

## TRANSLATING HYBRIDITY: ON GIANNINA BRASCHI'S *YO-YO BOING!*

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**Abstract:** This article explores the challenges of translating hybrid language in literary texts, focusing on Giannina Braschi's *Yo-Yo Boing!* (1998), a novel written in English, Spanish and Spanglish. Drawing on experimental and ethical translation theories, it analyzes the strategies used by Tess O'Dwyer (2011) and Alessia Patanè (2023), including domestication, foreignization and intralingual adaptation. The article examines how hybrid languages such as Spanglish function as cultural and political acts of resistance, complicating the translator's task. Building on recent sociolinguistic and postcolonial frameworks, it argues for "resistant translation" as a means of preserving the linguistic and cultural hybridity of such texts. Through comparative analysis and short experimental translations, it concludes that when translation is used to preserve rather than erase hybrid linguistic ecosystems, it can serve as a space of cultural affirmation, resisting assimilation and standardization.

**Keywords:** Spanglish; hybrid languages; cultural and linguistic hybridity; translation strategies; resistant translation; *Yo-Yo Boing!*

## 1. Introduction

Can a non-standard language be translated into a standard language, without losing what makes it a unique expression of a particular author, identity, culture, place or moment in time? Or, in other words, could its diversity be preserved outside of its original linguistic ecosystem? And what if this original linguistic ecosystem is one of cultural and linguistic “hybridity” found in cultural-linguistic borderlands<sup>1</sup>?

Borderlands are complex, often poor according to Western economic standards, but they are also particularly rich in cultural and linguistic diversity. Similar to the estuaries found in natural environments, where fresh waters or streams meet the ocean, these borderlands are complex, fragile, extremely fertile and, since antiquity, have been the place of intense and often conflictual cultural contact.

The “hybrid” languages found in borderlands are challenging to translate, but attitudes towards them have changed in recent years, disrupting translation theories and approaches (Bennett 2019: 3). The natural linguistic ecosystems of hybrid languages lie in geographical, geopolitical, cultural and linguistic borderlands that linguist and translator, Ilan Stavans (2000: 3) metaphorically describes as ‘the hyphen’. These are the in-between spaces where individuals navigate multiple cultures, languages, and national identities (see also Attig 2018).

There are scholars who wonder whether these hybrid languages should be translated at all, and if and when they are, the issue that naturally emerges is how. In this paper, I will be reflecting in part on the *whys* and on some of the possible *hows*, by focusing on one hybrid language in particular, Spanglish. Here, Spanglish is used to mean a “hybrid language variety resulting from a constant renegotiation of the linguistic borders between English and Spanish” (Attig 2019: 22).

## 2. Theoretical lenses

This paper approaches translation through the lenses of both experimental and ethical translation theory frameworks. I examine Giannina Braschi’s work of poetic-prose *Yo-Yo Boing!* (1998), and its English translation by Tess O’Dwyer (2011), as a case in point. I also explore how other literary translingual works have been approached by translators working with hybrid or nonstandard language varieties such as Spanglish.

Scholars and authors such as Santiago Vaquera-Vásquez (2011), Susana Chávez-Silverman (2004), and Ana Celia Zentella (2003) have examined the aesthetic, cultural, and political dimensions of Spanglish. Others, including Remy Attig (2018, 2019), have addressed the challenges of translating texts written in this hybrid mode. These discussions frame translation not as a neutral act but as

<sup>1</sup> I use the term *linguistic ecosystem* in a sociolinguistic sense to describe the dynamic interplay of languages, dialects, and registers within a specific social or geographic environment. Like natural ecosystems, linguistic ecosystems are shaped by contact, competition, and adaptation, and reflect broader power dynamics, histories of migration, and sociopolitical change.

one that carries cultural and political implications, especially when dealing with marginalized and minoritized varieties. The question of how to translate hybrid language, and whether to do so at all, has also been raised by authors themselves, including Gloria Anzaldúa, who resisted the translation of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, and others who have opted for self-translation or careful collaboration with trusted translators.

Spanglish defies easy categorization. In the context of this paper, it is considered more than just a mix of English and Spanish. It functions as a dynamic linguistic practice that includes code-switching, lexical borrowing, and more fully blended registers. Scholars such as Ana Celia Zentella (2003, 2023) and Ilan Stavans (2000) have shown how Spanglish reflects the lived experience of bilingual speakers navigating between cultural systems. Rather than indicating deficiency, Spanglish reflects fluency, adaptability, and creativity shaped by histories of migration, colonialism, and resistance.

While it has often been labeled as a “non-standard”<sup>2</sup> or even “incorrect” form of language, a number of scholars, among them Ana Celia Zentella, have challenged these characterizations. Zentella recognizes Spanglish as “a rule-governed, in-group and informal style of speaking that honors the grammars of both English and Spanish” (2023: 2). Like other hybrid varieties of language in the U.S., such as African American Vernacular English or Chicano English, Spanglish resists the binary of “correct” and “incorrect” language use, positioning itself as both an aesthetic innovation and a sociopolitical critique.

Recent sociolinguistic frameworks also offer useful tools for understanding hybrid language. The concept of translanguaging (García and Wei 2014) shifts attention from alternating between two fixed linguistic codes to the fluid and dynamic use of a full linguistic repertoire. This model better accounts for the internal coherence and creative potential of hybrid practices like Spanglish, particularly in literature, where such language practices can mirror processes of cultural negotiation.

In the case of Spanglish, the notion of radical bilingualism proposed by Lourdes Torres (2007) offers a useful point of departure. According to Torres, radical bilingual texts are those that make few concessions to monolingual readers, preserving the mixed, context-specific linguistic texture of the original. Remy Attig (2019) builds on this with his discussion of radical Spanglish and the possibilities it opens for translation. Drawing on postcolonial thinkers such as Homi K. Bhabha and García Canclini, Attig (2018) views Spanglish not merely as code-switching but as a hybrid variety in its own right, a resistant form of expression that challenges dominant linguistic paradigms.

Ellen Jones’ work, particularly in her monograph *Literature in Motion: Translating Multilingualism Across the Americas* (2022), offers an important contribution to current debates about translating hybrid and multilingual literature. She devotes particular attention to *Yo-Yo Boing!*, making her one of

<sup>2</sup> In sociolinguistic terms, a “standard” variety of a language is one that is institutionally recognized and used in formal education, media and government, while “non-standard” varieties tend to be informal, regionally or socially marked, and less institutionally supported (Milroy 2006).

the few scholars besides Attig to examine this text through the lens of translation studies. Jones explores the challenges of preserving what I will refer to here as “intentional illegibility”, or the friction that emerges from translingual writing. In her analysis of Tess O’Dwyer’s translation, she shows how the translator negotiates the tension between honoring the hybrid performativity of the original and rendering it accessible to English-dominant readers. This tension is something I also reflect on and discuss later in the paper. Jones’ work highlights the difficult choices faced by translators of texts that resist assimilation into a single linguistic code.

A related set of questions arises in the work of Susana Chávez-Silverman, who has written extensively in Spanglish and whose texts exemplify how hybrid language resists conventional translational norms. In collections such as *Killer Crónicas: Bilingual Memories* (2004), excerpts of which are discussed later in this paper, alongside examples of how Attig (2019) approached translating them, she crafts bilingual narratives that blur the boundaries between English and Spanish, often refusing to gloss or explain her code-switching. Rather than translating her work into separate monolingual versions, Chávez-Silverman insists on the expressive power of hybridity itself. Her work illustrates how linguistic hybridity can operate as both an aesthetic strategy and a political position, challenging normative expectations of coherence, fluency, and transparency in literary production and translation alike.

As Bennett (2019: 4) notes, hybrid texts are not only linguistically innovative; they are also performative of cultural realities and political identities. This performativity, tied to the visual, aural, and cultural resonances of multilingual texts, renders them difficult to translate using traditional translation techniques. Because hybrid works often refuse to “resolve” into one stable language or cultural frame, they pose significant challenges for translators and theorists alike. As a number of theorists have indicated, translation theory has traditionally presumed a neat distinction between source and target languages (Mehrez 1992; Meylaerts 2006; Grutman 2006; Bandia, 2008: 5-6, 2012), and has long depended on such binary oppositions. However, hybrid texts have increasingly destabilized these assumptions by blurring the boundaries between languages, codes, and cultural reference points.

This raises important ethical and methodological questions. How can heterolingualism be rendered in another language without flattening its complexity? And how can translation resist the tendency toward monolingualism, a tendency that, as several scholars have observed, is especially pronounced in commercial or institutional translation settings (Meylaerts 2006: 90-95; 206; Klinger 2015: 2)? Many theorists argue for embracing opacity and partial untranslatability as deliberate choices that signal linguistic and cultural resistance (Bertacco 2014: 24-27; Apter 2008). These approaches align with what Sommer (2003: 2) describes as the “hide-and-seek” quality of bilingual texts, where not everything is made readily accessible for all readers.

Hybridity, in this context, can be understood as a state of cultural and linguistic *in-betweenness*, where identities and meanings are negotiated within what Bhabha (1994: 36-39) calls the “third space”, a site of translation and transformation. García Canclini (2005) similarly sees hybridity as a defining

condition of Latin American modernity, shaped by the intersection of distinct cultural systems. In translation studies, Michael Cronin (2003) has shown how hybridity reflects the fluid and contested nature of language in a globalized world, where translation itself becomes a crucial site of cultural exchange and resistance.

While Jakobson (1959/2000) defined intralingual translation as rewording within the same language, I follow Attig's (2019) adaptation of the concept to describe English renderings that preserve the friction and hybridity of Spanglish texts. This includes choices such as retaining Spanish or Spanglish terms, echoing syntactic dissonances, and highlighting rather than concealing linguistic tension. In Attig's usage, radical hybridity refers to the deliberate retention of cultural and linguistic markers as a resistant aesthetic, rather than something to be smoothed out for ease of reading.

Building on these postcolonial and sociolinguistic perspectives, I also draw from Venuti's (2008) call for foreignization as an ethical strategy. Translation in this context is not only about transmitting meaning from one language to another. It is about preserving the linguistic, cultural, and political weight of hybrid forms, especially when they emerge from contexts of marginalization or erasure. Resistant translation, then, becomes a way to keep cultural-linguistic difference visible, challenging both monolingual norms and the assumptions of fluency that often underlie translation practices.

### **3. *Contextualizing Giannina Braschi and Yo-Yo Boing!***

#### **3.1 Braschi and her work**

Giannina Braschi is a Puerto-Rican poet and award-winning author known for her avant-garde, genre-crossing work that blends fiction, essay, theatre, and political philosophy (O'Dwyer 2021). PEN America describes her as “one of the most revolutionary voices in Latin American literature today” (no date). With a PhD in Spanish Golden Age literature, her creative corpus spans genres, continents and historical periods. Her bilingual experimentation and linguistic innovation arise from her “Latinidad, from her Puerto-Rican-ness” (Aldama 2020: 3). She is credited with inventing new forms to express shifting Latinx identities (*ibid.*: 4).

Her most recognized works include *Empire of Dreams* (1988), a Spanish language poetry collection that chronicles her life in NYC with all its contradictions during the 80s, later translated into English (1994), *Yo-Yo Boing!* (1998) written in Spanish, English, and Spanglish; and *United States of Banana* (2011) a postmodern allegory written in English. Her latest work, *Putinoika* (2024), also written in English, continues her radical experimentation, this time focusing on the crises of the Trump and Putin era, but it will not be addressed here.

Braschi was born and raised in Puerto Rico, educated in Europe, and lives in New York City. Her work emerges from cultural-linguistic borderlands and is deeply shaped by her transnational and transcultural life. Writing in English, Spanish and Spanglish, she moves through “zones where borders between

languages do not exist" (Aldama 2020: 6), and her hybrid identities and multilingualism form the cultural-linguistic ecosystem from which *Yo-Yo Boing!* and her broader creative practice emerge.

### 3.2 *Yo-Yo Boing!*: A linguistic experiment

Braschi's use of Spanglish in *Yo-Yo Boing!* can be considered as a radical type of bilingualism (Attig 2019; Torres 2007): not just a few Spanish words sprinkled into an English text, but a full hybrid "lect" (Attig 2019: 23), born from the ongoing renegotiation between English and Spanish. The title *Yo-Yo Boing!* reflects this, and suggests a dialogue between two voices or parts of the self, two "yo"s in Spanish, in tension, producing a "boing", a collision. Like the yo-yo toy, the novel swings back and forth, resisting stasis and signaling constant movement between cultural and linguistic spaces.

The title also alludes to "Yoyo Boing", the stage name of a well-known Puerto Rican comedian and television personality of the 1960s and 70s, Luis Antonio Rivera, signaling one of many moments of cultural intertextuality in the novel. This reference, humorous and layered, exemplifies Braschi's penchant for intertextual play, comedic flourish, and cultural code-switching beyond strictly linguistic domains.

The title of the second chapter, "Blow-Up" is another example of Braschi's intertextual play. It likely alludes both to the photographic technique of enlargement and to Michelangelo Antonioni's 1966 English-language film by the same name, a film in which, significantly, nothing is quite as it seems. This ambiguity resonates with Braschi's own narrative techniques and themes. As the critic Rolando Pérez (2023) observes in a recent reflection on *Yo-Yo Boing!*, although it might seem otherwise, "nothing in Braschi's work is there without a reason".

"Blow-Up", is the focus of this paper, and in particular the way it is written in a blend of English, Spanish, and Spanglish. The speakers, unnamed and distinguishable only by dashes, engage in dialogues that fluidly shift between languages, often within a single sentence. These voices, most probably writers, artists, and academics in pre 9/11 New York City, discuss race, sexuality, colonialism, artistic and academic struggles, pop culture and Puerto Rican identity. Braschi's Spanglish appears in the dialogues, and in her calques and neologisms found in them. These features pose distinct challenges to translators, as they embody a linguistic and cultural creativity that resists standardization. Consider these excerpts, where the dashes stand for two different speakers:

1. - Abrela tú.  
 - ¿Por qué yo? Tú tienes las keys. Yo te las entregué a ti. Además, I left mine adentro.  
 - ¿Por qué las dejaste adentro?  
 - Porque I knew you had yours.  
 - ¿Por qué dependes de mí?  
 - Just open it, and make it fast" (21)
2. - I want my orange juice. Juicy red with its pepas.

- Seeds.
- And I want fresh squeezed. I don't want chocolate. It gives me grains.
- Pimples. (26)

Here the word “grains”, functions as a calque, a false cognate of the Spanish *grano*, that in this context means “pimple”.

Here is another example:

3. [...] With what face puedo enfrentarme a las tinieblas.  
[...] Then out of the blue un verdadero grillo verde que tú conoces salió  
brincando.
- What's a grillo verde.
- Una esperanza.
- Hope?
- Un grillo verde que brinca y salta. That insect that brings good luck.
- A lady bug?
- Is it long and green?
- Oh, you mean a grasshopper.
- And you what?
- What – what?
- When they examined the grasshopper, it had my face. Era yo. Paco Pepe  
me dijo que yo era la esperanza de Fellini. I was so happy when he told me  
that dream.(97)

These examples highlight the rhythm and identity work of Braschi's use of Spanglish. The hybridity is not just for show, it is central to her poetics. Her characters move fluidly through linguistic systems, illustrating what Moreno-Fernández (2020), drawing on García and Wei (2014), and in referring to Braschi's *Yo-Yo Boing!*, describes as *translanguaging*. He uses the term to describe the dynamic process in which “multilingual speakers use their language as an integrated communication system, and perform complex social and cognitive activities through the strategic use of multiple semiotic resources in order to act, know and be” (Moreno-Fernandez 2020: 55).

#### **4. On Translating Yo-Yo Boing!**

In a preface to an interview Giannina Braschi gave to John Beasley-Murray (2023), Professor of Hispanic Studies at the University of British Columbia, Beasley-Murray states that:

Giannina Braschi's novel *Yo-Yo Boing!* resists translation both because it is already in translation – and translation cannot be translated – and because it touches on the untranslatable, on the limits of language and meaning.

Yet, *Yo-Yo Boing!* was translated. It was translated by Tess O'Dwyer, but with the translation of the second chapter “Blow-Up”, the one written in Spanglish, appearing much later. By O'Dwyer's own admission, this job was not an easy one and would have to wait “until she figured out how to translate all the code-switching bilingual dialogues, without losing all their humor and gusto” (O'Dwyer 1998).

O'Dwyer is no newcomer to Braschi's work; she is, in fact, her principal translator. A highly accomplished professional, she is candid in acknowledging that as she envisioned it, the ideal *Yo-Yo Boing!* audience was "a savvy bilingual who can enjoy the novel hot off the shelf as is" (O'Dwyer 1998). So, why was this particular endeavor different for her?

There are several reasons. One of them, offered directly by O'Dwyer relates to the challenge of translating a nonstandard language to a standard one. The other reason is a rhetorical question of my own: Why translate "Blow-Out" at all? The question stems not from the notion that it had been written in a language "that was already in translation", as Beasley-Murray (2023) argues, but because it is a manifestation of a natural state of cultural-linguistic hybridity.

Going further still, why translate a language that is, in itself, a manifestation of a political act, a form of social, cultural, linguistic, and literary transcendence, or what Braschi herself calls "breaking new grounds and forging a new language" (Braschi 2011: 163)? And just as importantly: if it is to be translated, then how can it be done in a way that preserves its diversity, even outside of its original linguistic ecosystem, that of a dynamic cultural-linguistic borderland?

### 5. Tess O'Dwyer's Translation

Tess O'Dwyer is an accomplished translator, editor, and arts consultant based in New York City, and a board member of the Academy of American Poets. She has translated all of Braschi's major works and co-edited *Poets, Philosophers, Lovers: On the Writings of Giannina Braschi* (2020) with Frederick Luis Aldama. A regular contributor to the literary magazine *World Literature Today*, O'Dwyer wrote a 2021 piece titled *Popping Up in Pop Culture and Other Unlikely Spaces: Latinx Author Giannina Braschi Crosses Over*, which partly addresses the question: why translate *Yo-Yo Boing!*?

Her translation of the Spanglish section played a key role in the novel's "crossing over" to a broader, less bilingually-savvy audience. From a publishing standpoint, this move certainly expanded the book's accessibility and marketability, partially domesticating a text that was already challenging in its multilingual, experimental form.

Another reason for translating *Yo-Yo Boing!*, as discussed in O'Dwyer's crossing over article, may lie in Braschi's inherently genre-crossing work itself. A monolingual English version could be seen as a means of making her writing more accessible to audiences engaged in other art forms and semiotic systems. In fact, her work has inspired adaptations across artistic disciplines, such as theatre, photography, comics, sculpture, music, video and even kinetic furniture design.

Returning again to the earlier question, why translate the Spanglish portion of *Yo-Yo Boing!* into English at all? Could the work's cultural-linguistic ecosystem rooted in a poetics of defiance against English-Spanish monolingual binaries, have been preserved in translation? The following examples show how O'Dwyer approached this challenge:

**Table 1:** O'Dwyer's Translation of Code-Switching and Dialogue

Braschi	O'Dwyer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Abrela tú.</li> <li>- ¿Por qué yo? Tú tienes las keys. Yo te las entregué a ti. Además, I left mine adentro.</li> <li>- ¿Por qué las dejaste adentro?</li> <li>- Porque I knew you had yours.</li> <li>- ¿Por qué dependes de mí?</li> <li>- Just open it, and make it fast. (21)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You open it.</li> <li>- Why me? You've got the keys. I gave them to you. Besides, I left mine inside.</li> <li>- Why did you leave them inside?</li> <li>- Because I knew you had yours.</li> <li>- Why do you depend on me?</li> <li>- Just open it, and make it fast. (19)</li> </ul>

In the source text, the frequent switches between languages inject rhythm, intimacy and linguistic agency. Beasley-Murray argues that this movement is lost in translation, and “left behind, like the keys” (2023).

What is also diminished is Spanglish as a translanguaging strategy, one that signals the fluid hybrid identity of Braschi's characters, and the way they make use of all their semiotic systems (Moreno-Fernández 2020).

Below are further examples of O'Dwyer's translation strategies.

**Table 2:** Translating Spanglish Poetic Imagery and Calques

Braschi	O'Dwyer
[...] With what face puedo enfrentarme a las tinieblas. (89)	[...] How can I face the twilight? (84)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>[...]Then out of the blue un verdadero grillo verde que tú conoces salió brincando.</li> <li>- What's a grillo verde.</li> <li>- Una esperanza.</li> <li>- Hope?</li> <li>- Un grillo verde que brinca y salta. That insect that brings good luck.</li> <li>- A lady bug?</li> <li>- Is it long and green?</li> <li>- Oh, you mean a grasshopper.</li> <li>- And you know what?</li> <li>- What – what?</li> <li>- When they examined the grasshopper, it had my face. Era yo. Paco Pepe me dijo que yo era la esperanza de Fellini. I was so happy when he told me that dream. (97)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Then guess who came hopping out of the blue as a <i>grillo verde</i>?</li> <li>- What's a <i>grillo verde</i>?</li> <li>- <i>Una esperanza</i>.</li> <li>- Hope?</li> <li>- A green <i>grillo</i> – that insect that brings good luck.</li> <li>- A lady bug?</li> <li>- Is it long and green?</li> <li>- Oh, you mean a grasshopper.</li> <li>- And you know what?</li> <li>- What – what?</li> <li>- When they examined the grasshopper, it had my face. It was me. Paco Pepe told me I was Fellini's hope. I was so happy when he told me that dream.(92)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Jack of all trades—the specialist diminishes the value of knowing it all, or at least, trying to grasp it all, and adds—Master of none. Un especialista, just for discerning the details, is not un sabio. El sabio puede ser un necio. Mira lo que decía Alcibiades de Sócrates, borracho, en las tabernas, bebiendo vino, con los dientes podridos. Mistaken for a beggar. How can a wise man look so base? Las apariencias engañan.</li> <li>- No engañan, my darling, confunden. (160)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Jack of all trades—the specialist diminishes the value of knowing it all, or at least, trying to grasp it all, and adds: master of none. A specialist, just for discerning the details, is not a wise man. A wise man can be a fool. Look what Alcibiades used to say of Socrates – drunk, in the taverns, with rotten teeth. Mistaken for a beggar. How can a wise man look so base? Looks are deceiving.</li> <li>- They're not deceiving, my darling, they're confusing. (155)</li> </ul>

While O'Dwyer's translation maintains the rhythm and general meaning, what often disappears is the fluid movement between languages, the translanguaging that signals Braschi's linguistic and cultural hybridity. Her language performs an identity that shifts across boundaries, in what Aldama (describes as the traversal of zones where "borders between languages do not exist" (2020: 6). This fluidity, though not entirely absent in O'Dwyer's version, is often marked instead by italicization, rendering the non-English elements more exotic, a classic foreignization move, in Venuti's (2008) terms. Sometimes, the retention of the Spanish sentence structure is also evident, reminding readers that they have stepped outside monolingual comfort zones.

In an informal exchange with the author, O'Dwyer quite frankly acknowledged that she might approach the translation differently today. At the time, she viewed rendering Spanglish into English as a gesture of literary respect, an effort to treat the hybrid code with the same dignity and seriousness typically reserved for standard language varieties. She was also careful, as I interpret it, not to over-exoticize the text or reduce its multilingualism to spectacle. Based on that exchange, I believe that today she might be more inclined to preserve more of the hybridity and linguistic resistance at the heart of Braschi's poetics, as a more recent translator, Patanè (2023), has attempted to do, taking an alternative approach that I explore in more detail in the next section.

This brings us to a broader point: the translator's voice and agency. As Munday (2008) reminds us, translators inevitably leave ideological and stylistic imprints on their texts. Their choices are shaped by personal aesthetics, beliefs, and experiences. O'Dwyer's partial domestication of Braschi's Spanglish, whether conscious or contextual, represents one such imprint. It negotiates between honoring Braschi's radical hybridity and creating accessibility for broader audiences. This tension, between Braschi's border-crossing poetics and O'Dwyer's at times standardizing approach, exemplifies the broader complexities of translating across cultural, cognitive, and linguistic borderlands.

## 6. Alessia Patanè's Translation

Alessia Patanè is a young Italian translator who has recently translated excerpts of *Braschi's Yo-Yo Boing!* into Italian. In a private interview with the author, she shared her views on translating hybrid literary works and the Spanglish content of *Yo-Yo Boing!*, in particular.

Patanè sees Braschi's use of Spanglish as a deliberate linguistic device, one that conveys meaning in and of itself. She considers it crucial to preserve the text's code-switching, but without sacrificing comprehensibility for Italian readers. While she acknowledged that translating Braschi's hybrid text was challenging, not only linguistically, but also in terms of its themes and stylistic complexity, Patanè described her approach as one of adaptation, guided by personal interpretation of the work. She emphasized the importance of respecting the original code-switching, seeing the difference or "otherness" it represents, as a creative opportunity.

Before beginning the translation Patanè considered the following premises:

- English and Spanish are not completely foreign to the Italian audience.

- Spanish shares a common root with Italian (Latin), and the two languages are similar in various ways, sharing a number of cognates.
- The role of English as a global language and the widespread dissemination of Anglophone culture (through books, movies, music, etc.) have made many English words, expressions, concepts, and icons commonly known in contemporary Italian culture.

Below are examples of Patanè's Italian translation strategies, accompanied by a brief summary of each approach.

**Table 3:** Negotiating Spanish and English Lexical Items

Braschi	Patanè	Strategies used
<p>[...] That's how you kill my idea, I won't continue working with it, if it doesn't already work. If it doesn't work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If you work with it, you can make it work.</li> <li>- Yo solo quiero saber si funciona o no funciona.</li> <li>- Sólo funciona este párrafo que you he tenido que rescribir entero.</li> </ul> <p>Esto se llama palimpsesto. (74)</p>	<p>[...] E così uccidi la mia idea, non continuerò a lavorarci, se sin da subito non funziona. Se fosse un'ottima idea funzionerebbe.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Se ci lavori, puoi farla funzionare.</li> <li>- Voglio solo saber se funziona o non funziona</li> <li>- Funziona solo questo paragrafo che ho dovuto riscrivere per intero.</li> </ul> <p>Questo si chiama palinsesto. (24)</p>	Passages in ENG or SPAN directly translated into IT. One Spanish term retained to signal the presence of code-switching.

**Table 4:** Maintaining Multilingual Texture in Dialogue

Braschi	Patanè	Strategy used
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Yo no sé por qué, mis dos primas, Maruja, the Banker and Kia, the Happy Widow, me llamaron a un meeting. Por qué un meeting con estas dos burócratas. They, on one side of the conference table armed with sharpened pencils and legal pads, and I, on the other side, empty handed, y nerviosa.</li> <li>- She spent it all on you.</li> <li>- Fue injusta.</li> <li>- Nos hizo sufrir a las dos.</li> <li>- The tables have turned. (85-86)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Non so perché, ma le mie dos cousins, Maruja, la Banchiera, e Kia, La Vedova Feliz, mi invitaron ad un meeting. Perché mai un meeting con queste due burócratas. Da una parte del table loro, armate di matite appuntite e block-notes, e dall'altra io, a mani vuote y nerviosa.</li> <li>- Ha pensado sola a te.</li> <li>- E' stata ingiusta.</li> <li>- Ci ha fatto sufrir.</li> <li>- Le cose have changed. (30)</li> </ul>	Mixing of ENG & SPAN words in the IT translation.

**Table 5:** Foreign Language Retention and Multilingual Layering

Braschi	Patanè	Strategies used
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pum-Pum, Paco, vamos a bailar.</li> <li>- Después, Xena ahora esto fumándome este cigarro.</li> <li>- Bingar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch.</li> <li>- I feel Croatian, surrounded by all these languages.(216)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pum-Pum, Paco vamos a bailar.</li> <li>- Dopo Xena, adesso mi sto fumando questo sigaro.</li> <li>- Bin gar Keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch.</li> <li>- Mi sento croato, circondato da tutte queste lingue. (59)</li> </ul>	<p>Spanish terms left untranslated retaining rythym of the expression. Expressions in German retained without translation into IT.</p>
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The three tables above illustrate how Patanè approaches the challenges of translating Braschi's hybrid language into Italian. Her strategies include translating Spanish and English segments directly, while also choosing, at times, to retain specific lexical items that preserve tone or rythym. In more complex passages, she maintains the multilingual layering found in the original, allowing the coexistence of languages to remain intact. Interestingly, Italian is not used simply as a neutral substitute but becomes part of the hybrid fabric itself, adding a new layer to the mix. This contrasts with the earlier English translation by O'Dwyer, whose choices reflect a different set of priorities and contextual considerations when approaching a hybrid text of this kind. Together their work highlights the freedom translators have in making interpretive choices, reminding us that translation is not a fixed act but an ongoing process of co-creation. This is particularly true in the case of hybrid, multilingual literature, where multiple versions can co-exist, each offering a different entry point into the work's complexity.

## 7. Alternative strategies for Translating Hybrid Texts

Building on the theoretical frameworks outlined above, this section explores alternative strategies for translating hybrid texts such as *Yo-Yo Boing!*, with a focus on preserving their linguistic friction, cultural layering, and resistance to standardization. In particular, I draw on Remy Attig's (2019) work on radical Spanglish, which he describes as a hybrid language variety that emerges from fluid boundary-crossing and cultural in-betweenness. Attig builds on Lourdes Torres' notion of radical bilingualism (2007) and draws from postcolonial thinkers such as Bhabha and García Canclini to argue that radical Spanglish manifests the kind of hybridity these theorists have described: a dynamic, in-between space where identity, language, and culture are constantly being renegotiated. As Attig explains:

Any given culture is itself in a constant state of flux and is defined not by a group conforming to a single pure monolith, but by the interactions that individuals and communities have with Others. Through the stress and discomfort of these interactions the hybrid (or "third space"), emerges. (Attig 2019: 23)

Writing in Spanglish is also often a deliberate act of resistance to the hegemonizing pressures of literary publishing in the U.S. and Spanish-speaking

worlds. As such, translating these works, especially radical ones, can itself become a political act, one that must struggle with the ethical tension between accessibility and preservation.

Attig primarily proposes two translation strategies for working with radically bilingual or hybrid texts: non-translation and intralingual translation. The first refers to the decision to leave words or phrases from the source language untranslated in the target text. These may include terms or concepts that lack direct equivalents or expressions that carry unique semiotic or affective weight. Drawing on Torres (2007), Attig identifies several practices for non-translation, including italics to mark Spanish as foreign, using glosses to contextualize terms, and the use of calques that preserve both syntactic structure and cultural meaning.

Jakobson (1959/2000) originally defined intralingual translation as “rewriting, or interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language”. In the context of Spanglish, Attig (2019) proposes a light intralingual approach that keeps certain words in their original form. This is to be applied especially when the word meaning is clear from context, or when words share Latin roots with English. Unlike non-translation, this strategy is not necessarily used because of untranslatability, but rather for stylistic reasons, to echo the linguistic texture and hybridity of the source text.

Attig also emphasizes that translators should consider the familiarity of the target audience with Spanish, particularly in the U.S. context, where Spanish is widely encountered. Based on this, he proposes expanding the intralingual lexicon by incorporating familiar Spanish words, especially from semantic fields such as food, family, emotions, and everyday life. This expanded lexicon encourages readers to engage more actively with the text, making comprehension possible without translation, preserving its cultural hybridity.

The example below from Attig's intralingual translation of a Spanglish passage from *Killer Cronicas: Bilingual Memories* by Chávez-Silverman illustrates this approach in practice (Attig 2019: 30). The Spanglish terms in the original text, and how they were negotiated by Attig, are in bold.

**Table 6:** Excerpts of Attig's intralingual translation of Chávez-Silverman

Source Text	Translation
<b>3 julio 2001</b> Buenos Aires Para Ana María Shua Overcome with happiness <b>mientras atravieso</b> the intersection of Agüero & Charcas, <b>absolutamente sobrecargada de júbilo</b> . Joy in myself <b>por haberme atrevido a solicitar la beca NEH y chingao, de ganármela y poder así be here, walking en Buenos Aires a un mes de mi despedida. De mi despedida también de mí misma y no quiero: I am in denial. Creo que no podré survive esta (desped)ida... se me arriman a la boca</b> all the dumb things you say when	<b>3 julio 2001</b> Buenos Aires Para Ana María Shua Overcome with happiness while I <b>cross la intersección de</b> Agüero y Charcas, <b>absolutamente overwhelmed de joy. Joy en mí por</b> having dared to <b>solicitar</b> the NEH grant <b>y fuck, to get it y to be here, walking en Buenos Aires <b>aun mes</b> from mi bon voyage. From mi bon voyage <b>de</b> myself too <b>y I don't want it: Estoy en de nilo.</b> I don't think I will be able to <b>sobrevivir</b> this (bon voy) either... <b>Mi boca</b> is filling up <b>de todas</b> las dumb things you say when you're going to say</b>

you're going to say goodbye to someone, or (en mi caso) a un lugar: no quiero dejarte, I'll never be the same, you know, todo eso... (Chávez-Silverman 2004: 127-129)	adiós to someone, o (en mi situación) a un place: no quiero leave you, I'll never be the same, you know, todo eso... (Attig 2019: 30)
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As is visible in the parts highlighted in bold above, Attig's strategy privileges cultural specificity over monolingual clarity. His aim is to preserve the cultural and stylistic complexity of Spanglish, while expanding access for new readers, without erasing the source text's identity. In doing so, he presents creative possibilities for hybrid translation.

These alternative approaches, grounded in bilingual aesthetics and cultural politics, serve as a foundation for the short experimental translations I propose in Section 8. Rather than imposing a single authoritative version, they invite multiple, coexisting translations that preserve the layered texture of hybrid texts like *Yo-Yo Boing!*

## 8. Experimenting with resistant translation

The excerpts I selected for the brief experimental translations that follow were chosen less through a systematic method than through a sense of resonance. Each passage stood out for its linguistic play, cultural layering, or ideological charge. One is introspective and idiomatic, another symbolic and dialogic, and the third explicitly political and metalinguistic. Each offered a distinct opportunity to experiment with resistant translation strategies, drawing on non-translation, paraphrase, selective code-switching, and the use of calques, as a way of preserving linguistic friction and cultural specificity.

In shaping these translations, which I have chosen to refer to as “resistant translations”, I drew on the principles of *radical bilingualism* (Torres 2007; Attig 2019), which advocate for maintaining the hybrid texture of translingual texts. I was also influenced by Patanè's (2023) Italian translations of *Yo-Yo Boing!*, which show how Spanglish's fluid code-switching can be honored through the creative retention and use of multilingual structures by the translator as a form of transcreation (Gaballo 2012). My own renderings attempt to maintain that spirit, preserving the layered voices of the original resisting assimilation into a monolingual norm.

Below are three examples comparing the original text, O'Dwyer's English translation, and my intralingual translation:

**Table 7:** Resistant translation experiments

Braschi BOING!	YO-YO	O'Dwyer English Translation	De La Cruz's Translation	Strategies used

<p>[...] With what face puedo enfrentarme a las tinieblas. (89)</p>	<p>[...] How can I face the twilight? (84)</p>	<p>With what face* can I enfrentarme with the dark? What have I done tonight to deserve it?</p>	<p>Retention of the calque and hybrid phrase structure. Addition of a question to help clarify meaning.</p>
<p>[...] Then out of the blue un verdadero grillo verde que tú conoces salió brincando.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What's a grillo verde.</li> <li>- Una esperanza.</li> <li>- Hope?</li> <li>- Un grillo verde que brinca y salta. That insect that brings good luck.</li> <li>- A lady bug?</li> <li>- Is it long and green?</li> <li>- Oh, you mean a grasshopper.</li> <li>- [...] When they examined the grasshopper, it had my face. It was me. Paco Pepe told me I was Fellini's hope.</li> </ul> <p>[...] (92)</p>	<p>Then guess who came hopping out of the blue as a <i>grillo verde</i>?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What's a <i>grillo verde</i>?</li> <li>- Una esperanza.</li> <li>- Hope?</li> <li>- A <i>green grillo</i> – that insect that brings good luck.</li> <li>- A lady bug?</li> <li>- Is it long and green?</li> <li>- Oh, you mean a grasshopper.</li> <li>- [...] When they examined the grasshopper, it had my face. It was me. Paco Pepe told me I was Fellini's hope.</li> </ul> <p>[...] (92)</p>	<p>[...] Then out of the blue <b>un</b> real live grillo verde that you know, came out brincando.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What's a grillo verde?</li> <li>- Una esperanza.</li> <li>- Hope?</li> <li>- A grillo verde that hops y salta. That insect that brings good luck.</li> <li>- A lady bug?</li> <li>- Is it long and green?</li> <li>- Oh, you mean a grasshopper.</li> <li>- [...] When they examined the grillo verde, the grasshopper, it had my face. Era yo. Paco Pepe told me I was la esperanza de Fellini.</li> </ul>	<p>Non-translation, paraphrase, avoidance of Italics and quotation marks, maintainance of multilingual dialogue.</p>
<p>- If I respected languages like you do, I wouldn't write at all. El muro de Berlín fue derribado. Why can't I do the same. Desde la torre de Babel, las lenguas han sido siempre una forma de divorciarnos del resto de la humanidad.</p>	<p>- If I respected languages like you do, I wouldn't write at all. The Berlin Wall came down. Why can't I do the same? Since the Tower of Babel, languages have always divorced us from the rest of humanity.</p> <p>[...]</p>	<p>- If I respected languages like you do, I wouldn't write at all. El wall de Berlín was torn down. Why can't I do the same? Since la torre de Babel, languages have always been a way to divorciarnos from la humanidad.</p> <p>[...]</p>	<p>Use of basic Spanish vocabulary, untranslated cognates, code- switching for cultural tone.</p>

<p>[...]</p> <p>Saludo al nuevo siglo, el siglo del nuevo lenguaje de América, y le digo adiós a la retórica separatista y a los atavismos. (163)</p>	<p>I welcome the new century, the century of the new American language, and wave farewell to all the separatist rhetoric and atavisms. (157)</p>	<p>I greet the nuevo siglo, the century of the new lenguaje de América, and I say adiós to la retórica separatista y a los atavismos.</p>	
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In these brief experiments, I followed Attig's broader approach of translating as little as possible in order to maintain the hybrid texture of the original. The strategies I used include avoiding italics or quotation marks that would frame Spanish as "foreign", retaining original calques, and using paraphrase or non-translation<sup>3</sup> where meaning could be inferred from context. These choices were intended to preserve the friction, rythym, and layered cultural references of Braschi's code-switching. Rather than smoothing these shifts into idiomatic English, I aimed to keep the linguistic tension and cultural clashing alive, in order to maintain the creative resistance embedded in Braschi's Spanglish. In this way, the original is allowed to speak on its own terms and challenge the reader to meet it halfway.

These examples illustrate how different translation choices can influence the preservation, or softening, of Braschi's hybrid poetics. Tess O'Dwyer's English version, whose clarity and elegance have brought *Yo-Yo Boing!* to new audiences, often leans toward a more fluent accessible register. My versions, by contrast, experiment with foregrounding linguistic tension and cultural specificity. They allow Spanglish to remain visible and undomesticated on the page. In doing so, I draw from Patanè's selective retention strategies and approach translation as a space for transcreation. The translator's role, in this view, is not to resolve hybridity but to carry it across linguistic and cultural borderlands.

Rather than offering definitive or ideal versions, these brief resistant translation experiments aim to explore further what a resistant approach might look like by maintaining the layered, multilingual and multicultural aesthetic of *Yo-Yo Boing!*

## 9. Conclusions

In an increasingly interconnected world, the figure of the monolingual reader may be less the norm and more the exception. As readers navigate cultural-linguistic borderlands, translation becomes not only a tool of access but also a space of negotiation, where hybridity, identity, and cultural specificity come into play. These borderlands are the hybrid linguistic-cultural ecosystems found in the major cities and suburban peripheries where languages and identities intersect, clash, mix, and co-evolve.

<sup>3</sup> Here, I use the term *non-translation* in its most basic sense: retaining original words when their meaning can be inferred from context. While some scholars, like Attig, have explored how this might overlap with forms of intralingual translation, I do not intend to conflate the two. My use is descriptive, not a claim to creative radicality in every instance.

Resistant translation approaches that reflect and preserve this hybridity can create space for those layered realities to be expressed on the page. These strategies push back against homogenizing pressures of standardization and assimilation by keeping cultural-linguistic complexity visible, even when it introduces friction or creates discomfort.

Translation is never neutral. As Martin Ruano and Vidal Claramonte (2004) remind us, any translation strategy implies risks and responsibilities. Yet, when approached with care and creativity, resistant translation approaches can serve as a means of honoring the politics, poetics, and pluralities embedded in multilingual writing. It becomes not just a transfer of words, but a way of carrying across cultural distinctions, identities, and voices, without obscuring them in the process.

These questions take on a particular urgency in the case of Giannina Braschi, whose work continues to challenge linguistic and cultural boundaries. While this article has focused on *Yo-Yo Boing!* as a key example of hybrid poetics and resistant translation, her more recent work, written entirely in English, continues to explore complex intersections of politics, languages, cultures and identities. In future work, I aim to examine how Braschi continues to draw on intertextual, intercultural and interdiscursive strategies to craft new forms of critique and imaginative intervention.

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