or sound like me. I choose every word carefully and make sure I pronounce them well. I can never, ever let anyone think I'm ghetto” (95).

Here we can make two points, in the form of how Starr uses the term “other” and how she expresses her ultimate fear of being seen as “ghetto”. Firstly, the main character already sets a clear line by describing how she always switches her language attitude and everything necessary when interacting with “others”. This sense of otherness not only applies to those who are racially or ethnically different from her, but also to herself as she sees how different she is living in such a society, since she is part of a minority in the US. Just as Anne Holden Rønning states, that the concept of “otherness”, which is at the core of Transculturation, “comprises not just the cultural, but also the aesthetic expression of hyphenated people”.(Rønning) It is fundamental that we take this into account when we look into minorities like Starr and her situation, in western cultures like the United States.

Going back to our main character’s words, expressing and portraying how she is being perceived as a ghetto girl, a black girl from the hood, and the social and cultural implications this carries. We are able to deduce that she feels that changing to the expected language, behaving differently, and ultimately portraying herself as someone different from who she really is will position her differently. This is a must in all situations or scenarios which involve “other” people, in other words, people who are not black like her.

Furthermore, I pose that when Starr creates the distinction between herself and the “others”, the author is creating different in-groups of readers, those who also see themselves as others, who can at some level feel empathic towards the main character or situation, apart from the common reader, apart from those who might share same ethnic background or skin color as the main character. Taking into account that we already established that literature is the means or way to understand what it feels like to live in the circumstances of others, (Williams 2015), this shares considerable light on the characters.

As Starr’s statement is being recorded, the questioning and doubts follow, the narration of the moment Khalil lost his life is over, yet the detectives continue to ask for clarification, information on him, as if no proof that Khalil was a “gangbanger” already was surprising. So, the detective followed up with the question “Khalil didn’t have anything to do with the fight?” I raise an eyebrow. “Nah.” *Dammit. Proper English.* I sit up straight. “I mean, no, ma’am. We were talking when the fight occurred” (98).

As the main character is forced to relive an emotionally charged and traumatic situation, we can see how Starr code-switches between AAE and Standard English as if it was the only way she can truly express herself or simply burst out, as keeping her Starr from Williamson, and Starr from Garden Heights as two separate characters becomes more hellacious.

Notwithstanding, the level of self-editing is colossal, the fear of being seen as a ghetto girl is far worse than having to act and pretend to be someone she is not. I believe this speaks extensively in regards to how much pressure and stigma people who belong to minorities in the US are under. Having to break those ideas society has created about them over the centuries, having to live and find oneself, one's identity with the intersectionality they are at and the stigma and expectations they carry at the same time becomes critical as we are able to get access and comprehend Starr's insights. Moreover, as Peterson states "Many (not all) speakers of African American English have the linguistic skill to shift into a more mainstream (in other words, "White") way of speaking when the situation calls for it" (102). Therefore, we can pose that Starr is one of these speakers who possess the ability to switch into a "white" discourse as she finds it fit whenever she has to, as she speaks in a different dialect when she is with her family or other African American people, for instance when she speaks to her father after the murder of Khalil, he asks "You sleep okay?" he asks. "Kinda" (326). Also in other instances when she describes other people "Everybody calls him that 'cause he always asks for money to buy a "Fo'ty ounce from the licka sto' real quick" (327). Thus, we could also argue that as she shares these inner thoughts, which seem to only be intended for the reader, show that that is her "natural" or "normal" way of speaking and her preferred language choices. This makes the dialect she uses in other situations, involving "others" unnatural. Yet, in situations of pressure the ability of self-editing can be lost, leading her to use her AAE even in front of "others".

Nevertheless, this is not the case for every other African American character in the book, as they naturally speak AAE, though there are several instances in which adults attempt to teach younger people to use "proper" English. For example, when DeVante, Starr's acquaintance goes to her Uncle Carlo's house, Starr's father, Maverick was helping to get him out of sight of a drug lord. As they arrive DeVante says "Damn, Big Mav. Where we at?" "Where are we?" Uncle Carlos corrects, and offers his hand" (224).

In this case, one of the adults tries to control DeVante's language, even though Starr's father does not correct him and DeVante himself seems not to want to learn to change into a

“whiter” discourse. Moreover, language is so fundamental for how others perceive them, as what type of African American they are (from the “hood” or not) that not only Starr knows this, but also her Uncle Carlos, as he is the one to make the correction from AAE into what we could say to be Standard English. This action, instantly sending DeVante a message of how it is spoken in his house, and in that neighborhood, as opposed to his own neighborhood on the other side of the city.

Furthermore, it also reflects how African American people are taught and have acquired the idea that they must speak Standard English, as the misconception of AAE is seen as “broken” or “bad” English even by the same African American community, making AAE a source of shame when as little or none solidarity is shown towards this community, just as Starr is trying to avoid it, as she has seen it before.

Under the same scope, the shame and fear the main character has regarding her language and representations, comes hand in hand with what was discussed in the previous chapter, regarding language being a social construct, just as Wolfram states, it is so purely social, that linguistics has a minimum role whatsoever.

The sense of shame comes to a point where Starr begins questioning her personal feelings, as she is dating Chris, a white boy from Williamson high school, yet she states:

I suddenly really, really, really realized that Chris is white. Just like One-Fifteen. And I know, I’m sitting here next to my white best friend, but it’s almost as if I’m giving Khalil, Daddy, Seven, and every other black guy in my life a big, loud “fuck you” by having a white boyfriend. Chris didn’t pull us over, he didn’t shoot Khalil, but am I betraying who I am by dating him? I need to figure this out (105-106).

She has to understand her language choices and attitudes, to have certain control, or power over her actions, as she feels guilty by having feelings towards a white boy like Chris. At this stage, we could argue that this conflict Starr is having can limit her freedom in decision-making due to the pressure, expectations, guilt and shame she is experiencing in this juxtaposition.

Further on, as Starr desperately tries to continue with her “normal” life and attend school, she is asked by one of her friends at Williamson if the Khalil the news media was talking about was the one they knew to be her childhood friend:

I swallow and whisper, “I don’t know that Khalil.” It’s a betrayal worse than dating a white boy. I fucking deny him, damn near erasing every laugh we shared, every hug, every tear, every second we spent together. A million “I’m sorry”’s sound in my head, and I hope they reach Khalil wherever he is, yet they’ll never be enough. But I had to do it. I had to (113).

Once again, the angst of being portrayed as the “hood girl” whose friend got shot, the black girl who was with him in the car, the black girl who was out at a party in the “ghetto” and every cultural, and social aspect that brings upon her, is what jitters her the most. Thus, we can say she is “caught between a rock and a hard place” thus, choosing to avoid the hood girl stereotype by denying she knew Khalil.

Starr seems to believe this fear is greater than the pain of not recognizing and admitting who Khalil was and who she is, therefore, she questions everything she is, and feels. I argue that it is this questioning and crisis she is having, that contributes to the final outcome. It enables her to become one Starr in one reality, combining her two “worlds”, setting her perspective of heritage, of her dark skin, of the #BLM(Black Lives Matter movement) solid and stronger than ever, despite what “others” might think or portray her as.

As the story continues, the situation gets worse on the streets, protesters start facing police, tear gas, and looting starts to take place. At this point, Starr reaches a climax in her journey of discovery as she becomes an “activist” herself, she becomes the face on national TV, and at the same time she takes the “angry black girl” image which she feared and constantly avoided, but embraces it for who she is and what she believes in.

As protests happen on the streets, Starr, her brother, boyfriend, and friends get themselves caught up between blocked streets and protesters shouting to police who were in front of them, they spot Starr’s attorney, Ms. Ofrah, at the front with a bullhorn, leading the chants. She encourages Starr to use her biggest weapon, her voice, and handles her the bullhorn and helps her to a car roof:

My name is Starr. I'm the one who saw what happened to Khalil," I say into the bullhorn. "And it wasn't right." I get a bunch of "yeahs" and "amens" from the crowd. "We weren't doing anything wrong. Not only did Officer Cruise assume we were up to no good, he assumed we were criminals. Well, Officer Cruise is the criminal." The crowd cheers and claps. Ms. O'fray says, "Speak!" That amps me up. I turn to the cops. "I'm sick of this! Just like y'all think all of us are bad because of some people, we think the same about y'all. Until you give us a reason to think otherwise, we'll keep protesting." More cheers, and I can't lie, it eggs me on. Forget trigger happy—speaker happy is more my thing. "Everybody wants to talk about how Khalil died," I say. "But this isn't about how Khalil died. It's about the fact that he lived. His life mattered. Khalil lived!" I look at the cops again. "You hear me? Khalil lived!" "You have until the count of three to disperse," the officer on the loudspeaker says. "Khalil lived!" we chant. "One." "Khalil lived!" "Two." "Khalil lived!" "Three." "Khalil lived!" The can of tear gas sails toward us from the cops. It lands beside the patrol car. I jump off and pick up the can. Smoke whizzes out the end of it. Any second it'll combust. I scream at the top of my lungs, hoping Khalil hears me, and chuck it back at the cops. It explodes and consumes them in a cloud of tear gas. All hell breaks loose (411 - 412).

I pose that is this critical moment, once again filled with emotions, adrenaline, feeling of injustice, and passion, which sets Starr under pressure that finally enables her to portray who she is, to combine the Williamson Starr and the Garden Heights Starr in herself, to embrace her ethnicity and find her voice, and tell the world the "truth" as she speaks up and people are watching her be broadcasted on national television.

I believe this to be the turning point in Starr's journey, as she later shares with the readers how she is now feeling part of a community whom she used to be ashamed of. Most importantly, she now identifies with them, no matter who she is with. "I was ashamed of Garden Heights and everything in it. It seems stupid now though. I can't change where I come from or what I've been through, so why should I be ashamed of what makes me, me? That's like being ashamed of myself" (441).

We have thus been able to see how Starr shares acumen and visions of her reality, being in a juxtaposition as she has to be two different Starrs, which include different attitudes, fears, ways of speaking, and expressing herself in all possible ways. It is evident throughout the book that she is facing an identity struggle; moreover, this becomes more evident as she self-consciously makes her language choices have a purpose behind them, that is not to be perceived as what mainstream media or society has defined people like her to be leading her to question her actions and feelings, just out of shame and fear.

This evidences the societal and cultural implications she is going through. Nevertheless, this ultimately then allows her to be her true self, despite the context, people, and situations she is in. This leads to her using her “natural” speech and language choices, combining her two realities into one, allowing herself to be the same Starr among “others” and among the ones like her, embracing her ethnicity as she now sees her community as not something to be ashamed of, but proud, yet aware of the social implications this carries for people like her.

3.3 Analysis.

In this section I analyze the similarities and point out the connections between the main characters of *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* by Oscar Zeta Acosta and *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas and the theory of sociolinguistics. In both novels, the main characters are part of an ethnic minority in the US and both of these minorities have had a history of discrimination. Furthermore, both characters embark on a journey at a time in their life in which they struggle to find their identity. This leads them to face situations in which they must question who they are, and how they fail to meet society’s expectations or standards of how someone from these minorities should look and behave. It is through this journey that the main characters reflect on their struggles through their language choices, codeswitching, failing to speak a certain discourse, or bursting out in certain situations. Ultimately, these characters have a moment of activism in their lives, which also leads to their self-realization of accepting and defining who they are regardless of how society and mainstream media have defined them.

One key similarity is that both main characters express their discomfort at issues they have with who they are and how they are perceived. On the one hand, in the *Brown Buffalo* Oscar

starts by expressing how hurt, or “attacked” he feels by his therapist asking “Oh? You don’t like Mexican music?” When he comments that the therapist “stabs it to me” (19), he shows how sensitive he is to comments about his race and ancestry and how at times they can be very triggering. Throughout the novel he is constantly singled out by his ethnicity as he fails to meet the expectations society has created for him. Oscar does not fit a mold he believes he should, as he “looks” Mexican and has a Mexican name, yet he does not know how to speak Spanish. At the same time, he is also an American citizen, and an American lawyer, yet people doubt it as he does not “look” like an American lawyer. Oscar decides to embark on a path to find out “who in the hell I really was” (184). This is constant evidence he is in an ongoing struggle to find his identity, and we are reminded of this throughout the novel.

Further on, Oscar faces situations which challenge who he is, and these situations are emotionally charged and triggering. For instance, when he has the altercation with the hotel clerk and decides to shout back at him, the main character shares with the reader the sense of disappointment and shame he feels as he thought he had “become a Mexican” (191). Yet he is banished from being one with these actions, thus filled with resentment and bitterness. This leads Oscar into “bursting” out in his as a way to express himself. This sheds light on how his language choices and questioning of his language skills, or lack thereof, represent his issue with his identity, not being either fully Mexican nor American.

Starr, too, begins the novel by sharing how she has two different realities which involve two different versions of herself. These versions are needed according to her, so as not to be perceived as the “black hood girl”. This involves Starr changing how she expresses herself, changing drastically her dialect from a more standard English or “whiter” version, to AAE, all in the effort to not be perceived by “others” as the shameful stereotypical image she fears. This is clearly evident very early and throughout the novel as she is constantly letting the reader know when she is “flipping the switch in my brain so I’m Williamson Starr” (71). Starr is depicted as always being acutely aware of her language choices, as she knows they will affect how others see her and how most importantly, she portrays herself. As she explains, “Williamson Starr doesn’t use slang—if a rapper would say it, she doesn’t say it, even if her white friends do. Slang makes them cool. Slang makes her “hood” (71). This is a constant habit for Starr until her two realities start clashing together as the consequences of Khalil’s murder, this being a traumatic experience

for her, watching news channels report on her friend in a despective manner, a protest in her “white” school, intense encounters with her best friends, among other situations.

As these situations involve her race as the main topic, at stake is the idea of who she is, which triggers her as the situations get emotionally charged, ultimately leading her to burst out or not be able to maintain control of her “flipping the switch”, using AAE in instances where she feels pressured to use standard English. We can see an illustration of this when Starr is at the police station giving her testimony of the murder, forcing her to relive and tell a traumatic experience, she burst out and responds to the detectives, who had asked her a question implying something negatively regarding Khalil, “I raise an eyebrow. “Nah.” *Dammit. Proper English.* I sit up straight. “I mean, no, ma’am” (98). Here we can see the power of language choices, and how language can create a reality for her, from which she feels ashamed. Thus, Starr’s language choices are specifically designed to create a representation of her that does not fit the mold of the “hood girl”. This I argue to be due to how she sees herself, and her community is very different from how “others” and society see them. Starr is trying to project her “identity” onto her surroundings, yet this is “an act that that provides a kind of psychological cultural grounding” (Lippi-Green 265).

The main characters are depicted as undergoing an identity struggle, which at times proves to be stressful and emotionally intense. They experience these identity struggles a bit differently, as Oscar feels equally banished from both Mexican and American society, whereas Starr is accepted into both Black and White worlds, but nevertheless experiences a sense of “otherness” in both as a result of the ethnic and cultural differences between them. Nevertheless, despite their differing ethnicities and years of publication (*Brown Buffalo* in 1989 and *THUG* in 2017), similar issues regarding minorities in the United States are still evident, regardless of the ethnic minority , showing that society has not yet advanced significantly in the nearly three decades between the two books.

As part of these identity struggles, language choices and representation are key in both novels, and both characters reach a consensus within themselves and see who they are as individuals rather than what society has set them to be. But here too there are differences. On the one hand, in *Brown Buffalo* the main character is less aware of his language choices and how they affect his image, and thus how he portrays his identity. Yet he is fully aware of his lack of language skills in Spanish, which prove to be a source of shame, thus forcing him to question his

identity. By contrast, in *THUG*, the main character is aware of how her language choices are strictly connected with her image and how she is perceived by others. Therefore, her language choices are extremely self-conscious at all times. But as we saw above when facing triggering, emotionally-charged situations where who they are is at stake, both characters code-switch in what we can understand as a need or way of bursting out, or expressing themselves truly.

The experiences the main characters go through are due to common misbeliefs about multilingualism: “Americans tend to think of monolingualism by default. For whatever reason – educational gaps, ideology, mythology – most of us imagine that Spanish is spoken in Spain, Polish in Poland, and so on. In fact, monolingualism is the exception across the world’s populations” (Lippi-Green 276). Both characters aspire to a bilingualism that society does not expect from them. Moreover, both face prejudice which deems one of their languages “broken English” or “bad English”, yet this is merely due to language attitudes and ideologies. This is especially ironic since Oscar speaks and writes in SE, and Starr is fluent in both SE and AAE.

By the time both novels reach the climax in their stories, after several experiences where they have been questioned for who they are and triggered by comments, the main characters demonstrate a change in attitude and vision of their identity and how they see themselves. I argue that this is because both characters become activists at a certain point. Oscar Zeta Acosta becomes involved in political activism for La Raza, a political party that fought for the representation of Mexican Americans and other Latin Americans in the US government and policies. Through this, he is able to find a balance of what he is and what he is not that makes him a whole, a Brown Buffalo as he called himself, embracing it proudly.

Moreover, he is able to combine his profession and his longing for a sense of community in representations for La Raza until his last days. In the same way, Starr Carter becomes the face and main voice of the protest against the murder of Kahlil and police brutality and racism. This happens as she decides to take the bullhorn to speak up as a protest took the streets, guiding the rants against the police, taking a step and showing her face on national TV, defending her principles and ideals of her and her community despite of what others might see her as, or how they might picture her as “the black hood girl” she always felt ashamed of being. These moments represent the turning point of both characters, who finally come to embrace their lifelong struggle, to see what they once saw as a problem, as something to be proud of, to fight and raise their voices for. It is at this point, that both characters accept that what society has made of them

and what is expected of them, does not have to be who they are, instead they can choose who to be.

As a consequence of finding their identity, both characters show a change in their language, especially their attitude to code-switching, using what they once had limited and felt ashamed of, as now something to be appreciative of. This I believe to be a consequence of embracing their bilingual identities, as “language has a central role in our sense of ethnicity and can survive beyond national borders and where the sense of national identity has been undermined or lost” (Davies 60). Both novels depict the ways that Standard English in the United States has historically been linked to whiteness, and even minority groups who speak SE face discrimination as a consequence of language ideologies. These novels depict the consequences and inner struggles millions of people who are part of a minority go through, having an important effect on their lives and how they see themselves. These two novels can only provide a glimpse of a much larger phenomenon, and indeed similar issues are discussed in a range of minority fiction in the US, including Asian American authors like Amy Tang and Gish Jen who address similar themes in their work. Still in the US today, minority groups are negatively affected by many factors, one of them being language ideologies and attitudes. As we have seen, they have a major impact on their society’s behavior, and in day-to-day life.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I set out to analyze the use of Chicano English and African American English (AAE) in two novels, one earlier novel and a recent one from two different minorities in the US. I analyzed how language was represented in these books, more specifically, the language used by the two main characters who are believed to have “broken English or “bad English” by non-linguists. My main aim was to analyze how their language changed through their life experiences and critical moments as they sought to find an identity. I posed that these changes are a consequence of their inner juxtaposition and struggles; thus, they changed as the characters' inner conflicts became solved.

While the characters and novels show evidence of their language use, it is clear that it changed as they experience situations in which they were singled out by their ethnicity, as most frequently happened to Oscar Acosta in *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*. The other option was to edit and control their language and self-expression in fear of being singled out and portrayed as a stereotypical image society has created of their ethnicity as happened to Starr Carter in *THUG*. Additionally, both characters face emotionally charged situations that triggered stress, fear, anger, anxiety, etc. These ultimately caused the main characters to “burst” out and this is evidenced through their language choices. As Oscar finds himself shouting in his “finest” English, Starr finds herself unable to “flip the switch” in front of the police officers, cursing herself as she slipped between her AAE and Standard English. Thus, their language choices are a reflection of their identity as they struggle to find one.

These situations allow the reader to see how both characters face or feared to face society's judgment as they fail to meet its expectations of what an African American or Mexican should look, act, behave and speak like. This becomes a source of shame, as they have been historically singled out and discriminated against, the main characters find in their life journey moments in which the idea of themselves, who and what they are comes at stake; thus both characters struggle to find their sense of identity despite society's definition of them. Yet, as both characters come close to finding their sense of belonging and identity, they illustrate a change in their language, where code-switching changes from a source of shame to a sense of prides and enriching the purpose or principles of both characters. In both novels, the language choices and inner struggles of the main characters are ultimately depicted as being part of their longing for

identity. Perhaps through the depiction of individual experiences, like Oscar's and Starr's, we as readers are able to see the reality language attitudes create for minorities in the United States, and the struggles this brings upon them and many others.

Although, the novels were written nearly thirty years apart, the analysis revealed that they have much in common, thus acting as a reflection of struggles people from minorities have to go through in today's society, regardless of their specific background. Therefore, it is fundamental that we teach future generations about such struggles and create a world where bilingualism—even imperfect bilingualism or multilingualism—is readily accepted, making it easier for people to embrace all sides of themselves.

4.1 Suggestions for further research

Now that we have established the relationship among language choices, identity, ethnicity, and as a consequence of today's society and its history, we can assess that language attitudes towards English varieties lead to segregation and constant discrimination. There is an extensive list of well-documented studies regarding the discrimination against Spanish speaking communities and other ethnic minorities like African Americans in the US, yet the most harmful practices have taken place in education (qtd. in Lippi-Green 271), “where Mexican children were routinely segregated into poorly staffed and overcrowded schools” (Lippi-Green 271). All in all, it is the attitudes of ordinary speakers, the people in power, policymakers, and educationalists (which tend to be a minority among the other groups) which are the ones who determine how much an English variety, which is associated with an ethnic minority, like the Chicano can and will be supported or discriminated in communities, schools, and workplaces in general.

As a result of this, linguistic discrimination in institutions puts teachers and students on opposite sides of a great abyss, creating an even bigger antagonism which can worsen the situations, which “in extreme moments, end in physical violence” (Lippi-Green 271). In the same way, specialized programs designed to help students learn standard English and achieve proficiency in the language, have had according to Ganadara and Orfield “exactly the opposite result” (qtd in Lippi-Green 271) as the learners rarely get involved in English speaking

situations. As evidence, we have the crucial case of The Ebonics Controversy, as the medium which carried all attitudes towards a specific group of people was their language.

In this sense, what good is a paper or a study that no one reads, and what is the value of information that no one puts to use. Therefore, we must bring this knowledge closer to the people, especially to the ones with the power to make changes in the educational systems, whether at university levels to get future teachers educated in language varieties and language attitudes, and/or schools or educational institutions to make students aware of such issues that surround us but seem invisible to their eyes. I believe that education is the basis for change; thus, if we educate people, we will consequently make a change or have an impact on the harsh language attitudes and ideologies that exist in today's societies. As a result, we can create a more diverse space for people whose English is not "broken," but which represents the true linguistic diversity of the United States, and the richness of minority cultures.

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