

THE POETICS OF CULTURAL CODES IN EDUARDO MENDOZA'S NOVELS

MARIANNA YEPREMYAN* 
Yerevan State University

The article examines the mechanisms through which various linguistic, social, and genre models shape the artistic system of Eduardo Mendoza's novels. It analyzes the combination of different speech registers alongside the techniques of their ironic, parodic, and stylistic transformation. Particular attention is paid to the relationship between the characters' communicative behaviour and the formation of a fluid identity, as well as the role of linguistic heterogeneity in the construction of urban space. The study demonstrates that cultural codes in Mendoza's prose do not function in isolation but form a dynamic structure linking the social profiling of characters, modes of self-definition, and different models of perceiving reality.

Key words: *Eduardo Mendoza, cultural codes, linguistic heterogeneity, parody, identity, urban space*

Introduction

The literary language of Eduardo Mendoza's prose emerges through the interplay of diverse registers, genre conventions, and social codes, serving as a principal structural element of the fictional world. Its functions extend far beyond stylistic expression: language actively shapes characters' social positions, constructs identity, and models urban reality.

The relevance of this study is driven by the defining features of Mendoza's prose, where the disruption of genre and stylistic hierarchies, irony, parody, and the integration of heterogeneous linguistic layers play a pivotal role. Examining these phenomena in isolation fails to reveal their unifying framework, underscoring the need for a systematic analysis of his literary language.

The initial hypothesis posits that linguistic heterogeneity in Mendoza's novels is not merely a local stylistic device, but an overarching structural principle. Register shifts, the interaction of social and generic codes, the parodic transformation of external discourse, and the variability of characters' communicative behaviour form an interconnected system through which subjectivity, social dynamics, and narrative space are constructed.

* **Marianna Yepremyan** – Lecturer at YSU Chair of Romance Philology

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Марианна Епремян – Преподаватель кафедры романской филологии ЕГУ

E-mail: mariannayepremyan@ysu.am ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8883-1480>



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The aim of this study is to identify the operational principles of literary language in Mendoza's novels and determine its role in organizing the narrative world. To achieve this, the paper analyzes the social marking of linguistic registers, the techniques of irony, parody, and stylization, the relationship between communicative behaviour and hybrid identity formation, and the linguistic modelling of urban space.

The methodological framework integrates structural-semiotic, sociolinguistic, and intertextual approaches. The analysis of linguistic heterogeneity and social polyphony draws on Mikhail Bakhtin's theoretical framework, while spatial modelling is informed by Yuri Lotman's semiotics. The interpretation of parody and irony incorporates Linda Hutcheon's concepts, whereas the discussion of situational identity draws upon the approach developed by Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall, alongside Erving Goffman's dramaturgical model.

The scholarly contribution of this study lies in its systematic synthesis of elements traditionally analyzed as isolated components of Mendoza's poetics. Irony, parody, stylization, social language differentiation, masking, and spatial construction are interpreted as interconnected manifestations of a single process—the dynamic interaction and transformation of linguistic and cultural codes.

Linguistic Heterogeneity and the Interaction of Social Discourses

One of the defining features of Mendoza's literary language is the interplay of diverse speech registers—colloquial, everyday, slang, literary, bureaucratic, scholarly, and journalistic. A prominent trait of his prose often highlighted in critical literature is his “mastery of a wide range of linguistic registers”¹. This combination of diverse speech forms aligns Mendoza's prose with Mikhail Bakhtin's conception of the novel, in which “the style of a novel is to be found in the combination of styles; the language of a novel is the system of its *languages*”². Linguistic variations here do not remain merely an external marker of character or social environment; rather, they shape the social relations, hierarchies, and conflicts within the fictional world.

Particularly significant is the clash of registers, which disrupts the expected correspondence between speech form and situation. Literary or pseudo-scientific discourse embedded in everyday or absurd contexts—as well as colloquial or slang vocabulary introduced into formal settings—generates stylistic dissonance, serving as a primary source of humor, irony, and parody. Beyond its comedic effect, this linguistic heterogeneity performs a broader function: it depicts the urban environment as a space populated by multiple social voices, each tied to a specific cultural and social experience.

The interplay of these discursive forms enables Mendoza to model the social hierarchy of the city, where characters' speech reflects their social standing, level of education, cultural background, and lived experience. These distinctions are manifested not only in vocabulary but also in syntactic structure, intonation, and rhetorical strategies. Language thus operates as a social code, characterizing the persona and their position within a network of social relations without the need for direct authorial commentary. A revealing

¹ **Cabrales Arteaga José Manuel.** (2000). Cervantes y la novela actual: aproximación a Una comedia ligera, de Eduardo Mendoza // Monte Buciero. – No. 5, p. 264. – pp. 255–272. [Electronic resource]. Available at: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/206319.pdf> (Accessed: 18.06.2025).

² **Бахтин М.М.** (1975). Слово в романе // Вопросы литературы и эстетики. Исследования разных лет. – М.: Художественная литература, с. 75. – 504 с.

example is the reproduction of bureaucratic discourse: “We shall proceed in accordance with the provisions of the regulations currently in force”³.

This phrasing reproduces the normative and impersonal character of official discourse, marking the speaker’s institutional position. At the same time, its incorporation into the literary context creates distance from the bureaucratic code itself, turning it into an object of ironic reinterpretation.

The social marking of speech is directly linked to the phenomenon of the discursive mask. Mendoza’s characters alter their speech strategies depending on the communicative context, assuming various social roles; language, therefore, does not merely reflect a pre-existing identity, but actively participates in its formation. This view aligns with Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall’s assertion that “identity is best viewed as the emergent product rather than the pre-existing source of linguistic and other semiotic practices”⁴. Particularly significant in this context is the authors’ inclusion of “temporary and interactionally specific stances and participant roles”⁵ within the architecture of identity. In Mendoza’s prose, this situational dimension is reflected in the character’s ability to shift from one speech code to another: each new communicative role acquires its own linguistic expression, while identity emerges as fluid and dependent on the discursive context.

Parody, Irony, and Stylization as Modes of Discursive Interaction

The interaction of speech forms in Mendoza’s prose also extends to literary and generic codes. Allusions to various traditions are combined with the stylization of detective fiction, historical narrative, journalism, or official documentation, while the reproduced model is frequently subjected to ironic displacement. Intertextuality is thus bound up less with the direct quotation of another text than with the reproduction of a recognizable type of discourse and the transformation of its function within a new context.

It is precisely this duality—the recognizability of a given model combined with simultaneous distancing from it—that constitutes one of the principal techniques of parody. Linda Hutcheon defines parody as “repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity”⁶. In Mendoza’s prose, this distance emerges from within the reproduced generic discourse itself: its familiar logic is preserved just enough to remain recognizable to the reader, while simultaneously being disrupted. In “The Olive Labyrinth” (“El laberinto de las aceitunas”), the logic of detective fiction becomes the explicit target of parody: “The investigation was proceeding steadily, though in an unknown direction”⁷.

The sentence reproduces the confidence typical of detective discourse in the orderly progression of an investigation; yet its second half deprives that movement of any clear destination. Progress no longer implies movement toward a resolution, and the rational structure of the investigation itself becomes a source of absurdity. The parodic reinterpretation thus targets not only the generic cliché but also the underlying epistemological

³ Mendoza E. (2012). *El enredo de la bolsa y la vida*. – Barcelona: Seix Barral, p. 98. – 352 p.

⁴ Bucholtz M., Hall K. (2005). Identity and interaction: a sociocultural linguistic approach // *Discourse Studies*. – Vol. 7, No. 4–5, p. 588. – pp. 585–614. DOI: 10.1177/1461445605054407. [Electronic resource]. Available at: <https://surl.li/yokxfr> (Accessed: 18.06.2025).

⁵ Ibid., p. 592.

⁶ Hutcheon L. (1985). *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*. – New York: Methuen, p. 6. – 143 p.

⁷ Mendoza E. (2001). *El laberinto de las aceitunas*. – Barcelona: Seix Barral, p. 112. – 230 p.

model based on the possibility of logically reconstructing the truth. In Mendoza's prose, such ironic distortion extends beyond literary forms to culturally embedded notions of fact, reliability, and truth: "The truth of the facts, as so often happens, turned out to be irrelevant"⁸.

The outward seriousness of the narrative formula is preserved, yet its internal logic is paradoxically turned against itself: the statement invokes the "truth of the facts" while simultaneously depriving that truth of any real significance. Parody thus moves beyond generic play and merges with an irony directed at discourses that claim to offer a reliable and unambiguous representation of reality.

The parodic structure of Mendoza's texts rests not only on the transformation of individual generic models but also on the continual intersection of distinct stylistic and discursive layers. Literary and colloquial language, official and marginal discourses, serious narrative forms and their ironic reinterpretations shape a fluid structure in which cultural codes are simultaneously reproduced and semantically displaced. The hybridity of Mendoza's literary language functions, therefore, not as a localized stylistic device, but as an overarching principle governing narrative organization.

This view of parody as an interplay and transformation of diverse cultural codes is supported by critical scholarship on Mendoza's prose. M. H. García-Rodríguez characterizes his parodic world as a "dialogic universe of simulacra"⁹, in which competing discourses vie for dominance within the fictional reality. In this context, parody is no longer limited to the deformation of a literary prototype; it serves as a mechanism for bringing different languages, social positions, and modes of interpreting reality into direct confrontation.

Irony occupies a central position within the system of literary language in Mendoza's novels, functioning not merely as a stylistic device, but as a fundamental principle of textual organization. In his prose, irony is pervasive: it operates across lexical, syntactic, and discursive levels, shaping the distinctive narrative tone and establishing a specific mode of authorial perception. Unlike classical irony, which relies on an implicit contrast between literal and intended meaning, irony in Mendoza's works often assumes a form of semantic instability, whereby an utterance remains open to multiple interpretations.

A defining feature of Mendoza's irony is its intrinsic link with parody and stylization. Together, these three elements form a cohesive poetic complex wherein irony serves to maintain critical distance, parody operates as a means of transforming generic and discursive models, and stylization functions to reproduce while simultaneously reshaping another discourse. In this context, literary language becomes a space of intertextual play in which diverse speech patterns not only coexist but continuously interact, exposing the conventionality and historical limitations of linguistic forms. Equally revealing is the capacity of the ironic statement to be structured around an internal logical paradox: "Nothing is more serious than that which is utterly devoid of importance"¹⁰.

The combination of mutually contradictory semantic orientations—absolute seriousness and complete insignificance—deprives the statement of any stable evaluative

⁸ **Mendoza E.** (2001). *La aventura del tocador de señoras*. – Barcelona: Seix Barral, p. 167. – 224 p.

⁹ **García-Rodríguez M.J.** (2020). *El enredo de la bolsa y la vida: la parodia de la signicidad en Eduardo Mendoza* // *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*. – Vol. 97, No. 8, p. 1334. – pp. 1333–1347.

¹⁰ **Mendoza E.** (2001). *El laberinto de las aceitunas*. – Barcelona: Seix Barral, p. 134. – 230 p.

grounding. Irony here does not stem from a direct negation of what is said, but from the impossibility of assigning a single, definitive meaning to the utterance.

A characteristic example of the interplay between irony and the socio-linguistic mask is found in “The Mystery of the Enchanted Crypt” (“El misterio de la cripta embrujada”), where the narrative is built upon a constant clash between elevated and low registers of speech. The protagonist, who occupies a marginal position in the social structure, attempts to lend his speech an air of intellectual sophistication by resorting to pseudo-scientific and rhetorically elaborate vocabulary. The result is a comedic effect produced by the conspicuous mismatch between form and content: “My self-directed education, though fragmentary, enables me to approach a wide variety of problems from an almost scientific perspective”¹¹.

Here, the ironic effect arises from the contrast between the pretentious form of expression and the protagonist’s actual incompetence. Pseudo-scientific discourse functions as a mask that simultaneously conceals and exposes his social marginality. Language thus becomes an instrument of self-construction, yet this self-construction is inherently unstable and illusory.

In Mendoza’s prose, stylization likewise merges the reproduction of a recognizable mode of discourse with its ironic transformation. In “The City of Marvels” (“La ciudad de los prodigios”), historiographical discourse is juxtaposed with a grotesque representation of urban reality: “Barcelona was growing at a disorderly pace, as though governed by a logic beyond all human planning”¹².

The historiographical mode of narration is combined here with a grotesque personification of the city. Barcelona emerges as an autonomous force whose development follows its own internal logic, escaping rational control. As a result, the apparent neutrality of historical narrative is disrupted, and the discourse itself acquires an ironic inflection.

The Discursive Mask and Hybrid Identity

Linguistic hybridity in Mendoza’s novels is fundamentally linked to the construction of character. The ability to shift from one speech code to another depending on the communicative context renders the protagonist’s identity fluid and situational. This principle is expressed with particular clarity in the protagonist’s words: “I was no one in particular, but rather a succession of characters improvised according to the occasion”¹³.

Identity is conceived here not as a stable essence, but as an aggregation of temporary roles, each acquiring its own linguistic expression. Language does not merely signal a character’s belonging to a particular social milieu; it operates as a tool for the situational construction of subjectivity. This process aligns with Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical model, according to which social interaction inherently involves presenting a specific self-image to others: “When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them”¹⁴. In Mendoza’s prose,

¹¹ **Mendoza E.** (2001). *El misterio de la cripta embrujada*. – Barcelona: Seix Barral, p. 47. – 191 p.

¹² **Mendoza E.** (2001). *La ciudad de los prodigios*. – Barcelona: Seix Barral, p. 89. – 416 p.

¹³ **Mendoza E.** (2001). *La aventura del tocador de señoras*. – Barcelona: Seix Barral, p. 156. – 224 p.

¹⁴ **Goffman E.** (1956). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. – Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, Social Sciences Research Centre, p. 10. – 161 p.

such role-based fluidity finds expression primarily through language: a shift in the manner of speaking simultaneously marks a shift in the social position that the character seeks to assume in a given situation.

This dynamic is especially evident in the imitation of intellectual or scholarly discourse. The protagonist's attempt to lend his speech an appearance of logic, coherence, and authority creates a temporary discursive identity: "My account of the facts, though somewhat lengthy, follows an impeccable method"¹⁵.

The pseudo-scholarly mode of speech performs a dual function here: it allows the character to present himself as the bearer of a rational and orderly consciousness, while simultaneously exposing the artificiality of the image being constructed. The discursive mask, therefore, does not entirely obscure identity; on the contrary, it brings the very process of its construction into focus.

Such variability is also driven by the necessity of social adaptation. Mendoza's characters employ diverse speech strategies—imitating official discourse, shifting into slang, or resorting to pseudo-intellectual rhetoric—to adjust to the shifting circumstances of the urban environment. In this context, the linguistic mask acquires not only a playful, but also a protective function: "Pretence was my only defence in a world where truth had no value"¹⁶.

Pretence here stems not only from the comedic discrepancy between the character's speech and his actual social standing. It becomes a mode of existence within an unstable social environment in which the subject is compelled to continually adjust his linguistic behaviour. The gap between language and social reality therefore acquires a more complex significance: the discursive mask simultaneously enables the protagonist to adapt to a given situation and reveals his inability to settle into a single, stable role. This principle is formulated with ultimate concision by the protagonist himself: "My identity depended on the tone in which I uttered each word"¹⁷.

This dependence of identity on "tone" accords a constitutive significance to the speech act: what matters is not merely what the character says, but how he structures his utterance. Lexical choice, intonation, and the assumed speech register become primary instruments of situational self-determination. Hybridity thus emerges not as a mere co-existence of distinct linguistic layers, but as an existential principle for a subject whose identity is continually negotiated through transitions between social and discursive roles.

Literary Language and the Modelling of Urban Reality

One of the most significant manifestations of the modelling function of literary language in Mendoza's prose is the construction of urban space. The city in his novels does not exist as a pre-established background that is subsequently given verbal description; rather, its image emerges through the interplay of social speech practices, historical narratives, and cultural codes. Linguistic heterogeneity thus acquires a spatial dimension, while the multiplicity of discourses becomes one of the primary means by which urban reality is artistically organized.

This approach aligns with Yuri Lotman's concept of artistic space, according to which "the structure of the space of a text becomes a model of the structure of the space

¹⁵ **Mendoza E.** (2001). *El misterio de la cripta embrujada*. – Barcelona: Seix Barral, p. 73. – 191 p.

¹⁶ **Mendoza E.** (2012). *El enredo de la bolsa y la vida*. – Barcelona: Seix Barral, p. 203. – 352 p.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

of the universe, and the internal syntagmatics of elements within a text becomes the language of spatial modelling”¹⁸. In Mendoza’s prose, space is modelled largely through language: social, institutional, everyday, and cultural discourses do not merely resonate within the city, but actively participate in shaping its structure, giving rise to distinct modes of perceiving and interpreting it.

This principle is expressed with particular intensity in “The City of Marvels”: “The city spoke in a thousand languages, none of which told the truth”¹⁹. The metaphor of the speaking city transfers linguistic heterogeneity from the domain of individual speech to the structure of fictional space itself. The “thousand languages” signify not only a multiplicity of characters or speech registers, but also the coexistence of distinct ways of describing and understanding urban reality. None of these discourses is granted the status of ultimate truth; instead, the image of the city emerges from a plurality of partial, intersecting, and often contradictory perspectives.

In this respect, polyphony becomes a property not merely of the narrative structure, but of urban space itself. Bureaucratic, marginal, intellectual, everyday, commercial, and historical discourses correspond to different forms of social experience, constructing multiple, simultaneously existing versions of the city. Linguistic stratification, previously observed in the speech of individual characters, thus acquires a broader significance: differences in modes of speaking become simultaneously differences in modes of seeing and interpreting the city.

This spatial organization is particularly characteristic of Mendoza’s portrayal of Barcelona. In her analysis of Mendoza’s urban novels, Susanne Schwartzbürger identifies one of the persistent principles underlying the representation of Barcelona as the “city-labyrinth”²⁰. This definition is significant not only in topographical terms: the labyrinthine quality of the city reflects the multiplicity of routes, social spaces, and perspectives through which it becomes accessible to both character and reader.

Such internal heterogeneity is likewise evident in the dynamics of the urban image itself²¹. Barcelona acquires a dynamic of its own, one that cannot be reduced to the intentions or actions of individual characters. Its development emerges from the interaction of multiple social, historical, and economic processes, none of which is capable of subordinating the city entirely to a single order.

For this reason, the personification of Barcelona has more than a merely figurative function. It expresses the autonomy of the urban system: the city appears to generate its own networks, conflicts, and forms of movement. Within such a model, the human subject is embedded in a space that extends far beyond any individual perspective. Characters may alter their speech strategies, social roles, and modes of self-definition, yet the urban environment itself continually presents them with new codes to which they must adapt. The formation of the hybrid identity discussed above is therefore directly conditioned by the structure of the space in which that identity exists.

¹⁸ Лотман Ю.М. (1970). Структура художественного текста. – М.: Искусство, с. 212. – 384 с.

¹⁹ Mendoza E. (2001). La ciudad de los prodigios. – Barcelona: Seix Barral, p. 214. – 416 p.

²⁰ Schwarzbürger S. (2002). La ciudad narrada. Barcelona en las novelas urbanas de Eduardo Mendoza. La relación entre texto y ciudad // Revista de Filología Románica. – Anejo III, p. 203. – pp. 203–220. [Electronic resource]. Available at: <https://surl.li/jtbsov> (Accessed: 18.06.2025).

²¹ The image discussed above (See footnote 12) acquires an additional significance in the context of Mendoza’s spatial model.

The linguistic modelling of the city operates on two interconnected levels. On the one hand, differences between social discourses make the internal stratification of the urban environment visible; on the other, their continual interaction prevents the emergence of a single, definitive version of Barcelona. The city appears not as a fixed and completed image, but as a system of constantly shifting interpretations in which historical narrative, institutional discourse, colloquial language, and individual experience overlap.

Mendoza's literary language does not merely represent space; it becomes the very instrument through which space itself is constructed. It is through the interaction of heterogeneous linguistic and cultural codes that the city acquires its multilayered character, internal mobility, and capacity to function as an autonomous entity within the fictional world. The modelling function of language thus connects the principal levels of Mendoza's poetics: social differentiation, discursive heterogeneity, hybrid identity, and the representation of modern urban reality.

Conclusion

The analysis confirms the initial hypothesis that the literary language of Mendoza's prose is systemic in nature. Its distinctiveness lies not in a collection of isolated stylistic devices but in the sustained interaction of heterogeneous linguistic and cultural codes. Within this system, the social markedness of utterance, the ironic reinterpretation of genre models, and the variability of communicative behaviour emerge as different manifestations of a single process of semantic transformation.

This pattern operates across different levels of the fictional world and links them together. Language not only reveals social relations but also participates in the construction of the subject, shapes the fluidity of identity, and determines modes of perceiving the urban environment. The individual, society, and the city are thus incorporated into a shared field of interacting interpretations, in which no position possesses absolute stability and no version of reality enjoys definitive authority. Literary language consequently emerges as one of the fundamental principles of Mendoza's poetics, ensuring the internal coherence of its various levels while simultaneously preserving the openness of the fictional world to multiple interpretive perspectives.

ՄԱՐԻԱՆԱ ԵՓՐԵՄՅԱՆ – Մշակութային կոդերի պոետիկան Էդուարդո Մենդոսայի վեպերում – Հոդվածում վերլուծվում են այն մեխանիզմները, որոնց միջոցով խոսքային, սոցիալական և ժանրային տարբեր մոդելները ձևավորում են Էդուարդո Մենդոսայի վեպերի գեղարվեստական համակարգը: Քննվում է տարբեր խոսքային ռեգիստրների համադրությունը, ինչպես նաև դրանց հեգնական, երգիծական և ոճավորող փոխակերպման հնարքները: Հատուկ ուշադրություն է դարձվում կերպարների հաղորդակցական վարքագծի կապին շարժուն ինքնության ձևավորման հետ և լեզվական անհամասեռության դերին քաղաքային տարածության կառուցարկման գործում: Ցույց է տրված, որ Մենդոսայի արձակում մշակութային կոդերը չեն գործում մեկուսացված, այլ ձևավորում են դինամիկ կառուցվածք, որը կապում է կերպարի սոցիալական բնութագիրը, ինքնորոշման եղանակները և իրականության ընկալման տարբեր մոդելները:

Բանալի բառեր – Էդուարդո Մենդոսա, մշակութային կոդեր, լեզվական անհամասեռություն, պարողիա, ինքնություն, քաղաքային տարածություն

МАРИАННА ЕПРЕМЯН – Поэтика культурных кодов в романах Эдуардо Мендосы. –

Статья посвящена анализу механизмов, посредством которых различные речевые, социальные и жанровые модели формируют художественную систему романов Эдуардо Мендосы. Анализируется сочетание различных речевых регистров, а также приемы их иронического, пародийного и стилизационного преобразования. Особое внимание уделяется связи коммуникативного поведения персонажей с формированием подвижной идентичности и роли языковой неоднородности в конструировании городского пространства. Показано, что культурные коды в прозе Мендосы не функционируют изолированно, а образуют динамическую структуру, связывающую социальную характеристику персонажа, способы его самоопределения и различные модели восприятия действительности.

Ключевые слова: Эдуардо Мендоса, культурные коды, языковая неоднородность, пародия, идентичность, городское пространство

Ethics Statement

The author confirms that all ethical requirements regarding the research have been met.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author confirms that there is no conflict of interest.

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