

# Code-switching and linking the margins



Imagine for a second that all the Anglo-Saxon world's literary characters were lined up one by one chronologically. We start off with Chaucer's characters and move our way up to Wilde's dandies, and then up to Marlow who is framed in the background by a few tribesmen in the Congo, and then suddenly we have Mr. Biswas.

For the most part Colonialist literature has contained Caucasian characters as their center with the inclusion of some distant races as support.

The subjects of colonialism were barred entry to the privileged world of Colonial literature by their inability to conform to Colonialist's cultural practices; their expression of culture both in language and custom did not meet with the stringent and racist codes required for literature. V. S. Naipaul, who was originally consigned to the category of "commonwealth writer," by the British press, has managed to place the subjects of Anglo-Saxon's colonialism, into the same canon with their oppressors. Marlow, muddling his way up the river, now sits adjacent to Mr. Biswas who curses in his Creole English struggling to pay off debt.

Unlike Mr. Biswas, Naipaul's own writing is often steeped in the vernacular of his Oxford education, but he faithfully records the breaches with colonial grammatical rules through extensive code-switching making low-caste Indian Christian converts into literary forms as accessible as the characters found in other canonical Western literary texts.

Naipaul's use of "variable orthography to make dialect more accessible," (Empire 41) in code-switching takes people marginalized by colonialism's hegemonic processes and renders them in the center as literary subjects. This process frees the voices of Naipaul's novel which have <https://assignbuster.com/code-switching-and-linking-the-margins/>

been silenced by colonial insistence on proper grammar and the reality of their remoteness geographically. For instance, The novel's protagonist, Mr. Biswas, communicates in an English that often enunciates verbs as the beginnings of sentences such as when he says, "" Feel how the car sitting nice on the road?

Feel it, Anand? Savi?" (Naipaul 278) or " Is the sort of place you could build up." (Naipaul 138). Not exactly the language of Shakespeare, but Mr. Biswas is a literary character enfolded in Naipaul's own inventive and colonialist language. By draping Biswas in grammatically perfect sentences, Naipaul has managed to break class bearers refuting the position of colonialist characters as seconds as they are in Conrad, but still maintaining a narrative voice that bridges the gap between subject and ruler.

Mr. Biswas doesn't speak in the language of fine literature, but his speaking, " refutes the privileged position of a standard code in the language." (Empire 40). Biswas is expressing himself in a Creole that prefers the verbal placements of Bengali, he is refusing to adopt the thought processes included in proper English grammar.

Naipaul's use of code-switching allows Mr. Biswas' expressions to be placed in canonical literature and by extensions it sheds light on cultural otherness, Mr. Biswas does not think in the proper forms of colonial English, he still spews out thoughts like a proper Brahmin only using English as his form.

Biswas' sayings reveal a cultural otherness that English can't express, thinking in terms of verbs first or his constant negation of articles such as " a" and " the," are all indicators of the culture that lies beneath his speech, but which English cannot bring to light.