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Between English and Multilingualism: The Rhetoric of Revolutions in Conrad's *Nostromo*

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Abstract

The aim of the present article is to analyse how the English language was adjusted and mixed with other languages so as to represent the multilingual reality of a Spanish-speaking country in Conrad's *Nostromo* (1904) and, at the same time, lay bare the «discrepancies between [...] stated principles and actual deeds» (Berthoud and Kalnins 2007a: xvi) without ever mentioning them explicitly. The novel is set at the end of the 19th century in Costaguana, a fictitious South American country with a long history of revolutions and bloody dictatorships. The third-person narrator tells the story in such a way so as to expose the futility of these rebellions that never really change the status quo, and the bombastic lack of substance of the discourses which promote and justify them. One of the narrative and linguistic devices used to achieve this goal is the recourse to multilingualism: *Nostromo* – written in English – contains a large number of phrases and expressions totally or partially in other languages such as Spanish, Italian, German, and French. Throughout the novel it is possible to find a vast array of instances in which the representation of this multilingual reality is fashioned in such a way so as to draw attention to the above-mentioned «discrepancies between [...] stated principles and actual deeds». Thus, the narrator exploits the characters' multilingual discourses in a Bakhtinian way (Bakhtin 1981) to silently denounce their hypocrisy and futility.

Key Words – multilingualism; translation; Conrad; *Nostromo*

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1. Introduction

Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo* (1904) is an exceptionally multilingual novel[1]. It is set at the end of the 19th century in the Republic of Costaguana, a fictitious Latin American country with a long history of *pronunciamientos* ('coups d'état'), rebellions, revolutions, and bloody dictatorships[2], and displays endless instances of words, phrases and entire sentences in languages other than English. Most of these occurrences are in Spanish (the official language of Costaguana), but there are also several examples in Italian, German, French, Latin, and Quechua. The narrator tells the story by adopting many different points of view and by reproducing contrasting discourses[3] (most of which – if not all – pervaded by a latent hypocrisy and a helpless futility). Then, as we shall see, he silently exposes their subtle insincerity and duplicity by means of juxtaposing them with the ensuing facts (which normally contradict the grandiloquent words).

The objective of this paper is to analyse the way the narrator adjusts the English language and handles the multilingual instances in the novel so as to draw the reader's attention to the immense gap between the hollow rhetoric of the characters' discourses and their actions. In order to do this, firstly we shall outline a brief introduction to the multilingual structure of *Nostromo*, and then we will proceed with a concise analysis of the instances of non-English phrases and expressions, which will be subdivided into four categories: use of italics, direct speech, onomastics and titles, and third-person narration.

The plot of the novel revolves around the San Tomé silver mine (in the Occidental Province, near Sulaco), whose concession-holder is Charles Gould – a third-generation English immigrant to Costaguana. After a period of relative political and social stability, another revolution breaks out. The insurgents' first objective is to take control of the mine – the most valuable asset in the country. In order to prevent them from seizing a cargo of silver, Nostromo – an Italian mariner who is settled in Costaguana – and Decoud – a *Costaguanero* intellectual who lived most of his life in France – attempt to smuggle it out of Sulaco on a lighter. Before reaching its destination, the small boat collides with a steamer transporting the insurgent troops and, severely damaged but not detected, barely makes it to the Great Isabel (an island not far from Sulaco), where the two men manage to hide the treasure. However, after Decoud's death, Nostromo tells his superiors that the silver had sunk as a consequence of the accident and decides to keep it for himself. In order to prevent the mine from being plundered, Charles Gould and the leaders of the Blanco Party (the ruling faction before the military coup) build an army to fight for the secession from Costaguana. Eventually – supported by the United States – and with the help of a local outlaw (Hernández), they manage to obtain their independence: the Occidental Province becomes the Occidental Republic.

[1] For a general introduction to multilingualism in Modernist fiction, see Taylor-Batty (2013).

[2] According to Pauly (2007: xiv), Costaguana is «an imaginary South American country rendered with immense immediacy and verisimilitude». Taddei (2007: 150) argues that «in *Nostromo* leggiamo la puntigliosa costruzione della realtà politica di un paese immaginario: in tutte le sue sfumature, con completezza di informazioni e congruità di nessi».

[3] In the Foucauldian sense (Foucault 1972).

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2. The heteroglot world of Sulaco

Nostromo is a remarkably dialogical novel, and it portrays a heteroglot world where many different languages and discourses meet and intertwine, corroborating but also contradicting each other[4]. In turn, the narrator adopts the imperialist discourse in all its different facets and the rhetoric on which it is based, the discourse of the liberal oligarchy of Costaguana and that of its conservative counterpart, the discourse of those who believe in the cause of freedom and emancipation, but also of those who do not believe in anything anymore, etc. All these voices make up the text, which is the place where they clash and merge, reciprocally engulfing each other. However, in Conrad's fiction there is often a considerable difference between the things people say and those they actually do. In this regard, Berthoud and Kalnins (2007a: xvi) argue that «[i]t is essential to Conrad's particular kind of realism, then, that the reader distance himself and is alert to the discrepancies between the outer and inner truths and between stated principles and actual deeds». Additionally, it should be taken into account that, as Pauly (2007: xxi) explains, the Polish writer has «a preoccupation with language as a political tool and its perversion for ideological ends»: language can be distorted and used as a means of tergiversation in order to justify human deeds, whatever their nature may be. Conrad deplores this type of manipulation and aims at exposing the mechanisms on which it is founded. Thus, for example, he juxtaposes the rhetoric glorifying the alleged benefits for the nation which supposedly might result from the exploitation of the mine and the construction of the railway – stated principles – and the fact that only the foreign and local elites will really enjoy those benefits – actual deeds. In this regard, it is also important to emphasize that the subaltern discourses remain unspoken: an alert reader will not fail to notice that some voices are missing in this complex polyphony. The main characters are primarily from Europe and the United States, and not from Latin America (where the novel is set). Nostromo, Giorgio Viola and his family are from Italy; Emily Gould, Dr Monygham, Sir John and Joseph Mitchell are English; Charles Gould, although born in Costaguana, comes from an English family and has lived and studied in England for about ten years; Holroyd is from the USA. The few characters from Costaguana who have a relatively significant role belong to the local oligarchy and have strong ties with the foreigners – whom they help in the colonial enterprise. For instance, José Avellanos is a former ambassador to several European courts, and Martin Decoud lived in Paris for many years. They all represent different interests – but only those of the rich and powerful – which, in the end, seem to converge into one common plan: the independence of the Occidental Province. On the contrary, those who belong to the subaltern classes, such as the *mozos de campo* 'farm labourers', the miners who have to extract the silver from the mountain, etc., are not given the chance to let their voices be heard.

Nostromo is narrated in the third person. According to Ian Watt (1988: 47), it is told by an «impersonal, but often authoritative and apparently omniscient third-person narrator who knew Sulaco well». However, although this narrator seems to be quite familiar not only with the capital of the Occidental Province, but with the whole country in general, he is almost certainly a foreigner[5]. He tells the story using an endless series of flash-

[4] In the Bakhtinian sense (Bakhtin 1981).

[5] At the beginning of Chapter VIII (Part First – The Silver of the Mine) the narrator states that «[t]hose of us whom business or curiosity took to Sulaco in these years before the first advent of the railway can

forwards and flashbacks, intermittently changing the point of view and the attitude towards the subject of the narration. This way, according to Curreli (1996: xix), the reader gets the impression that every effort proves to be futile in the end, because law and order will never be achieved: *pronuciamientos* and revolutions will go on and on forever, for the sole benefit of the few powerful minorities which control the country[6].

Using Paul Simpson's framework (1993: 75)[7], it is possible to identify six different typologies of narratorial point of view in the novel: B(N) positive, negative and neutral, and B(R) positive, negative and neutral. However, despite this apparent diversity, they all express a Eurocentric mentality. Even though different facets of this mindset are represented, the basic episteme underlying them all is always the same Western one. Furthermore, the point of view of the natives is seldom represented and when this happens, it is always that of the local oligarchy, which shares the same episteme of the foreigners. On the other hand, the *Weltanschauung* of the subaltern natives, which is very different from the Western one, is hardly ever considered. In this sense, the narrator might seem to adopt an imperialist discourse. Maybe for this reason, over the years Conrad has been accused of being a racist and of supporting this ideology in his own way[8]. However, it should not be forgotten that the author does not have the obligation to share the narrator's beliefs and convictions. Moreover – as previously pointed out – words and facts do not always go hand in hand in Conrad. Indeed, the narrator constructs the text in such a way so as to draw the reader's attention to the inconsistencies in both his and the character's discourses, thus subtly exposing the gap between «stated principles and actual deeds» (Berthoud and Kalnins 2007a: xvi). It could almost be said that the narrator leaves hidden clues throughout the text because – in the end – he wants to be unmasked. In this regard, it is interesting to see, for example, how the narrator introduces the character of Joseph Mitchel at the beginning of the novel. This is done in such a manner so as to suggest from the very start that in *Nostromo* the reader will encounter many different points of view:

> (1) "Our excellent Señor Mitchell" for the business and official world of Sulaco; "Fussy Joe" for the commanders of the Company's ships, Captain Joseph Mitchell prided himself on his profound knowledge of men and things in the country – *cosas de Costaguana*. (Conrad 2007a: 10)

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remember the steadying effect of the San Tomé mine upon the life of that remote province» (Conrad 2007a: 76).

[6] Pauly (2007: xxiv) argues that «Conrad's pessimism, or his 'political agnosticism', is also expressed by the novel's narrative structure. Its disrupted chronology questions history's course and meaning».

[7] Besides the narrator's point of view, the framework devised by Simpson (1993) also considers her/his attitude towards the subject of the story. Simpson identifies two basic types of narrator: homodiegetic (category A) and heterodiegetic (category B). Category B is further subdivided into narratorial mode – B(N), disembodied narrator – and reflector mode – B(R), the narrator sees and feels only what the characters can see and feel. These more traditional types are then combined with the modal categories which express the narrator's and/or the characters' attitudes. In this regard, Simpson identifies three shadings marked by three different patterns of modality: positive (deontic and boulomaic modality), negative (epistemic and perception modality) and neutral (absence of modality systems). Thus, he identifies nine different types of narrator: A positive, A negative and A neutral; B(N) positive, B(N) negative and B(N) neutral; B(R) positive, B(R) negative and B(R) neutral.

[8] See, for example, the famous essay *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's* Heart of Darkness by Chinua Achebe, where the Nigerian writer argues that Conrad is a racist and describes Africa as «the antithesis of Europe and therefore civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality» (Achebe 1988: 252).

The Captain, an Englishman, is 'Señor Mitchell' for the native businessmen and politicians who live in Sulaco and speak Spanish; 'Captain Joseph Mitchell' for his English subordinates; 'Fussy Joe' for the commanders of the Company's ships.

The novel's linguistic diversity, crucial in calling the reader's attention to the multiplicity of points of view in the text, is used for the following three purposes:

I. To name referents which are typical of the local culture and do not have an adequate equivalent in English.

II. To give an idiosyncratic characterization to the characters' speech. Although their dialogues and thoughts are rendered mainly in English, many of them are not Anglophones and would have used their mother tongues in a real setting. In this sense, it could be said that many of the English utterances which appear in the text are translations from hypothetical originals in Spanish and Italian[9]. For example, one may suppose that the dialogues between Giorgio and Teresa Viola, both from Italy, were originally in Italian. Thus the interchanges between these two characters which appear in English in the novel should be, in actual fact, translations. However, several times Conrad chooses to retain at least some parts in the original language, thus granting a clear-cut linguistic and cultural idiosyncrasy to the characters' speech. In this regard, as Knauth (2011: 3) points out, «[t]here is an intrinsic affinity between translation and multilingual literature, in so far as multilingual literature is ruled by explicit or implicit translational processes, while translation implies the very principle of literary multilingualism».

III. When the third-person narrator adopts the characters' discourses in a Bakhtinian way (Bakhtin 1981), foreign lexemes can be central to the task of directing the reader's attention to the gap between «stated principles and actual deeds».

3. Multilingualism and the use of italics

A great number of non-English words and expressions are written in italics. However, the use of this typeface is not totally consistent throughout the novel. Normally, italic characters are not used for toponyms (e.g. «Casa Gould», «Casa Viola», «Alameda», «Consulado», etc.), and titles (e.g. «Excelentísimo», «Capataz de Cargadores», «Señor Administrador», etc.) Nonetheless, there are some exceptions (e.g. «*generalísimo*», «*Monsieur l'administrateur*», etc.). 'Señor' is in italics when it is not followed by the name it refers to («Pardon me, *señor*», but «Señor Fuentes»). All the other foreign lexemes are usually in italics (e.g. «*léperos*», «*vecchio*», etc.), but even in this case there are exceptions (e.g. «fiesta», «patio», etc.) The reasons behind this stylistic choice are not entirely clear. According to Berthoud and Kalnins (2007b: xxvii), the editors of the Oxford World's Classics edition, «[a]lthough it is not possible to establish conclusively the reasoning behind his [*Conrad's*] inconsistent usage, it seems probable that he considered some words would be familiar to his English readers (e.g. «burro», «poncho») and others, like «Capataz de Cargadores», so recurrent that repeated italicization would be redundant». In this regard, however, it must be said that different editors of the novel

[9] In translingual and/or multilingual novels, the use of elements from languages and/or varieties which are different from the main language of the text is often combined with the *translation* technique (Gilmour and Steinitz 2018; Hiddleston and Ouyang 2021; Jones et al. 2021).

have applied conflicting criteria. For example, the instances in Tab. 1 («mozo», «burro» and «padrona») are in italics in the Penguin Classics edition (Conrad 2007a), but not in the Oxford World's Classics one (Conrad 2007b):

Penguin Classics Edition	**Oxford World's Classics Edition**
good-for-nothing *mozo* (2007a: 6)	good-for-nothing mozo (2007b: 6)
the stolen *burro* (2007a: 6)	the stolen burro (2007b: 6)
"Leave my soul alone, *padrona*, and I […]" (2007a: 202)	"Leave my soul alone, Padrona, and I […]" (2007b: 185)

Tab. 1

4. English, multilingualism, and translation in direct speech

The use of foreign words acquires different significances according to the context, the speaker, and the type of lexeme. A considerable number of instances in Spanish indicate referents which are typical of the Hispano-American culture and do not have an equivalent in English. Such occurrences appear in the direct speech of all the characters (*Costaguaneros*, Italians, and Anglophones all alike):

(2) "Giving a *tertulia*?" he said, with a detached air. (Conrad 2007a: 400)

In this case, the Anglophone Dr Monygham is addressing Mrs Gould (another Anglophone). Thus, it can reasonably be supposed that this conversation is not a translation from Spanish, but actually took place in English. In spite of this, Dr Monygham uses the Spanish word *tertulia*, which is defined by the Diccionario de la Real Academia Española (DRAE) as a «[r]eunión de personas que se juntan habitualmente para conversar sobre algún tema». An English equivalent (for example, 'social gathering') would not have described this referent with the same accuracy[10].

On other occasions, non-English words or entire utterances are used to grant a certain degree of idiosyncrasy to the translation into English of the utterances of characters whose original words were spoken in another language because of the context – in the case of Anglophones – or because their mother tongue is not English, but Spanish, Italian, etc. Sulaco is indeed a linguistic Babel, where the Anglophones speak English among themselves, but switch to Spanish when they have to interact with the natives, or as a lingua franca with foreigners who do not speak English. The *Costaguaneros*, instead, speak Spanish in almost every context (most of them seem not to know any other language). Thus, for example, when Captain Mitchell (Anglophone) speaks with a visitor from England, he addresses him using the title «sir»:

(3) "It was history – history, sir! And that fellow of mine, Nostromo, you know, was right in it. Absolutely making history, sir." (Conrad 2007a: 105)

As this conversation was between two Anglophones, it is not a translation from another language. Conversely, when Basilio – the *Costaguanero* Spanish-speaking head servant

[10] As a matter of fact, the word *tertulia* is included in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (SOED): «[i]n Spain, an evening party, a soirée». However, it is not a very common word in English.

at Casa Gould – addresses Decoud (another Spanish-speaking character), he uses the Spanish title 'señor' (and the feminine «señorita» when he mentions Antonia Avellanos):

(4) "No, *señor*," said behind Mrs. Gould the soft voice of Basilio, the head servant of the Casa. "I don't think the *señorita* could have left it in this house at all." (Conrad 2007a: 166-167)

The two Spanish titles signal to the reader that this conversation is a translation from Spanish, the mother tongue of both characters involved in this interchange (who obviously did not speak English with each other).

Sometimes, this type of characterization is acted out by the use of interjections. For example, Sotillo (a revolutionary leader) utters the interjection *caramba* ('good heavens!') while interrogating Captain Mitchell:

(5) "[…] You have no rights and no property! *Caramba*! The very breath in your body belongs to me […]." (Conrad 2007a: 264)

In other circumstances, it is possible to find isolated foreign nouns, adjectives, or verbs in otherwise English sentences. For example, «querido» and «compadre» in Spanish, and «padrone» in Italian in instances (6), (7), and (8):

(6) "*Querido*," she murmured caressingly, "why do you pretend not to see me when I pass?" (Conrad 2007a: 103)
(7) "You are a just man", urged the emissary of Hernández. "Look at those people who made my *compadre* a general and have turned us all into soldiers." (Conrad 2007a: 283-284)
(8) "What? Your son? But you are right, *padrone*. If he had been like me he would have been a man." (Conrad 2007a: 101)

(6) and (7) were originally spoken in Spanish, while (8) was spoken in Italian. In the novel, they appear translated into English. However, some elements from the original conversations are retained so as to preserve a certain degree of idiosyncrasy.

There are also occurrences of Spanish diminutives which serve to express love and affection. For example, «rubiacita», uttered by Linda Viola (Giorgio's daughter) while talking about her younger sister:

(9) "People notice her fair hair as she goes along with us. They call out after her, 'Look at the *Rubia*! Look at the *Rubiacita*!' They call out in the streets […]" (Conrad 2007a: 24)

In several cases, entire utterances or even dialogues are rendered in languages other than English:

(10) "*A la casa*, Ignacio", she cried at the motionless broad back of the coachman, who gathered the reins without haste, mumbling to himself under his breath, "*Sí la casa. Sí, sí niña.*" (Conrad 2007a: 131)

In this brief exchange, Mrs Gould – an Anglophone who speaks Spanish as a second language – instructs her Spanish-speaking coachman in his native language.

In (11), Nostromo speaks Italian (his native tongue):

> (11) "*È vero!*" exclaimed the Capataz, surprised into the use of his native tongue by so much perspicacity. (Conrad 2007a: 235)

Normally, he speaks Spanish with non-Italian characters. However, in this case, he unconsciously addresses the Spanish-speaking Decoud in Italian. The use of his mother tongue betrays his state of utter astonishment.

> (12) "No; it's no go. *Pas moyen, mon garçon. C'est dommage, tout de même. Ah! zut! Je ne vole pas mon monde. Je ne suis pas ministre – moi! Vous pouvez emporter votre petit sac.*" (Conrad 2007a: 45)

The words in (12) are pronounced by a French woman (who, evidently, had not learned Spanish very well) when she addresses a Spanish-speaking friend of Charles Gould's father. The opening words («No; it's no go») could be an English rendering of her poor Spanish (maybe, 'No; no ir'). She attempts to speak the language of the natives, but, overcome by her lack of proficiency, promptly switches to her mother tongue. The part in French is not translated into English because it was – most probably – incomprehensible to the addressee.

Finally, there are some utterances in which two foreign languages intermix with each other. This gives an idea of how multilingual Sulaco really is. The characters are used to speaking different languages according to the context, and sometimes they get confused as, for example, in instance (13), in which Nostromo mixes Italian and Spanish while talking to Giorgio Viola:

> (13) "*Hola! Vecchio! O, Vecchio!* Is it all well with you in there?" (Conrad 2007a: 19)

We expect Nostromo to speak Italian with his fellow countryman Giorgio. However, in the first part of the exchange, alongside the Italian *vecchio*, which gives it a flavour of Italianness, there is also the Spanish greeting *hola*. At the end of the novel, Nostromo tells Giorgio something similar, but reverses the order of the two languages:

> (14) "*Olà! viejo* [sic]*!* Are you there?" (Conrad 2007a: 369)

In this case, the Italian interjection *olà* comes first, while *vecchio* becomes the Spanish *viejo*.

None of these examples comes with a translation or an explanation of the foreign terms. Nonetheless, the context usually provides the reader with some hints to understand their meaning.

5. Onomastics and titles

The names and titles used to refer to the characters change according to the context, the speaker (in direct speech), and the point of view adopted by the third-person narrator. Normally, they are not written in italics. This *modus operandi* can be appreciated, for

example, when the narrator introduces the character of Joseph Mitchel at the beginning of the novel[11]. Tab. 2 shows the variants used to refer to some of the main characters:

Character	Variants
Charles Gould	Don Carlos/Don Carlos Gould, Mr. Gould, Señor Administrador, Señor Administrator, Carlos, Charley, Rey de Sulaco, King of Sulaco, The Inglés/The Inglés of Sulaco, *Monsieur l'administrateur*
Emily Gould	Señora Emilia Gould, Doña Emilia, The English Señora, Mrs. Gould, Never-tired Señora
Nostromo	Nostromo, Capataz de Cargadores/Capataz, Gian' Battista, Battistino, Juan
Vincente Ribiera	Señor Ribiera, The Excelentísimo Señor don Vincente Ribera, The Excelentísimo

Tab. 2

For example, Charles Gould is:

- Charles (Gould) for his close Anglophone friends.
- Charley for his Anglophone wife.
- Mr. Gould for all the other Anglophones.
- Carlos for his close Spanish-speaking friends.
- Don Carlos (Gould) for all the other Spanish-speaking characters (especially those of the upper middle class).
- Señor Administrador for the servants and the lower classes in general (especially in the Sulaco area).
- Rey de Sulaco for the Spanish-speaking local oligarchy when he is not present.
- King of Sulaco (literal translation of the expression used by the natives) for the foreign businessmen.
- The Inglés/The Inglés of Sulaco for the *Costaguaneros* in general.
- *Monsieur l'administrateur*[12] for some French businessmen.

6. English, multilingualism, and translation in the third-person narration

Firstly, just like in direct speech, Spanish lexemes are often used in the third-person narration to represent typical elements of the Hispano-American culture which have no adequate equivalent in English:

(13) A peaceable *cholo* wearing these colours. (Conrad 2007a: 78)

In this case, *cholo* is used to refer to an individual of mixed European and indigenous origin in general or, alternatively, to a Native American (descendant of the Pre-Columbian population) who had given up her/his culture and adopted European ways[13].

[11] See instance (1) in Section 2.

[12] Unlike the other names and titles, «Monsieur l'administrateur» is one of the few instances in italics.

[13] María Moliner's dictionary (2008) defines *cholo* as: «(1) Indio o mestizo adaptado al modo de vida occidental; (2) Mestizo de blanco e india». The DRAE definitions are quite similar: «(1) Mestizo de sangre europea e indígena; (2) Dicho de un indio: que adopta los usos occidentales». The word also appears in the

Secondly, one could argue that the third-person narrator uses non-English words and expressions in order to enhance the *exoticism factor* for the enjoyment of his audience. This way, an alien reality, though refracted through Western lenses, seems to retain some local flavour and an illusion of authenticity for the European/North American reader:

> (15) Two *mozos de Campo* [sic], picturesque in great hats, with spurred bare heels, in white embroidered *calzoneras*, leather jackets and striped ponchos. (Conrad 2007a: 70)

In this passage the narrator uses two[14] expressions in Spanish. The choice of *calzoneras* is almost inevitable, as they are typical Mexican trousers[15], with no equivalent in English. However, 'mozos de campo' could have been translated with such noun phrases as 'farm labourer' or 'farm hand', but this would have implied a significant loss of expressivity and exoticism for the Western reader who is being addressed[16].

Thirdly, and most importantly, foreign expressions and phrases are often used when the narrator adopts a character's discourse and the focus of the narration shifts onto that character. When this happens, the narrator embraces the character's perspective, thus representing his/her thoughts and impressions. Such a thing normally occurs when the narrator totally or partially switches to the B(R) mode, right before or right after an instance of (free) direct speech/thought, or when he uses free indirect speech/thought or narrative report of a speech/thought act[17]. When this occurs, non-English lexemes are used to characterize each reflector as accurately as possible. At the same time, the idiosyncratic foreign expressions serve as a means to draw the reader's attention to the shift which has just taken place. This can be seen, for example, in the third-person narration following the dialogue in instance (16) between Giorgio Viola and his wife Teresa:

> (16) "You go in at once, Giorgio," she directed. "One would think you do not wish to have any pity on me – with four *Signori Inglesi* staying in the house."
> "*Va bene, va bene,*" Giorgio would mutter.
> He obeyed. The *Signori Inglesi* would require their midday meal presently. (Conrad 2007a: 22)

This exchange takes place at Casa Viola, where the couple lives and runs a small hotel and café. As they are from Italy, they presumably speak Italian between themselves,

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SOED (which indicates its Spanish origin), where it is generically defined as «[a]n Indian of Latin America; a mestizo».

[14] We are not counting *poncho*, which not only appears in the SOED, but also in the OALD (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*) and is not as alien as the other Spanish words to the average English speaker.

[15] The entry *calzoneras* appears neither in the DRAE, nor in Moliner's *Diccionario de uso del español* (2008). However, curiously enough, it can be found in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (MWD), defined as «trousers buttoned at the sides and usually slit at the bottom», from Mexican Spanish *calzoneras*.

[16] This example makes it clear that the reader whom the narrator has in mind cannot possibly be from Latin America. The *mozos de campo*, dressed in such a way, would never be perceived as picturesque by someone born and raised in Costaguana, for whom such a sight is mere routine.

[17] See Leech and Short (1981: 318-351) on the use of free indirect speech/thought and narrative report of a speech/thought act.

which is why the dialogue contains some Italian expressions ('Signori inglesi' and 'Va bene, va bene'). When the conversation draws to an end, the narrator adopts Giorgio's point of view. In doing so, he incorporates the phrase «Signori inglesi» in the third-person narration in order to reproduce the garibaldino's linguistic idiosyncrasies. This technique helps to call the reader's attention to the shift in perspective. Teresa uttered the two words, but they also represent the way Giorgio regards his English guests. Indeed, four pages later the reader finds out that he «had a great consideration for the English» (Conrad 2007a: 26) because he believed that, just like Garibaldi (at whose side he had fought in Latin America and Italy), they supposedly struggled for the cause of freedom and independence in South America. Perhaps, that is why they belong to the group of his most cherished customers at the café 'Albergo d'Italia Una'. There is not an ounce of irony in those words, but the utmost respect. On his part, the narrator does not seem to add anything of his own to the meaning intended by Giorgio. However, a few pages later we find a description of the treatment the native *Costaguaneros* normally receive at the garibaldino's café:

> (17) […] the aristocracy of the railway works listened to him [*Giorgio*], turning away from their cards or dominoes. Here and there a fair-haired Basque studied his hand meantime, waiting without protest. No native of Costaguana intruded there. This was the Italian stronghold. Even the Sulaco policemen on a night patrol let their horses pace softly by, bending low in the saddle to glance through the window at the heads in a fog of smoke; […] Only now and then the assistant of the chief of police, some broad-faced, brown little gentleman, with a great deal of Indian in him, would put in an appearance. […] Giorgio, thrusting his pipe into his mouth abruptly, served him in person. Nothing would be heard but the slight jingle of the spurs. His glass emptied, he would […] go out, and ride away slowly, circling towards the town. (Conrad 2007a: 27-28)

In the course of the novel, Giorgio repeatedly claims – stated principles – to believe in freedom and emancipation for all the oppressed people of the Earth, just as the *Signori Inglesi* he so greatly admires do. However, he does not want – actual deeds – any *Costaguaneros* in his inn, which is «the Italian stronghold» in Sulaco and has a room «reserved for the English engineers» (Conrad 2007a: 27). The discrepancy is evident and Giorgio's hypocrisy is unmistakable. This example is a clear instance of Conrad's pessimism. If even an idealist like the garibaldino shows such inconsistency between words and facts, what can be expected from the corrupted politicians and businessmen interested only in the pursuit of their «material interests» (Conrad 2007a: 68)?

The same strategy is also implemented using the different titles which in turn, according to the context, are used to refer to the same person. In the following instance, in which the narrator adopts Captain Mitchel's point of view, the President-Dictator Ribiera is referred to simply as 'Señor Ribiera'[18]:

> (18) Poor Señor Ribiera (such was the dictator's name) had come pelting eighty miles over mountain tracks after the lost battle of Socorro, in the hope of outdistancing the fatal news – which, of course, he could not manage to do on a lame mule. (Conrad 2007a: 11)

[18] We know this is Mitchell's point of view because «Señor Ribiera» appears in his direct speech shortly afterwards.

Instance (18), at the beginning of the novel, recounts the inglorious epilogue of the President's political trajectory, when he is forced to flee from the country after the coup. On the contrary, 83 pages later, when the narrator adopts Sir John's point of view, Ribiera is referred to as 'The Excelentísimo':

> (19) Sir John had been extremely fêted in Sulaco, next to the President-Dictator, a fact which might have accounted for the evident ill-humour General Montero displayed at a lunch given on board the *Juno* just before she was to sail, taking away from Sulaco the President-Dictator and the distinguished foreign guests in his train. The Excelentísimo ("the hope of honest men", as Don José had addressed him in a public speech delivered in the name of the Provincial Assembly of Sulaco) sat at the head of the long table. (Conrad 2007a: 94)

This excerpt describes a dinner party organized in honour of the President-Dictator, still at the height of his power, on the occasion of his visit to Sulaco to inaugurate the construction of the railway. It is worth noting the irony in Sir John's discourse. Even though – when talking to him face to face – he repeatedly flatters Ribiera (whose full title is «El Excelentísimo Señor Don Vincente Ribiera»), behind his back, he calls him 'The Excelentísimo' with an evident mocking intent[19]. An expert in South American affairs, he knows all too well that the President will not last long in a country where *pronunciamientos* are part of everyday life. The eventual downfall of Ribiera, eighteen months later, will prove him right.

Once again, the reader cannot fail to perceive the discrepancy between the grandiloquent speech – stated principles – delivered by «The Excelentísimo» during the railway inauguration ceremony, and the shameful image – actual deeds – of «poor Señor Ribiera» running for his life on the back of a lame mule. Moreover, it is worth noting that in this case the contrast is made even sharper by the disrupted chronology: when reading about the ceremony (Part First – Chapter VIII), the reader is already aware of Ribiera's impending doom (Part First – Chapter II).

7. Conclusions

Nostromo is a very complex novel, and its multilingual facet is only one of the many constituents which make up its intricate structure. Nonetheless, as we have seen, this feature can become decisive in many contexts. Not only can it be exploited to portray the characters' speech in a more idiosyncratic manner, but also to illustrate the multiplicity of the different points of view and discourses as clearly as possible. Moreover – and most importantly – on several occasions, the multilingual factor is used as a means to draw the reader's attention to the discrepancy between stated principles and actual deeds (for example, in the instance in which Giorgio Viola's duplicity is exposed). In order to lay bare this inconsistency, the narrator adopts a number of discourses in a Bakhtinian way

[19] Sir John is mocking the bombastic titles which some Latin American dictators often bestowed upon themselves. Though feared in their countries while in power, they were generally regarded as *extravagant* abroad. Consider, for instance, José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia, the Paraguayan dictator from 1814 until his death in 1840. In 1814, he was appointed «Dictador Supremo de la República del Paraguay» (which earned him the epithet 'El Supremo'). In 1816, he was declared «Dictador Perpetuo de la República del Paraguay» (Sáez 2010: 66-67).

(Bakhtin 1981), and then juxtaposes them with the ensuing facts. In so doing, he makes a silent stand against their hypocrisy and futility, which are mercilessly unmasked. On more than one occasion, as has been shown (see Section 6), the efficacy of this trick is guaranteed by the multilingual characterization of those discourses.

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