

Descubriendo el sabor: Spanish Bilingual Book Publishing and Cultural Authenticity

By Jamie Campbell Naidoo and Julia Lopez-Robertson

{ I'm a grafted flower that didn't take, a Mexican without being one, an American without feeling like one . . . a puppet jerked by the strings of two cultures that clash. I'm la mestiza la pocha, la Tex-Mex, la Mexican-American, la hyphenated who lacks identity and struggles to find it. (Sentías, 2005, pp. 16–17) }

Introduction

The experience that Sentías describes is a common one among many Spanish-speaking Latino children, who feel a disconnect between their home and school environments. Often, these children have to juggle two languages and two cultures in order to feel a sense of *pertenencia* (belonging). They rarely see themselves and their home language represented in the books that they encounter in classrooms and libraries. Thus, as the Latino population in our country continues to increase, it becomes imperative that our Latino children have books in their schools, libraries, child-care centers, and homes where they can see themselves, their culture, and their language represented. Numerous reading experts concur that students are more likely to flourish when they see themselves reflected in the curriculum and when the protagonists are role models from their communities or culture (Ada, 2003; Beaty, 1997; Goodman, 2005; Isom & Casteel, 1997; Mora, 1998; Nieto, 1997; F. Smith, 2006; Smolen & Ortiz-Castro, 2000; Wilde, 1996).

Isabel Schon affirms:

There is no question that encouraging Latino children to read—in any language—is one of the best ways to enrich their lives as individual human beings, to develop insights into and an understanding of their own lives and the realities of living in the United States, to become aware of the greatness of their cultural heritage, and to deepen their interest in reading as a leisure-time activity. (2006, p. 48)

Considering the growing Spanish-speaking population in our schools, it seems institutions would want as many bilingual books in the hands of children as possible—helping to scaffold their language acquisition, providing role models that speak their language, and giving them access to the entire grade-level curriculum. However, there are dangers in embracing such a seemingly straightforward ideal. Not every Spanish bilingual book is equal in the quality of translation or representation of the Latino culture. Few high-quality bilingual books exist, and trouble arises when publishers try to fill the huge void. In an effort to exploit the

market, publishers sometimes allow quantity to replace quality, resulting in stereotypical images, poor translations, and cultural inaccuracies. Books that were originally created with the best intentions have often paved a rutty road, misrepresenting the very people they were intended to carry forward. Additionally, Schon (2006) remarks, “most bilingual books show a complete disrespect for the Spanish language . . . with inappropriate expressions, mangled grammar, or ambiguous sentences that do not reflect the beauty, rhythm, and spirit of the Spanish language” (pp. 49–50).

There are many more considerations that must be managed when publishing bilingual books as compared to monolingual books, particularly if the titles also depict the Latino culture. Publishers must consider cultural authenticity, the quality of the translation, and various formatting issues. Perhaps this explains why some children's publishers are reluctant to enter the Spanish bilingual book market. In 2006, U.S. publishers introduced nearly 5,000 new children's books. Of these, the nearly 44 million Latinos residing in the United States would have seen themselves represented as protagonist in only 105 titles. And a mere 42 of these titles were actually written by Latinos (Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2007). Unfortunately, statistical data on the number of bilingual books represented among these titles and information regarding sales of bilingual children's books is entirely absent.

Notwithstanding the lack of quality Spanish bilingual books available, as educators it is our responsibility to ensure that all of the children in our classrooms, libraries, and child-care centers encounter their cultures and languages within our curricula and in the books that grace our shelves. Short and Fox (2003) assert that children “have the right to see themselves within a book, to find within a book the truth of their own experiences instead of stereotypes and misrepresentations” (p. 21). Yet if high-quality bilingual books are absent, how are we to do this?

In an effort to understand fully the issues surrounding bilingual book publishing, we examine the literature to determine some of the common problems in bilingual books. We then discuss the results of our interviews with Latino children's literature experts concerning the quality of bilingual books. Finally, we relate how

independent/ethnic publishers ensure cultural authenticity and accurate translations in the Spanish bilingual books that they publish.

Issues in Bilingual Book Publishing

One of the biggest concerns surrounding bilingual books about Latinos is cultural authenticity. This has been a contentious topic in the field of children's literature since the 1960s and continues to be relevant today (Bishop, 1983; Cai & Bishop, 1994; Cooperative Children's Book Center, 1991; Fox & Short, 2003; Harris, 1993; Henderson & May, 2005; Rogers & Soter, 1997). Discussions about cultural authenticity typically revolve around the right to write—who has the right to tell the stories of a culture—which includes the insider/outsider debate (Fox & Short, 2003). Author Jacqueline Woodson believes strongly that people of color should

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be the ones to tell their stories, and tell them “honestly and openly” (Short & Fox, 2003, p. 9). She, like many other authors of color, wonders why an outsider (someone who was not born within a particular culture) would want to tell another's story and questions what outsiders think they know about the particular culture that would make them want to tell the story. Often, authors who are outsiders tend to rely on their own perceptions rather than on actual research into the culture about which they are writing, resulting in inaccurate and sometimes harmful stereotypes. Many cultural insiders believe that it is difficult to tell stories about things that one has not experienced firsthand. Life experiences, they believe, add to the authenticity of a piece of literature.

In relation specifically to bilingual books about Latinos, one must ask whether or not the people who wrote and illustrated the book are from the Latino culture. If one of these book creators is an outsider, then how is he or she qualified to create a book about the particular Latino culture in question? Issues influencing cultural authenticity in bilingual books include cultural perspective, translation, appropriate illustration, and physical format.

Cultural Perspective

While there are numerous authors who believe that only insiders should tell their story, many believe that stories are not bound by the outward appearance of the author. Bishop (2003) believes that cultural authenticity “has to do with the success with which a writer is able to reflect the cultural perspectives of the people about whom he or she is writing, and make readers from inside the group believe that the writer ‘knows what's going on’” (2003, p. 29). Thus, an Asian-American author can write about a Latino subculture if she can effectively convince the reader that she has experience and considerable knowledge of the culture.

Susan Guevara (2003) also talks about “the Difference,” a term

that she and a colleague coined, which means that a piece of art “contain[s] some unexplainable aspect of humanity so as to give it the illusion of being alive” (p. 56). We believe that the Difference can also be used when discussing the authenticity of a piece of literature. If a bilingual children's book contains sufficient details (in the text and illustration) to make it sound believable and accurate, then it can be said to possess the aliveness or the Difference. A book can exemplify the Difference even if it is written by someone outside the Latino and/or Spanish-speaking culture.

Woven within cultural perspective are issues of cultural relevancy and cultural differences. Quandaries arise when books were originally written in Spanish and then translated into a bilingual Spanish/English edition or vice versa. These books can possess wording or situations that are unfamiliar or inappropriate to the other culture (Abós, 1999; Edwards & Walker, 1996). For instance, when the book *The Story of Colors/La Historia de los Colores* (Marcos & Domínguez, 1999) was published, controversy

ensued because the author was a leader of the Zapatista guerrilla movement in Mexico, the text mentioned lighting a pipe, and the illustrations contained nudity. Abós (1999) remarks “on crossing a cultural boarder, something barely noticed in the original becomes a key element of the translated version—different audiences read different things in the same story, even in the same words” (p. 700).

Another problem with cultural relevancy and cultural differences occurs when Latino cultures are treated as one universal culture rather than as independent subcultures, particularly when the Spanish language is considered to be devoid of regionalisms (Diego, 2007; Edwards & Walker, 1996; Italiano, 1993; Morales, 2003; Schon, 2006; K. C. Smith & Higonet, 2002). As an example, Barrera and Quiroa (2003) describe the various regional uses of the word *piñones*. In Puerto Rico, the word means a small banana, while in New Mexico it is a kind of nut. While this particular term would not cause a great travesty if it were misused, Spanish-speaking Latino children deserve to experience a rich text that exemplifies correct regionalisms matching the Latino culture of the story. Barrera and Quiroa caution that this type of misrepresentation at best can leave “young readers guessing about Latino families” and at worst, “it exacerbates the simplistic notion that Latino families are alike because they share a common language heritage—and perhaps a common (or interchangeable) cuisine” (p. 256).

Translation

Translations significantly affect the cultural authenticity of a book. While a good translation can bridge two different cultures, Short and Fox (2003) caution that “the tendency to stay with formulaic and safe uses of the language of a specific culture and to translate these words literally in order to cater to the needs of

monolingual readers often results in culturally inauthentic texts for bilingual readers and poor literary quality for all readers” (p. 19). Awkward dialogue, misuse of words, and an overgeneralization of the Spanish language “disrupt the unfolding of the stories overall and create highly redundant texts for the bilingual reader” (Barrera & Quiroa, 2003, p. 263).

To maintain cultural authenticity, translations need to keep the nuances of the original text. While they should reflect the same ideas, they should not be a literal word-for-word translation. Literal translations have a tendency to lose the nuances of the original text, resulting in stilted or wooden language (Abós, 1999; Diego, 2007; Edwards & Walker, 1996; Morales, 2003; Schon, 2004, 2006). An example may be found in *Tito, the Firefighter/Tito, el Bombero* (Hoppey & Hoffman, 2004), a book about a young Latino who wishes to become a firefighter and one day is able to use his Spanish and English to help the firefighters. Readers come to the part in the book where Tito is walking past the firehouse and sees a man in front waving and pointing. The text reads, “*I could tell something was very wrong. Something was muy mal.*” This is an unnatural use of the Spanish language and inhibits the flow for the bilingual reader. A child would not say something in English and then repeat it in Spanish.

There are numerous words in the Spanish language that do not have an English equivalent, and it is the responsibility of the translator to find appropriate words or phrases. Diego (2007) suggests, “The work of a translator is to build a bridge—a sound, sleek, and smooth bridge that perfectly, and seamlessly, connects the book in question with a new group of readers” (par. 1).

Another issue connected to maintaining the nuance of the text is the selection of appropriate Spanish. Publishers and translators must decide whether to use spoken regional Spanish, formal Spanish, Mexican Spanish, or a “universal neutral Spanish” (Diego, 2007; Edwards & Walker, 1996; Italiano, 1993; Morales, 2003; Schon, 2006; K. C. Smith & Higonnet, 2002). As we will discuss later, these decisions vary greatly from publisher to publisher.

Rather than view the translation of books simply as the opportunity to make more money, publishers need to demonstrate that they have respect for the Spanish language and Latinos by carefully hiring translators and editors who understand the language and culture being written about. It is not enough to find people who simply speak Spanish; they must know the culture represented in the text and they must also know the grammar and mechanics of the Spanish language. Smith and Higonnet (2002) advise publishers to employ Latino illustrators and translators from the same ethnic background as the author and story setting. In addition, it is recommended that translators should have first-hand experience working with children in the culture that they are translating the language from and with the children in the culture that they are translating into (Edwards & Walker, 1996).

Grammar and punctuation are also important in maintaining the cultural authenticity of the Spanish version of a bilingual book. Various researchers note that due to the large number of grammatical and spelling errors in their books, it appears that some publishers do not edit the Spanish version of the bilingual text (Morales, 2003; Schon, 2004, 2006). *No Fair to Tigers/No es justo para los tigres* (Hoffman & Porter, 1999), a book about a wheelchair-bound little girl, is an example of a text that shows

inconsistencies in grammatical form. Although the aim of the book is to “help children become aware of the biases present in their everyday lives,” the inconsistent use of punctuation marks throughout shows a lack of awareness of the editors’ and publishers’ own bias and poor understanding of the Spanish language.

Appropriate Illustration

“Literature is said to provide characters and events with which children can identify and through which they can consider their own actions, beliefs, and emotions” (Mendoza & Reese, 2001, par. 4). Illustrations are an integral part of literature for young children. Latina children’s book illustrator Maya Christina Gonzalez recalls,

As a child I would go looking for my face in my coloring books, in my storybooks but I never found my round, chicana face, my long dark hair. So I would go to that blank page in the back or the front of these books and draw my own big face right in where it belonged. . . . Our face is important. It is a mark of who we are and where we come from. (2004, par. 1)

While positive illustrations have the potential to make them feel respected and included, presenting Latino children with inaccurate, stereotypical images of themselves may result in negative self-images and may lead to feelings of shame for one’s culture and oneself. Roethler (1998) comments, “One of the ways in which black [and Latino] children in America create their schemata is through the illustrations they encounter in the literature to which they are exposed as children. Children, especially young children, are sensitive to illustrations. . . . The images these children soak up will remain with them for the rest of their lives” (p. 96).

Since the illustrations in a picture book help express and enhance the story, they must accurately depict the culture that they are portraying. A serious misconception is that there is one universal “Latino” culture, with everyone exhibiting a “Latin Look” of dark hair and eyes accompanied by brown skin. Too often, Latinos are depicted in illustrations as only possessing this Latin Look, ignoring Latinos who appear African, Asian, or White (non-Anglo). A few other stereotypical images found in bilingual books include homes with religious artifacts and grandmothers who are always at home. While some older Latinas do stay at home taking care of grandchildren or the house, it is an overgeneralization to assume that all grandmothers are homebound and it furthers stereotypical images and attitudes toward Latinos.

Another potential issue in the illustrations of bilingual books concerns the style of the art. Latino children have the right to see themselves accurately and respectfully portrayed in books; we should accept nothing less from the bilingual books that we select for our libraries and classrooms. However, when the illustrator chooses cartoon illustrations to depict the Latino culture, the potential for misconceptions arises. Edwards and Walker (1996) comment, “Cartoons are caricatures. While it may be acceptable to use them to represent the dominant group in society, the fact that they may emphasise [sic] negative stereotypes of minority populations raises many uncomfortable questions” (p. 346). The

majority of bilingual books contain illustrations that are sensitive to the Latino culture, but a few cases do exist where Latinos appear to be caricaturized. But there is a problem in current Latino children's literature with identifying specific instances of caricatures, particularly when an artist employs a folk-art style for the illustrations. For instance, *Elena's Serenade* (Geeslin & Juan, 2004) and *Clara & Señor Frog* (Geeslin & Sanchez, 2007) both portray Latinas with overly large, misshapen heads. At first glance, it is easy to cite these books as examples of caricatures that stereotype Latinas. Only after considering the artists' use of the folk-art style as it relates to the premise of the books does it become clear that the first book creates stereotypes while the second book incorporates the subject of the book into the illustrations.

Physical Format

In an effort to distinguish between the Spanish and English texts in bilingual books, publishers often choose to use a different color, font, and/or style for the Spanish text. Sometimes the changes in the physical format are helpful, and other times they are quite problematic. In some instances, the Spanish version of the text is printed in an illegible font, italicized, and/or produced in a color that is difficult to read against the page background (Edwards & Walker, 1996; Nathenson-Mejia & Escamilla, 2003). An example of poor formatting is *Moon Rope/Un lazo a la luna* (Ehlert, 1992), a Mexican folktale with striking illustrations, in which Spanish and English text are separated and shown in a different font and color. Unfortunately, the Spanish text is silver against a dark blue background, making it very difficult to read. Another case is *My Name Is Celia: The Life of Celia Cruz/Me llamo Celia: La vida de Celia Cruz* (Brown & López, 2004), a beautifully written and magnificently illustrated book that details the story of famous salsa singer Celia Cruz. In an effort to make the text appear as alive as the illustrations, both fonts are italicized, leading to English and Spanish texts that are virtually unreadable.

Another formatting issue pertains to the placement of the Spanish text in the bilingual book (Italiano, 1993; Nathenson-Mejia & Escamilla, 2003). All bilingual books include separate texts of the narrative written in two different languages, usually with one language taking precedence over the other in textual placement. Most Spanish/English bilingual books place the English translation above or before the Spanish text on the page. This placement could indicate the dominance of the Anglo over the Latino culture within American society. Fortunately, there are some bilingual books where the Spanish text precedes the English. Some of these include: *Mis papitos, Héroes de la cosecha/My Parents, Heroes of the Harvest* (Caraballo & Gómez, 2005); *Mis abuelos y yo/My Grandparents and I* (Caraballo & Cruz, 2004); *Arroró, Mi Niño: Latino Lullabies and Gentle Games* (Delacre, 2004); and *Iguanas in the Snow and Other Winter Poems/Iguanas en la nieve y otros poemas de invierno* (Alarcón & Gonzalez, 2001).

El sabor

We consider the amalgamation of the aforementioned characteristics of cultural authenticity to be *el sabor* (the flavor). In order for a bilingual book to embody *el sabor* it needs to repre-

sent accurately and sensitively the culture so as not to propagate negative stereotypes of Latinos. Latino children must have the opportunity to see themselves within the pages of their books. To have *el sabor*, bilingual books also need to be consistent and correct in their use of written and conversational Spanish. Speech and dialogue in Spanish language must flow naturally and be error free. Finally, the illustrations of bilingual books that possess *el sabor* should contain honest and respectful representations of the particular Latino subculture about which they are written.

The fusion of these aspects of cultural authenticity, or *el sabor*, further Schon's (2004) belief that only bilingual books "faithful to the spirit, rhythm, and symmetry of both languages, and books that reflect all the linguistic differences, colloquialisms, and popular expressions that add charm to the work" (p. 136) should be used for educational purposes. Children have the right to see themselves and their culture respectfully and accurately portrayed in books that are displayed in their classrooms, libraries, and homes. When thinking about *el sabor* of a bilingual book, educators should ask themselves: Does it come alive, does it carry the nuances of the culture, does it take you on a journey, does it help you understand a culture different from your own, or does it bring you to a new understanding about your own culture? If a book has invited you to think about these things, then we believe it has *el sabor*.

A Word from the Experts

To gain a deeper understanding of the concerns related to bilingual books, we turned to notable Latino children's literature experts Oralia Garza de Cortés, Lucía González, Isabel Schon, and Alma Flor Ada. Each of these experts brings a unique perspective to understanding bilingual books.

Oralia Garza de Cortés

Cofounder of the Pura Belpré Award and a former children's librarian, Oralia Garza de Cortés has spent her entire career advocating for Latino children's literature and literacy. She has published numerous journal articles and book chapters related to library services to Spanish-speaking children, served as a former president of REFORMA (the National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking), and worked as the program manager for the Los Angeles Universal Preschool. Garza de Cortés is currently self-employed as a Latino children's literacy consultant.

According to this esteemed Latina, Spanish bilingual books are influenced by their respective cultures, with their Spanish varying from region to region. When bilingual books first appeared, there were many errors because of the numerous ways of saying the same thing in Spanish. This problem lingers today in addition to other problems, such as the large amount of Spanish text in picture books in relation to the English equivalent. Garza de Cortés asserts that there are "so many issues but there aren't any cut-and-dry answers. There are many grown-up sentiments and politics that get in the way of getting the books into the hands of children that need them." She recalls that bilingual books never seemed to have their own space in public libraries or in the publishing

world. In the past, publishers did not produce bilingual books because they were listening to people in the children's literature community who were not in favor of the books. They raised many arguments against bilingual books, such as that older students are comfortable with their first language and are not interested in learning a second language. For younger children, the argument was that they get confused with the two languages. It was also suggested that librarians do not have the luxury in story time to read in English and then in Spanish. In the late 1980s, bilingual books began to have more credence in libraries due to their connection with the Family Literacy movement. "Now," remarks Garza de Cortés, "all of a sudden, publishers want bilingual books and we are not used to this. Latino writers are so used to rejection by publishers for bilingual and Spanish books."

Lucía González

Currently the associate director for programming and youth services for the Broward County Libraries Division, Latina children's author Lucía M. González has served as a children's librarian for 20 years. From 1991 to 2001, she was responsible for purchasing all the Spanish books for the Miami-Dade Library System. Having worked with bilingual children for decades, González believes that exposing them to bilingual books encourages children to read, improve their reading skills in Spanish, and share the books with their parents and other adults who lack fluency in English. "Bilingual books bring parents into the reading world of the child and offer the joy of reading in the Spanish language," she attests.

González does note problems with past and current bilingual books for children, asserting that publishers do not pay as much attention to the power of the language when it comes to the Spanish part of the bilingual book. "The 1980s," she recounts, "were the cradle of bilingual books in the United States. Some of the publishers became successful because of the great need for these books by parents and librarians. Publishers like Children's Book Press were leading the way. They became the vanguard for the publishing of bilingual books. In the '90s, there was still a question of should we publish bilingual books or not. Today, publishers know that there is a place for bilingual books."

González laments that some of the small publishers, leading the way in the 1980s, are currently struggling against the larger publishing houses. "It has become hard for the original leaders of bilingual book publishing. In the effort to publish bilingual books, large publishers are losing sight of what the needs are and the quality and kinds of stories being published. They are publishing just because they want to publish bilingual books. They need to be more selective and encourage quality."

In some instances, the book suffers because the Spanish does not have the same rhythm as the English text. Publishers focus only on the correctness of the translation and not on other elements that help children enjoy the text, such as the cadence, style, and rhythm. Insisting that publishers apply the same editorial guidelines and rules to the Spanish version as the English, González states, "Bilingual books should be strong in both languages." She suggests that where possible, the author write both the Spanish and English versions of the text, as she does for her books.

Isabel Schon

Serving as the founding director of California State University San Marcos's Barahona Center for the Study of Books in Spanish for Children and Adolescents, Dr. Isabel Schon is one of the most outspoken, authoritative voices in the area of Spanish and bilingual book publishing. With several books and more than 400 articles and book chapters to her credit, Schon has spent most of her life evaluating Spanish and bilingual books for children and adolescents. She is well acquainted with the varied quality of these books and is not shy about expressing her opinion.

In discussing the current trends in bilingual book publishing, Schon remarks, "There are few beautifully written bilingual books. The vast majority of bilingual books have no cadence, no style, and no eloquence shown with respect to the Spanish language." She also notes that one of the worst aspects of bilingual books is that many publishers maintain good English versions of the text because of copy editors, but the Spanish version is stilted, awkward, and does not flow well. According to Schon, there is a general destroying of the Spanish language because publishers often have no way of judging the work of the translator. The good intentions of publishers fall short due to the lack of Spanish editors and proofreaders at the publishing houses. Schon points out, "If you don't know the language, how do you know if it is incorrect, poor Spanish? Publishers can pick up the English problems but not the problems with the Spanish. Some publishers are making a big effort, but there are very few great translators. Many publishers don't know the difference between a good translator and a bad translator."

To remedy this shortcoming, Schon proposes that publishers put forth the time, effort, and money to hire a good translator to ensure a quality product. However, she does caution "that even though someone comes for a Spanish-speaking country they may not write good Spanish."

In addition to problems with translations, Schon recognizes the difficulties faced by publishers in relation to the illustrations of bilingual picture books. "Illustrations have to save space. To say anything in correct, beautiful Spanish, it takes 20 to 30 percent more words than English. English is direct and concise. Every language has its beauty in style. But Spanish isn't as direct and concise. Publishers need more space for the Spanish text, and something in the illustrations has to give." This problem is also noted by many of the other experts and publishers that we interviewed.

While many of the experts in our interviews are against the use of formatting to distinguish the English and Spanish versions of the text, Schon is quite supportive, maintaining that bilingual books should use different color and font styles for each language to minimize confusion for the reader. Schon warns that both versions should always be legible.

Despite her acknowledgment of the perceived need for bilingual books by teachers and librarians, Schon remains skeptical about the publishing of bilingual books for young children. She argues that researchers and experienced educators prefer separate books with separate languages. Bilingual books are wonderful for adults, but young children need to be immersed in the separate languages of separate editions.

An award-winning author and translator of numerous books for children and young adults, Dr. Alma Flor Ada is not only a professor at the University of San Francisco but also a leading theorist of bilingual education in the United States. She has years of experience working with bilingual children and bilingual books. Her perspective on bilingual books is quite different from Dr. Schon's. According to Ada, there are many positive aspects of these books: (1) purchasers get two books for the price of one; (2) the child sees the two languages (English and Spanish) given the same status; (3) parents are able to read the book in the language they know best, while allowing or encouraging the child to read in the other language; and (4) readers (whether children or adults) can read the book first in the language they know best (L1), and then reread in the language they are learning (L2), with greater comprehension than if they attempted to read it first in L2.

Ada attests that bilingual children need access to both bilingual books and dual editions. Limiting a child's access to only bilingual books threatens the value and richness of the reading experience.

However, Ada comments that not all texts lend themselves to being good bilingual books. The length of a text often restricts which books are considered for bilingual editions. "Children's books have a specific number of pages," notes Ada. "To fit twice as much text in those pages is only possible when the text is not too long to begin with." In instances where this is not possible, then dual editions—one Spanish and one English—are preferable. As an example, Ada recounts, "Isabel Campoy and I were delighted that Simon & Schuster decided that our new title with them, *Tales Our Abuelitas Told*, deserved to be published simultaneously in English and a separate version, *Cuentos que contaban nuestras abuelas*, in Spanish. The fact that this book would be published in two versions was not necessarily an editorial decision but a request from the sales force." Because of its nature and length, it would not have been possible as a bilingual book.

Ada attests that bilingual children need access to both bilingual books and dual editions. Limiting a child's access to only bilingual books threatens the value and richness of the reading experience. To increase the quality of bilingual books, Ada asserts, "Publishers would do well if they choose to translate into Spanish the work of the English-speaking Latinos, or Latinos who write in English. Usually, publishers select for translation into Spanish the best selling monolingual English authors. This does not always work as well as it would if they were to translate books by Latinos, with Latino themes."

Ada's sentiment is supported by many Latino children's literature researchers. All children need the opportunity to see themselves and their culture represented in the books they encounter. Latino children encountering only Anglo characters in bilingual or Spanish books can begin to feel as if their cultural heritage is not important. Smith and Higonnet (2002) note, "Bilingual texts can have very complex agendas beyond language acquisition that include the preservation of cultural practices, folklore, and history; enhancing minority children's self esteem and social interac-

tion; and building a culture of tolerance and resistance to ethnic stereotypes" (p. 217).

As we mentioned earlier, one of the current issues surrounding bilingual books pertains to the use of "correct" Spanish. As a translator, Ada offers her perspective on the topic, "The Spanish used will be dictated by the nature of the text. If a story is set in a particular environment (Mexican, Puerto Rican, for example), the language of the characters, and perhaps the descriptions, should reflect that particular regional way of speaking. For the omniscient narrator, or for books that do not have a very specific regional connotation, I try to use a general Spanish. This is not always possible; there are a few words that do not have one general term." In these instances, Ada chooses the word that she feels will be understood by the majority of Spanish speakers. She suggests that Spanish regionalisms be considered synonyms, as is done in English, and she notes, "English has as many variations as Spanish, and people do not ask, 'What English do you use?'"

Overall, the Latino children's literature experts suggest that while bilingual books are improving in quality, numerous problems linger. Almost all of these problems relate to the Spanish version of the text. Sometimes the Spanish in a book does not match the particular Latino subculture that is being described; other times, the Spanish fails to maintain the same cadence and flow as the English text. The experts believe that publishers, particularly the larger publishing houses, are more interested in obtaining accurate translations in lieu of making the text readable and enjoyable for young Spanish readers. While accuracy in the Spanish text is important, it is equally important that children who read Spanish have the same high-quality reading experience as English readers. Another issue that the experts note is the lack of editing of the Spanish version of the texts. In some publishing houses, it seems as if the editors are concerned only with editing the English portion of the text, accepting the Spanish translation with few or no changes. Finally, the experts assert that some publishers fail to recognize the various regionalisms in the Spanish language, resulting in books in which the Spanish text uses regionalisms of one culture's language (such as Puerto Rico) to describe content about another culture (such as Guatemala).

Bilingual Children's Book Publishers Respond

Publishers of bilingual children's books often find themselves targets of criticism from educators and librarians who accuse them of creating wooden translations loaded with grammatical errors and inconsistencies. In the past, many of these claims were made with no opportunity given to the publishers to explain how they ensure quality bilingual books. We wanted to provide publishers with such a platform and interviewed seven of the leading publishing houses that produce bilingual books. These publishers are Cinco Puntos Press, Groundwood Books, Lectorum Publi-

cations (a division of Scholastic), Lee & Low Books, Children's Book Press, Piñata Books, and Rosen Publishing. Each of these publishers was asked to describe how they (1) ensure quality and maintain cultural authenticity, (2) overcome the common problems or issues encountered in the production of bilingual books, (3) select translators and determine which titles to translate, (4) distinguish between the Spanish and English versions of the texts, (5) decide which type of Spanish to use, and (6) edit the Spanish translations.

Cinco Puntos Press

Established by Bobby Byrd and his wife, Lee, Cinco Puntos Press is no stranger to bilingual books or the criticisms that they bring. According to Byrd, the criticism began in 1985 with the publication of their second book, Joe Hayes's *La Llorona/The Weeping Woman* (1985), which is written in Mexican Spanish. The title is the press's most popular book, selling more than 100,000 copies and leading Byrd to affectionately call the publishing house "The House that *La Llorona* Built." When the book was first published, Byrd notes, "The people promoting bilingual books were primarily Cuban. The Cuban idiom of Spanish (which is much more regular and Castilian than the Mexican version) was the primary way of understanding the Spanish language. At that time most of the Spanish in books was Castilian Spanish. Mexican Spanish was . . . low in the 'pecking order.' There was a type of chauvinism directed towards Mexican Spanish." Since the publisher was one of the earliest independent publishers of bilingual books, they bore the brunt of criticism that still continues today.

However, Cinco Puntos takes many measures to ensure that their bilingual books are of the highest quality. "We are very careful," says Byrd. "If you make one tiny mistake in Spanish, you will be the brunt of all these harsh criticisms." Joe Hayes, one of the publisher's translators, writes both the Spanish and English versions of his stories. As a student of language and folklore, his translations are well respected by Byrd. But these translations, as many of the others for the publishing house, are sent to Teresa Mlawer at Scholastic for her or her daughter to review. The editors make comments and send them back to Cinco Puntos, which passes them along to the translator. According to Byrd, this back-and-forth between the different people involved is one of the most time-consuming issues the publisher faces. "For a bilingual book or any translation, we may have two to three readers make comments in regards to the translation. If someone makes a comment, we have to check with everyone to see what they think. Sometimes you have so many 'cooks in the kitchen' with a bilingual book in regards to language."

Byrd, a poet, maintains that language is the reason he got into publishing. "We want to maintain the regional flavor of the book and often use regional Spanish to fit the book's story line and setting. Kids learn to love language by being introduced to the various variants and shades of meaning in the different version of a language. You learn about diversity when you read the books with regionalisms." Cinco Puntos generally uses Mexican Spanish for its bilingual books because the majority of the publisher's stories originate and are set in the area around the Texas-Mexico border where Mexican Spanish is the language of the people. "It is the right decision for us to use Mexican Spanish in our books because

that is where our stories come from and because the majority of Latinos in the United States are Mexican American."

When it comes to formatting, the publisher wants each language to have equal weight. Byrd recounts that in the first edition of *La Llorona*, the Spanish was in italics and the English was in a regular font. They realized that the use of italics gives a different meaning, so they changed it in the subsequent editions. Sometimes the publisher might decide to use different colors for the different versions of the text. Still, he emphasizes, "We never want to seem like we are disrespecting one language over the other. Generally, we print everything in the same type with no italics of Spanish words in the English text. But there are times when we have to make our own judgments if specific cases require a different font or italics."

On deciding which books to choose for bilingual editions, Byrd states, "We don't do a bilingual book unless the story calls for it. *Sélavi* [Youme, 2004] wasn't bilingual in Spanish because Spanish wasn't spoken in the culture we were talking about, and there isn't a great demand to purchase books written in Creole." On the other hand, the publisher is quite cognizant of the profitability of publishing bilingual editions. "If we put three books on the table and they are all the same—one in English, one in Spanish, and one bilingual, the bilingual one will outsell the other two every time. It comes down to money. Librarians and teachers don't have much to spend, and they feel better purchasing bilingual books—almost a two-for-one mentality." In addition, Byrd relates, "There has always been a pedagogical argument against bilingual books. Critics suggest that children will not learn a secondary language if they have their primary language in front of them. Spanish-speaking parents want bilingual books. Many of the parents don't speak English. Bilingual books allow parents to share books with their children."

Groundwood Books

Founded almost 30 years ago by Guatemala native Patsy Aldana, Groundwood Books is a Canadian publisher that specializes in high-quality children's books about marginalized groups such as First Peoples in the northern hemisphere. Beginning in 1998, the publisher created its *Libros Tigrillo* imprint, which publishes Spanish and bilingual titles originally written by Latin Americans living throughout the Americas.

Maintaining the quality and integrity of the Spanish language is essential in the publication of Groundwood's titles. All of the translating and editing of the Spanish is conducted in-house. Being bilingual herself, working with editors in both languages, and having knowledge of the culture represented, Aldana is able to ensure quality and cultural authenticity. In addition, to maintain cultural authenticity, the publisher uses the Spanish from a title's country of origin. "I don't believe in standard Spanish," remarks Aldana. "It doesn't exist."

Groundwood publishes only bilingual books that have been written by Latino or Latin American writers. This decision influences the books that are available in bilingual editions. Aldana notes, "I might buy rights for a book from Latin America. But if I only get English language rights, I can't publish the Spanish version of the text." Another consideration in determining if a book can be published in a bilingual edition is the length of the text. "If

it is a long text and not suitable for a dual language edition, then I won't publish it as a bilingual book," says Aldana.

Interestingly, the founder of Groundwood is not fond of bilingual books. "If I had a choice," Aldana states, "I would publish dual language editions. I think bilingual books have design issues. They don't allow children to immerse themselves in the language. If you do a good bilingual book there are so many limitations. There is a real compromise in quality. Two separate editions are much better." Aldana goes on to say, "I think that it is terrible that people aren't buying books in Spanish. I've always been bilingual. If you have access to both languages you are always checking the translations rather than immersing yourself into the language. I don't think bilingual books are the way to do it. I think it is a cop-out on the part of publishers and the education system to prefer them." Despite her misgivings, Aldana's bilingual books sell very well. Two of her bestselling books include *Sky Blue Accident/Accidente celeste* (Luján & Grobler, 2007) and *Rooster/Gallo* (Luján & Monroy, 2004).

Lectorum Publications

Originally opened as a bookstore and later purchased by Bob Mlawer, Lectorum Publishers has been around for 47 years and claims to be the "oldest and largest Spanish-language book distributor in the United States." During her 32 years of tenure, Teresa Mlawer, the president of this New York-based publishing division of Scholastic, has catapulted Lectorum from a small bookstore to a distributor and finally, after its acquisition by Scholastic in 1996, to a publisher of Spanish and bilingual titles. Although the bookstore recently closed, Lectorum continues as a publisher and distributor of Spanish and bilingual books.

As a distributor, the Cuban-born Mlawer is sought out by many authors who want to create bilingual books. However, she asserts, "Not every book should be turned into a bilingual book. Some lend themselves to that, such as short picture books for small children. For older children, why would you do a bilingual book?" According to Mlawer, the publisher creates bilingual books only for very small children. "If there is a lot of text, then we don't turn it into a bilingual book. Bilingual books are four to five lines per page. If the text is longer than that, then we make dual editions. We don't want to scare children with length of text."

Once Mlawer has chosen titles for bilingual editions, she takes great care to ensure the quality of the translation. "Our number one goal is to respect the voice of the original author. We don't want a translation to sound like a translation; we want the language to flow. We try to keep the meaning and structure the same for both languages." Mlawer, who also translates for Cinco Puntos Press, does most Lectorum's translations herself. However, she does employ other qualified people on the staff and will go outside the house if a book calls for skills that are absent within the publishing house. "We try to get the best translators, editors, and copy editors," Mlawer affirms. "Our books go through several revisions—which is the key to coming out with a great translation and still maintaining the quality. Even my personal translations are edited by someone else."

These translations are written in a universal Spanish (neutral Latin American Spanish) that Mlawer believes any Spanish

speaker will understand. However, if Lectorum decides to publish a bilingual edition of a story originally from a particular country, such as Puerto Rico, and the original author uses a word specific to Puerto Rico, then Mlawer will leave the word in the text and explain it at the end as needed. She believes it is important for children to learn the different words particular to a specific Latino subculture. "The more vocabulary being taught to the children, the better," she comments.

In addition to retaining specific Spanish regionalisms, the publisher also tries to ensure that the illustrator understands the particular culture from which the book originated. As an example, Mlawer mentions the series *When the Great Ones Were Small*. "We have made sure that we verified the information and that we have illustrators that match the author's country of origin" and/or the setting of the book. She also maintains, "We never use comic illustrations, especially when we do a culturally relevant book. We want children to identify themselves in illustrations, so we use ones that are realistic."

Much like the other publishers interviewed, Lectorum does not use different colors or italics to denote the Spanish text. Generally, they print one language on top of the page and the other on the bottom. Mlawer remarks, "We want to keep the languages separate but don't want to confuse the children with the different [type settings]. It is my personal decision to do this. If the story is originally written in Spanish, then I'll keep the Spanish author first over the English author, and vice versa. It is just a question of who did the original text."

All of these precautions and attentions to detail seem to have paid off for the publisher. Mlawer acknowledges that their books are becoming more and more popular with both Latino and non-Latino families. Some of the publishers' bestselling bilingual children's books include Montijo's *Cloud Boy/Niño Nube* (2006), Ellery's *If I Had a Dragon/Si yo tuviera un Dragón* (2006), and Kesselman's *Este monstruo me sueña/This Monster Rings a Bell* (2004).

Lee & Low Books

Founded in the early 1990s by Philip Lee and Thomas Low, Lee & Low Books is one of the few minority-owned publishing companies in the United States. As an independent publisher of multicultural children's books, the company was one of the first to acknowledge the need for children of color to see themselves reflected in their books. Jason Low, one of the current co-owners of Lee and Low, remarks, "Although I am not one of the founders, my ten years with the company has allowed me to witness significant growth over the years. Lee & Low was established with the mission of filling a void in children's publishing and providing diverse books with contemporary multicultural themes. We purposely avoid publishing talking animal stories and folklore, since there is nothing new we can bring to these genres."

The publisher has been issuing Spanish and bilingual books since 1994. In the early years, they translated only books with Latino themes into Spanish. Later, they decided that quality stories from all cultures should be made available to Spanish readers. Low stresses, "It is important for Spanish readers to be exposed to universal themes that cross cultural barriers and captivate children by revealing cultures, customs, and traditions that are different but the same."

Like all publishers of bilingual books, Low realizes that only specific books will support a bilingual format. "If a book is too text heavy, the words and pictures cannot interact in a fluid way, and the delicate harmony between the two elements of story and illustrations are lost. We find some of the best candidates for bilingual books are poetry, since the text is usually spare, leaving plenty of room for words in English and Spanish to coexist." Two of Lee & Low's books that reinforce this rule are Delacré's *Arrorró, mi niño: Latino Lullabies and Gentle Games* (2004) and Alarcón's *Poems to Dream Together/Poemas para soñar juntos* (2005).

In addition to deciding which books will be produced in a bilingual format, Low acknowledges that selecting a translator is perhaps the biggest challenge faced by his company. "We don't want a translation that is simply grammatically correct. The translation, or adaptation, must also capture the style, spirit, and intention of the author." Low explains that there are several factors Lee & Low takes into account when choosing a translator. First, the translator must be a native Spanish speaker. Low suggests, "Such people not only have knowledge of the proper use of Spanish, but they can employ regional and colloquial usage appropriately." Another consideration in choosing a translator is that he/she must be a good writer. "It is not enough to know Spanish grammar and syntax. The translator must reinterpret the English text as a storyteller in Spanish. The translator must be able to maintain the voice of the author, yet be able to rewrite it clearly for the Spanish-speaking reader. This is a particular challenge for poetry and verse." A final concern in selecting a translator relates to his/her knowledge of the subject matter being translated. "Each translator has special strengths," says Low. "Some translators are particularly good storytellers, while others may have expertise in certain subjects. When we translated *Gracias te damos/Giving Thanks: A Native American Good Morning Message* (Swamp & Printup, 1996), we looked for someone who had studied Native American cultures. For *¡Béisbol! Pioneros y leyendas del béisbol Latino/¡Béisbol! Latino Baseball Pioneers and Legends* (Winter & Rodríguez, 2002), we selected a translator who was knowledgeable about baseball and its terminology."

Low is also quick to point out that the company's Spanish translations are edited for accuracy. "Even though we place great emphasis on finding the best translator for each book, it is critical that the translated text be edited. Even the best writers need a good editor, and translators are no exception. Therefore, copy editors and proofreaders must have extensive knowledge of Spanish as well as a good command of the book's subject matter. Translations often require several rounds of editing."

Similar to Lectorum, Lee & Low does not use different colors or italics to denote the Spanish text. They also generally use a universal Spanish in their bilingual books, unless the original author employed a specific regional voice in the English edition. Low clarifies, "If the book has a specific setting in the English edition, such as Mexico or Puerto Rico, or if the characters speak in a local dialect, then the translation should reflect this."

The many precautions and measures taken by the publisher to ensure the quality of the translations results in books that exemplify Lee & Low's emphasis on cultural authenticity. "Accurate portrayal of different cultures is one of the key reasons why our books have been so successful," Low admits. "Our stories resonate with people of all cultures and help to establish connections

between people of different backgrounds as they realize that the personal stories shared by individuals of one culture are surprisingly similar to those of other cultures." Indeed, the publisher's books are successful. Some of their bestselling bilingual books include Nikola-Lisa's *America: A Book of Opposites/Un libro de contrarios* (2001), Suen's *Toddler Two/Dos años* (2002), and Alarcón's *Poems to Dream Together/Poemas para soñar juntos* (2005).

Children's Book Press

Founded by Harriet Rohmer in 1975, Children's Book Press (CBP) is a nonprofit multicultural and bilingual children's book publisher that was the nation's first publisher to specialize exclusively in multicultural literature for children. Children's Book Press is also one of the pioneers of publishing children's books in a bilingual format, with books written in numerous languages, including Chinese, Korean, Cambodian, Laotian, Vietnamese, and Spanish. According to Dana Goldberg, the executive editor of CBP, "We've been publishing Spanish/English bilingual books for children for over 30 years. Harriet Rohmer founded CBP to fill a void in the children's publishing field; back then there were few, if any, bilingual titles for children and few that showcased stories for and from communities of color in the United States. Our mission today is the same as it was back then: to provide children from the African American, Asian American, Latino, and Native American communities with books that reflect them—their experience, culture, history, and languages."

In an effort to ensure cultural authenticity, CBP generally publishes stories by authors and artists whose heritage represents the culture being portrayed in the text and illustrations. "By no means do we feel that people can't produce successful stories and art about experiences other than their own, but it is our guiding principle to ensure that our books are culturally authentic, sensitive, and accurate," asserts Goldberg. When faced with the challenge of determining which books to publish in bilingual formats, the publisher chooses bilingual over monolingual whenever there is a relevant second language. CBP also asks their authors of Spanish bilingual books to provide their manuscript in both English and Spanish. When this is not feasible, they employ translators who are native Spanish speakers. The publisher then sends the translation to Spanish readers, who check for cultural accuracy, grammar, punctuation, and spelling. These readers examine the narrative or poetic flow (to ensure that the Spanish version can stand on its own) and verify the consistency between the English and Spanish texts. "This process can be very time-consuming," admits Goldberg, "but is a really crucial step in producing high-quality bilingual literature. Our ultimate goal is that a reader who is fluent in both languages wouldn't be able to tell which language the story was written in first, and which is the translation."

Comparable to the other publishers, CBP's translations contain Spanish regionalisms as well as a Spanish that is understood by most Spanish speakers. Goldberg maintains, "There is no one pure Spanish, the same way that there is no pure English. Keeping that in mind, we try to strike a balance between culturally appropriate regionalisms that reflect the author's background, and Spanish that will be clear and understandable to all Spanish-speaking children." The publisher seeks regionalisms in Spanish that will

be easily understood within the story's context but does provide a glossary when necessary.

Beyond the issue of translations and selecting the appropriate Spanish, Goldberg mentions other problems CBP encounters in publishing Spanish bilingual books. One of these problems relates to the illustrations. "We have to be careful to leave enough room for the artwork to breathe on the page while also accommodating text in two languages. When you're dealing with two blocks of text per page instead of just one, it can be challenging." Another dilemma that Goldberg notes is deciding how to distinguish between the Spanish and English versions of the text. Unlike some of the other publishers, CBP does employ variances in color or font to distinguish the different languages. Goldberg remarks, "We've handled this issue differently in different books we've published. In some books, the English always appears on one side of the page and the other language always appears on the other. Other times, the languages will be distinguished by using two slightly different fonts, or differently colored initial caps (the first, capitalized word on that page). Other times, both languages appear in the same font, but there will be a visual marker separating the two languages."

It seems that CBP's strategies for selecting and publishing Spanish bilingual books work well. Many of their titles have won one or more of the three major Latino children's book awards: the Pura Belpré, the Américas, and the Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award. And it is no surprise that many of these books, such as Garza's *Family Pictures/Cuadros de familia* (1990) or Pérez's *My Very Own Room/Mi propio cuartito* (2000), are also bestsellers for the publisher.

Piñata Books

Piñata Books is the children's and young adult imprint of Houston-based Arte Público Press. According to Dr. Nicolás Kanellos, the director of Piñata Books and the Brown Foundation Professor of Hispanic Literature at the University of Houston, he started Arte Público Press in 1979 "in order to give Hispanic authors an outlet for their work and to reform the national culture so that Hispanic life, literature, history, art and culture would be represented. We began publishing Piñata Books for children and young adults in 1992 because there was a great need for literary and cultural materials in Spanish reflecting the culture of Latinos in the United States, including the language that children and families use and social situations that are relevant to Latinos in the United States, both in the schools and the communities."

Considering that the publishing company was established to celebrate Latino subcultures, authentic Latino language, culture, and social situations are at the heart of all the titles published by Piñata. To guarantee this authenticity, Kanellos ensures that the author and illustrators of all the company's children's books are of Latino heritage. "We work with Latino professional writers and professional illustrators who are familiar with Latino visual culture. We work with scholars in children's literature and linguistics at the University of Houston. All of our editors and copy editors and staff are Latinos and we meet in editing and production meetings. The cultures represented on the staff are Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Argentine, Chilean, Mexican, Colombian, etc." This cultural diversity in the company's staff is deliberate, as the pub-

lisher completes most of its translations in-house with very little outsourcing. Bearing in mind that all of Piñata's children's picture books (and a few of their intermediate and young adult titles) are published in bilingual format, this decision saves considerably on publishing expenses. Kanellos is quick to point out that quality is not sacrificed, since the majority of the company's staff is comprised of literary and cultural scholars who study Latino issues, more so than the staff at other publishers.

Still, Kanellos acknowledges that the company faces many of the same problems as other publishers when it comes to publishing bilingual books, particularly in deciding the type of Spanish to use. Writers and translators must decide "when and how to use national and regional dialects, choosing a lexicon that is understandable to the varying dialectical groups but remaining faithful to specific regional and national cultures and dialects, etc." Kanellos further explains, "We do not attempt to find a middle ground or to choose only the folkways and dialects that are understandable to every group. We are not afraid to publish a book by a South Texas writer employing the dialect of farm workers or small-town people, or a book on salsa which refers directly to Cuban or Puerto Rican customs and music." The publisher maintains the integrity of the Spanish version of a text by avoiding literal and word-for-word translations. Instead, Kanellos asserts, Piñata's translators and writers strive to obtain an equivalent idiomatic version.

All of these efforts to ensure authentic language and culture in their bilingual books appear to have proven successful for Piñata. Many of the publisher's titles have received literary awards, such as the Américas Award, and been placed on American Library Association booklists. A few of Piñata's successful titles include Mora's *The Desert Is My Mother/El desierto es mi madre* (1994) and Lachtman's *Pepita Talks Twice/Pepita habla dos veces* (1995).

Rosen Publishing

Noted by several of our expert interviewees as a publisher of quality Spanish and bilingual nonfiction children's books, Rosen Publishing has been in business for more than 50 years and has been publishing Spanish/bilingual editions for around seven. Mauricio Velázquez de León, editorial director of Spanish publications, maintains that high quality and high interest are integral to the success of Rosen's bilingual and Spanish titles.

Similar to Kanellos from Piñata, Velázquez de León cites appropriate Spanish as the biggest problem he faces as a publisher of bilingual books. "The most common problem is finding Spanish that will be understood by a Guatemalan, Mexican, etc." The majority of Spanish can be understood by all Spanish speakers, but there are a small percentage of words that can be comprehended only by someone from a particular Latino subculture. "If the book written is by a Mexican and the editor is Cuban and the proofreader is from Ecuador, there are nuances that might not be picked up. But they must be picked up and changed to make the text clear for everyone." To ensure this clarity in the Spanish, Rosen takes many precautions. The publisher employs translators and editors who are experts in the field. Velázquez de León asserts, "It is very important that every person who participates in the Spanish translations' proofreading and editing is a Spanish speaker living in the U.S. or understands the nuances of Spanish

in this country. There are regional differences in Spanish, and we want to make sure that everyone understands each other and the pan-American Spanish language.”

Velázquez de León has a list of translators that he knows and trusts. These translators generally prefer working with specific topics such as science books, biographies, and so on. He also emphasizes the importance of the translator being a good writer. “Sometimes people know the language and can translate but they can’t write. If you just translate word-by-word you leave a lot of work for the editor to do. We want someone that is first and foremost a writer and *then* a translator. I want evidence of their writing experience.”

In addition to selecting the appropriate Spanish and the best translator, Velázquez de León also has to determine whether to issue a book as a bilingual or separate Spanish edition. As many of the other publishers have noted, the length of the text drives this decision, since there is limited space on a page. “Most of the

the publishers are not as consistent when formatting the separate English and Spanish texts. While some of the publishers employ different fonts, italics, and colors to distinguish the Spanish text from the English, other publishers simply place one language at the top of a page and the other at the bottom. Even the choice of which language to print first varies among the publishers. Some publishers always place the English first, others the Spanish, and still others alternate the two. Despite the differences in their rules and regulations, all of these publishers are making efforts to improve their bilingual books, efforts that are long overdue.

The Power of Bilingual Books

As evidenced by the remarks of the Latino children’s literature experts and the ethnic/independent/small press publishers, there are many issues surrounding the publication of Spanish bilingual books, ranging from the selection of appropriate Spanish to the

When deciding which books to issue as bilingual editions, all of the publishers allow the length of the text to drive their decision, realizing that Spanish text uses more space than English text and the greater the amount of text on a page, the greater the problems fitting it within the confines of the illustrations.

bilingual books we publish are for the lower levels. They have very short text, a limited number of pages, and more space for both languages. We have heard from librarians and teachers that the need for bilingual books is at the lower levels.” Consequently, the publisher partially bases its decision to publish a bilingual edition on the book’s grade level. If the reading level is under fourth grade, then it is issued as a bilingual edition; otherwise it is issued in two separate versions—an English edition and a Spanish edition. The subject matter also determines the decision. Certain subjects have a demand from students to be in a bilingual edition. Knowing that there is a need for a specific book on a specific subject drives Rosen’s decisions: “We try to cover a topic that no one is covering. We want to do high-quality books on subjects that kids want to read. We want to give kids reasons to go to the library to read books and enjoy them.”

For the most part, the publishers interviewed take careful precautions to ensure that the Spanish versions of their bilingual books are authentic and accurate. To accomplish this, they purposefully select translators who have a good working knowledge of the Spanish language. Many of the publishers also require that their translators and/or editors represent the particular Latino subculture in the book. Similarly, while a few of the publishers choose a universal Spanish for their bilingual books, the majority maintain cultural regionalisms that match the story’s setting and/or the authentic voice of the original author.

When deciding which books to issue as bilingual editions, all of the publishers allow the length of the text to drive their decision, realizing that Spanish text uses more space than English text and the greater the amount of text on a page, the greater the problems fitting it within the confines of the illustrations. However,

physical layout of the text. Each of the publishers’ various decisions can have far-reaching effects on a book’s target audience.

High-quality bilingual books can be used as bridges between the home and school environments of Spanish-speaking children, affording them opportunities to make connections between the language of their parents and the language of their teachers/classmates. In addition, bilingual books help English language learners learn how to read and understand English. Rowlands (2007) asserts, “The importance of bilingual literacy is . . . well established. Children who read in their primary language acquire both an understanding of *reading* [emphasis in orig.] and the knowledge base needed for comprehension in a second language” (p. 21). Bilingual books can also be used to promote cultural awareness and understanding of the various Latino subcultures and to improve the ethnic identity development of Latino children. Garza de Cortés (2000) notes, “To present children with literature that reflects their own cultural heritage and background is to nurture their well-being and to develop strong roots from which they can develop into their fullest potential, able to venture out into their own imaginative, creative journey, able to absorb the wealth of knowledge that two broad cultural and linguistic traditions can offer” (p. 79).

If a book’s Spanish text has not been translated in such a way that maintains the rhythm of the original version, the benefits of bilingual books will not be realized. Abós (1999) writes, “A translator is not an interactive dictionary—he or she is a mediator between peoples, between literary traditions. Her role is first that of a reader and an interpreter, and then a rewriter . . . [Translating] is a complex and multifaceted process, a collision between two languages, two cultures, two readerships; and the translator sits at the eye of the storm, the mediator between two worlds, making

choices” (p. 701). If a book is simply translated word-for-word from English into Spanish, the text will be stilted and uninteresting to Spanish readers, robbing them of the magical experiences that their counterparts receive from the English version of the text.

Based on our interviews with the publishers, it appears that many choose their translators to ensure this high-quality experience that bilingual books can offer. Unfortunately, not all publishers are making these same efforts. Errors still exist in works by notable authors. For instance, the recent book *I Am Latino: The Beauty in Me* (Pinkney & Pinkney, 2007) is an excellent book to celebrate the Latino culture and promote cultural awareness. However, the Spanish words *mamá* and *papá* are missing their accent marks within the text. Consequently, while the content is highly recommended, the Spanish is a little less than desirable.

Teachers and librarians need to be highly selective. Simply making Spanish bilingual books available to Latino children is not enough. The books must embody *el sabor*—representing all the qualities that good bilingual books have to offer.

Assessing Bilingual Books

To assist educators in locating bilingual books that possess *el sabor*, we have established the following helpful guidelines. Educators should consider:

- Placement of the Spanish text. In some bilingual books the English text precedes the Spanish, printed either on the right of or on top of the Spanish text.
- Color and formatting (size and weight of type) of the Spanish text. Sometimes the Spanish version of the text is printed in an illegible font, italicized, or in a color that is hard to read against the page background.
- Distinction between the English and Spanish texts. Some bilingual books distinguish between the two text languages by the use of color, italics, or a symbol to denote the difference.
- Length of translated texts. In some instances, the Spanish version of the text will be much longer than the English or vice versa. The difference in length can be intimidating to young children and hard to fit on the page using the current placement of illustrations.
- Cultural relevancy and cultural differences. Books that were originally written in Spanish and translated into a bilingual Spanish/English edition or vice versa can possess situations or wording that is unfamiliar or inappropriate to the other culture. In addition, content could be beyond the experiences of the “other” culture.
- Consistency of translations with the original text. A translation should reflect the same ideas but not be a literal word-for-word translation. There are numerous words in the Spanish language that do not have an English equivalent. Literal translations have a tendency to lose the cultural flavor of the original text, resulting in stilted or wooden writing.
- Selection of appropriate Spanish. Publishers and translator are faced with a dilemma when publishing Spanish bilingual books. Do they use spoken Spanish dialect, formal Spanish, Mexican Spanish, or a universal neutral Spanish?

- Use of cartoon illustrations. In some cultures the use of cartoon illustrations is deemed disrespectful.
- Grammatical and spelling errors within the Spanish text. Sometimes Spanish translations in bilingual books are not edited by the publishers and can include errors in punctuation, spelling, or grammar.

Correct Spanish is an integral component of maintaining cultural authenticity in bilingual books, and all children deserve to see their home language accurately represented in the books that they encounter. Teachers and librarians who are unfamiliar with the Spanish language should not feel incapable of choosing and integrating high-quality bilingual books into the curriculum, nor should they utilize our selection guidelines without considering the other elements that influence *el sabor* of a book, such as its visual elements. Instead, they should seek assistance from Latinos and native Spanish speakers in their community, and from the parents of their Spanish-speaking students, to help them choose culturally appropriate books.

We also suggest the following web sites that list quality bilingual books: the Association for Library Services to Children’s Bilingual Booklist for Children, located at www.ala.org/ala/alsc/alscresources/booklists/bilingualbooks.htm, and the Barahona Center for the Study of Books in Spanish for Children and Adolescents at www.csusm.edu/csb/english/. To help educators begin their collection of quality bilingual books, we recommend the following titles that we feel contain *el sabor*:

- *Angels Ride Bikes and Other Fall Poems/Los ángeles andan en bicicleta y otros poemas de otoño.* (1999). Francisco X. Alarcón. Illus. by Maya Christina Gonzalez. Children’s Book Press.
- *Arrorró, mi Niño: Latino Lullabies and Gentle Games.* (2004). Lulu Delacre. Lee & Low Books.
- *The Bossy Gallito/El gallo de bodas: A Traditional Cuban Folktale.* (1994). Lucía M. González. Illus. by Lulu Delacre. Scholastic.
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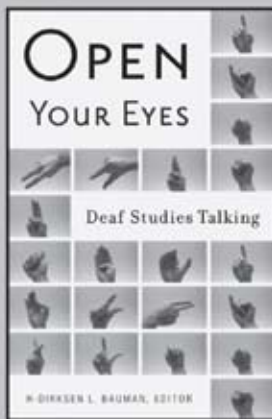
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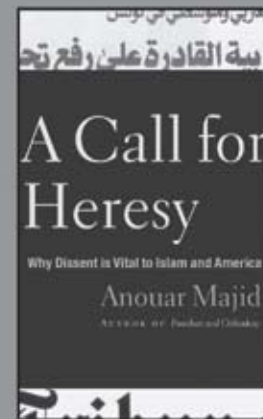
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