

# Junot diaz's "drown" – used language

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An important element in any story is the language that a writer uses. The manner by which an author writes his story tells readers about the message he is trying to communicate. In every story, the wording itself conveys a certain message. In Junot Diaz's "Drown," language is an essential tool. The language he used is not just a means by which he communicates with readers.

His manner of writing sends a message as well. Diaz's work is about the life of immigrants. Immigrants commonly tackle cultural identity issues. Diaz's work tackles these issues. Self-identification is explored in the story and is evident in Diaz's use of two languages. By using Spanish, his native language, and English, the author addresses the struggle that immigrants encounter, the struggle of maintaining one's native culture while living in a foreign land.

The ten stories that are found in "Drown" are all written in English. However, Diaz integrated certain Spanish words within the text. Such integration of the two languages demonstrates the battle between the two cultures that the characters need to identify with.

In the stories, "Ysrael," "Aguantando," and "Fiesta, 1980" Diaz inserts a few Spanish words in the narration. These stories tackle the early years of the narrator's life in the United States. At this point, the narrator is in a constant struggle of cultural identification with his new home and his native land. In "Ysrael" Diaz writes: "The next morning the roosters were screaming."

Rafa dumped the ponchera in the weeds and then collected our shoes from the patio, careful not to step on the pile of cacao beans Tia had set out to dry." (Diaz 9) The interjection of Spanish words is not clearly noticeable. By doing so, Diaz is able to let readers into the narrator's mind. He is able to let readers see things from the perspective of the narrator, a man who struggles to stay in touch with the culture of his native land.

The next stories in the book focus on the life of immigrants as they have settled in the United States. In the story, "Edison, New Jersey," Diaz uses language to demonstrate the difference in the two cultures that the narrator identifies with. Yunior, the main character in the story, is shown to rarely use Spanish, his native language. The only time that he speaks in Spanish is when he points out how he differs from the American culture. Also, Yunior only uses Spanish to differentiate himself from the culture he left behind, the Dominican culture. When he makes a delivery to a house where he found sheets of newspaper laid down on the floor, Yunior suddenly uses Spanish: "Carajo, what if we slip." (Diaz 122)

Another instance when Yunior shifts to Spanish is when he describes his ex-girlfriend's new boyfriend. He describes the guy as a "zangano" and "painfully gringo." (Diaz 126) These two instances, no matter how insignificant to the story they may be, illustrates the continuous battle of the two cultures as immigrants attempt to create their identity. Also, these incidents illustrate the narrator's feeling of being left out from the world around him. He constantly longs for the feeling of belongingness in the

culture of his new land. At the same time, he cannot seem to escape his past and the culture of his native land.

Junot Diaz's use of Spanish and English illustrate the battle of two cultures. It shows the struggle of Dominican immigrants to create their identity as they try to adjust to the American culture while at the same time maintaining their native cultural heritage.

## **Works Cited**

Diaz, Junot. *Drown*. New York: Riverhead, 1997.