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Here *and* There: Code Switching and the Politics of Spanish-Language Identity in Latina

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Language allows us to achieve goals and access opportunities while connecting us to others from different cultural backgrounds. Though it gives us the opportunity to exchange ideas, it can also be a challenge—the kind that forces bilinguals to choose an identity. In other words, one belongs neither here nor there. For many Latinos, the United States is the “land of the free,” a place where they live the American dream. What they don’t realize is that chasing that dream—that lifestyle—requires them to adapt to a new culture without losing sight of their own. With the help of code-switching—a technique used to alternate between dialects or, in this case, two languages—Latina authors including Julia Alvarez, Ana Castillo, and Sandra Cisneros, have created a literature world where they're neither from here nor there, but both.

Code-switching: Background

Code-switching (CS) is a practice that occurs when a person switches from one language to another in the same sentence. This form of communication dates back to the 1960s – 70s when it made its first appearance in Latino texts. Benjamin Bailey describes CS as “the use of two or more languages in one speech exchange by bi- or multilingual speakers. Switches between languages can occur between turns, within turns, and between constituents of single sentences.” These turns occur within dialects, alternating from a tongue to another and can be something as simple as pronouncing the “g” at the end of a word like “speaking.” In other cases, the turns are less obvious and much smoother. For example, Spanglish is a form of CS as the speaker alternates between Spanish and English. A person who uses Spanglish would say something along the lines of: “I want to, *pero* . . .” Here, *pero* serves as the conjunction “but.” In this case, *pero* has no cultural value; however, it is a symbol of comfort. For some speakers, their Spanish and English language is so intertwined, they subconsciously switch between tongues. In *Code-switching*, Gardner-Chloros says, “Code-switching is used here to ‘animate’ the narrative by

providing different ‘voices’ for the participants in the incident which is described.” Whether a speaker reverts to CS intuitively or not, he/she allows multiple aspects of his/her personality to shine through. In fact, “bilinguals often switch varieties in order to communicate something beyond the superficial dialects of their words” (3). Sometimes, reverting to CS isn’t a sign of laziness, as Gardner-Chloros says, but rather a form of attachment. For example, if the grandparents of a bilingual speaker nicknamed her something such as *flaca*, in translating the nickname to skinny, the speaker would grow distant. Because of the family connection, translating a Spanish language word would be disrespectful. In other words, the family attachment a word carries dismisses its ability to be translated. In “Constraints on Language Mixing: Intrasentential Code-Switching and Borrowing in Spanish/English,” Pfaff states: “switching has evolved into metaphorical use of Spanish to express a personal or affective orientation to the content of speech, in contrast to a more objective or impersonal use of English” (294).

The purpose of incorporating CS during speech can vary from being unable to translate a word to not wanting to. While there are a few words that cannot be translated into a different language, there are also words that *can* be translated but would lose their significance during the process. CS, then, is “both a language contact phenomenon and a social contact phenomenon” because it helps people from similar—and perhaps even different—cultures connect. But that’s not always the case. Bailey comments, “The occurrence, shape distribution, and meanings of code-switching vary across and within communities, depending on members’ access to cross-boundary social roles and domains” (241). CS interpretation varies from group to group. Bailey analyses the experience of a child who comes from immigrant parents. In that particular situation, the kid will not only learn CS from an immigrant perspective, but also from the perspective of his/her generation. While the kid will be familiar with Spanish terms used around

the immigrant community, he/she will also be familiar with those used by his generation. In being part of both a language and social phenomenon, CS also becomes a symbol of “identity for individuals who live simultaneously in multiple social and linguistic worlds” (242). By practicing this strategy, bilinguals can indulge in their culture without having to choose one tongue over the other.

CS can be considered an art similar to theatre or music because it allows both the writers and readers to create a connection between multiple worlds, specifically cultural worlds. While there are some words that can be translated, others cannot be changed from one language to another without losing value or significance; in those cases, people revert to code-switching. Some interpret code-switching as the inability to fluently learn or adapt to a second language, but others, such as Penelope Gardner-Chloros believe “by analysing [*sic*] code-switched speech, we can find out which combinations of words or morphemes from different languages can easily be combined and which are more resistant, or perhaps even impossible” (5). In this way, code-switching helps readers and writers cross borders in and outside of one’s culture.

This practice doesn’t only occur between two languages; it also occurs in different kinds of speech. In “Code-switching, Code-mixing, and Radical Bilingualism in U.S. Latino Texts,” Roshawnda A. Derrick explains the three strategies of code-switching: Cushioned Spanish, Gratifying the Bilingual Reader, and Radical Bilingualism. According to Derrick, cushioned Spanish “exposes readers to Spanish vocabulary whose meaning is apparent context” (1-2). When a writer incorporates cushioned Spanish code-switching, he/she introduces cultural concepts that are either common or obvious. CS in this form is obvious to the eye, as the words in a different language are italicized. Torres, who has studied cushioned Spanish, presents Nicholas Mohr’s example of this strategy: ““Midday was the time when folks went home,

showered, ate an abundant *almuerzo* and then took a long *siesta*” (2). In the sentence above, *almuerzo* means lunch and *siesta* means nap and these are relatively easy to understand given the surrounding context of the sentence. The Gratifying the Bilingual Reader strategy “grants full access to bilinguals while still allowing monolinguals to understand the central message” (2). This CS is the simplest because the words mean exactly what their translation does, which is included in the term as a way to increase clarity. The following is an example of this strategy from Ortiz Cortez: “But she had said, ‘*No gracias*,’ to the funeral, and she sent the flag and metals back marked. *Ya no vive aqui*: Does not live here anymore. Tell the Mr. President of the United States what I say: *No gracias*” (2). Radical Bilingualism is “in works that contain sections with sustained CS which would be intelligible only to bilingual readers” (2). This kind of CS is aimed for bilingual speakers; writers who use this strategy speak directly to a specific cultural group, making it much more exclusive. Derrick uses the following passage from Junot Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* to demonstrate this form of CS: “‘Gradually, Beli began to see beyond the catcalls and the *Dios mío asesina* ‘and the *y ese tetatorío* and the *que pechonalidad* (93)’” (35). Though the three strategies explained above are utilized and presented differently, they allow people to relate to one another.

Regardless of the form of code-switching writers incorporate into their writing, their purpose is never to leave people out. On the contrary, the purpose of code-switching is to find a common ground between monolinguals who are interested in learning about other cultures and bilinguals who need to find a balance between their mother tongue and a second language. In books like *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, *So Far from God*, and *Caramelo*, the characters turn to code-switching as a way of holding onto their roots. *Speaking Chicana: Voice, Power and Identity* summarizes the many reasons why Latina authors incorporate their native

language into their experiences by saying there is a “need for identity and solidarity with [their] ethnic group . . .” because they are afraid of “losing linguistic symbols of culture” (2). Though we cannot know for sure what an author’s intentions are for including code-switching in their writing, we can assume that using such a practice is related to identity. Preserving one’s mother tongue also preserves relationships to one’s entire family, a concept Latinos hold close to their hearts. Gardner-Chloros says, “The characteristic ways in which bilinguals combine their languages in a particular community constitute a way of expressing their group identity—like a characteristic accent” (5). CS then helps inform the audience about an author’s culture, but it also enforces his/her connection to his/her cultural experiences.

How the García Girls Lost their Accents: Pronunciation Matters

Born on March 27, 1950 in New York City, Julia Alvarez is a Dominican-American writer raised in the Dominican Republic. When she was ten years old, Alvarez and her family were forced to return to New York because of the political tension in the Dominican Republic. In 1971, Alvarez graduated with a bachelor’s degree from Middlebury College, and in 1975, she graduated with a master’s degree from Syracuse University. Some of Alvarez’s publications include: *In the Time of the Butterflies* published in 1994; *The Secret Footprints* published in 2000; *Tía Lola Came to Visit Stay* published in 2001; *Before We Were Free* published in 2002; *The Woman I Kept to Myself* published in 2004; and *Saving the World* published in 2006.

Alvarez is most known for her cultural identity exploration, which began with her 1991 publication: *How the García Girls Lost their Accents*. The novel follows the journey of a Dominican family who must assimilate to the New York culture. Carla, Sandra, Yolanda, and Sofia—the García Girls—struggle with finding a balance between their Latina and American identities. Papi and Mami encourage the girls to indulge in their Dominican culture by sending

them to the Island every summer; however, even when the girls are surrounded by their *cultura*, they cannot seem to get rid of their “American ways.” Though they display different forms of Americanization—such as spending alone time with boys—the girls continuously turn to code-switching during situations in which their identity is at stake.

The name—and in some cases, the nickname—of every character in the novel is a representation of who they are. In the Latino culture, names are the biggest form of identification; what you chose to identify as determines the kind of person you are. Mami and Papi are excellent examples of this practice because we don’t know their real names until very late in the novel. When they are first introduced, they are simply Mami and Papi, which are synonyms for mom and dad. Though it is a small detail, it is important because it helps the reader understand the value of authority figures—specifically parents—in Latino culture. In some cases, characters aren’t given an individual name and are instead referred to by a generic name, such as mom and/or dad, as a sign of respect. Because Latinos look up to older, wiser family members, they do not need to be called Lorena (Mami’s name) or Carlos (Papi’s name) for their roles to be distinguishable. Alvarez’s choice to call mom Mami and dad Papi is one worth analyzing. The author could’ve chosen to Americanize the characters by calling them something in English since they encourage the girls to develop their language. But instead, Alvarez allowed them to keep their roots. The names Mami and Papi are used so frequently throughout the book, they do not need to be italicized for the reader to know they are words in a different language; they are an example of the CS strategy Gratifying the Bilingual Reader. Whether the reader understands Spanish or not, they are able to understand who Mami and Papi are. Alvarez not only helps the reader identify characters, but she also helps them understand the importance of every family member role. Alvarez plays around with the common idea that characters who aren’t given

individual names aren't important and turns it upside down. Instead of being generic characters, Mami and Papi lead the story; without them, none of the García girls would've lost their accents.

Mami and Papi aren't the only ones with powerful names; so is almost every older figure in the García girls' lives including their family members in the Dominican Republic. Initially, the girls' trips to the Dominican Republic during the summers were supposed to serve as a reminder of the culture they left behind. But one summer, as the girls began adapting more to their American lifestyle, their trip to the Island was one of punishment. Fifi was caught "smoking in the bathroom"; "Carla was on for experimenting with hair removal," which Mami disapproved because she thought the act would become a habit; Mami was uncomfortable with Yoyo "bringing a book into the house, *Our Bodies*"; and Sandi wasn't home when "a visiting aunt and uncle dropped in for a visit at college" (110-1). Feeling hopeless, the girls turned to what they did have control over: the names of their aunts and uncles. They mimicked their personalities as "a way of getting even with people who would have power over [them] all summer. [They] played with their names, translating them into literal English so they sounded ridiculous. Tía Concha became Aunt Conchshell, and Tía Asunción, Aunt Ascension; Tío Mundo was Uncle World" (111). By translating names as a way of "getting even," Alvarez points our attention to the weight a name carries. The girls knew they'd have no chance at negotiating their stay, so, instead, they retaliated in a silly but meaningful way. While it may seem childish to change somebody's name, in doing so, the girls remind us just how much a person's name reflects who they are and what they stand for. The changing of names is symbolic because it gives a small glimpse into the Latino family hierarchy—where Mamis and Papis are at the top and are followed by aunts and uncles—while making note of the way a person's identity changes when his/her name is altered. For example, later when we meet Tío Mundo, we learn he is a doctor

who worked hard for his degree. Of course, we don't get that same perception of him when the girls change his name to Uncle World. The Spanish syllables with which Tío Mundo's name is pronounced are what remind the girls of his journey, making him that much more of an admirable role figure. When the girls call him out of his name—the name he has made something out of—they take away from both his beginnings and his present. Instead of Alvarez using CS in its typical Gratifying the Bilingual Reader form to incorporate common words, she uses it as a way to give the girls a power with words that puts them on par with their more senior family members.

The power of Yolanda's name is different in that it carries the culture she loses throughout the novel. The first time we meet Yolanda is at a family reunion, where her tías are sitting around, gossiping. Lucinda, the cousin that “looks like a Dominican magazine model” (5), asks Yolanda about her sisters. She responds in “halting Spanish” and then “reverts to English,” which she gets in trouble for. Yolanda doesn't mind because she knows “the more she practices, the sooner she'll be back to her native tongue” (7). Although Yolanda has trouble remembering the correct Spanish translation of English words, her name remains in Spanish. Even if she goes “blank over some . . . word . . . or [mixes] up some common phrase” (7), her name cannot be taken from her because it means something to her in the same way that the names Mami, Papi, and Tío Mundo do. Later, Yolanda gathers with her sisters for Christmas. They, just like their tías had, sit around and gossip, making sure to announce any big changes that have occurred since they last saw each other. Yolanda admits she no longer writes poetry, hoping to hear sounds of sorrow on her behalf. Instead, the sisters continue their conversation. Sandi says, “He's such a turd. How many times has he done this now, Yo?” Yo is one of the many nicknames Yolanda answered to when they were younger. Carla, the oldest sister, states, “Yolanda . . . She

wants to be called Yolanda now,” in an angry tone, as if responding to one’s one name was a sin. Puzzled by her sister’s declaration, Yolanda asks, “What do you mean, *wants to be called Yolanda now?* That’s my name, you know” (61). The irony in this is that Yolanda and her sisters agreed to the nickname Yo, but all of a sudden, Yolanda prefers to be called by her full name. Perhaps the years that passed made her realize Yo didn’t say much about her, but the name “Yolanda” did. We can assume that because Mami and Papi’s native language was Spanish, Yolanda’s name was pronounced in Spanish as well. Identifying by a name in a different language—a language that is yours, but not entirely as you seem to lose it from time to time—demonstrates the value of roots instilled in the girls. When the girls renamed their aunts and uncles with English names, Mami reminded them the importance of one’s origins, which might be why Yolanda is so inclined to claim her identity even though she lost some of her culture.

Yolanda, as did the rest of the girls, experienced a bad heart break, in which she took time off to make peace with her mind. Instead of calling her by her full name, Alvarez called her Yo. Her parents, on the other hand, called her Yolanda, stressing their Spanish syllables. When Mami and Papi visited her, Yolanda reminded them of her love and claims the reason why her and her ex-lover didn’t work out was because they didn’t “speak the same language.” Here, Alvarez plays with the significance of Yolanda’s words. When Yo says her and her previous significant other didn’t “speak the same language,” she doesn’t mean she spoke Spanish and he English (or vice-versa). Yolanda realized they loved so differently, they couldn’t possibly love each other. In disbelief, Mami says, “‘*Ay, Yolanda.*’ . . . [pronouncing] her name in Spanish, her pure, mouth-filling, full-blooded name, Yolanda” (81). Yolanda’s name, and her mother’s pronunciation, is especially meaningful during this part of Yo’s life because of the identity crisis she is experiencing. During the time that Yo stayed with her lover, she gave up a lot of herself,

often forgetting she had personal interests. By creating a scene where Mami pronounces Yo's name the "correct way," the author reminds us that perhaps it is in moments like those that one must grip one's identity. As devastated as Yolanda may have been, in that moment, all she really had was her name; her lover might've walked away, but he couldn't take away what was hers. He couldn't take "Yolanda" from her.

Yolanda had made language her own. She recognized the importance of words, especially of those in the English language. But she never allowed herself to forget that language didn't belong to her. During any occasion in which she felt clueless, Yolanda would "look up the word in the dictionary . . . English was then still a party favor for [her]—crack open the dictionary, find out if [she'd] just been insulted, praised, admonished, criticized" (87). In college, Yolanda's affection for language grew enormously, leading her to declare herself an English major. Once she transferred and settled in, she attended her first English class, where her professor "called roll" and "stumbled over [her] name and [smiled] falsely at [her], a smile [she] identified as one flashed on 'foreign students' to show them the natives were friendly" (88-89). The identity that followed Yolanda because of her name made her feel out of place. Without getting an opportunity to show her real self, she was labeled as someone who "had an odd name" (89). Unlike during her heartbreak, Yolanda had no idea who she was during her college years. She got through the years expecting to find herself but realized she was someone she didn't recognize.

So Far from God: Religion Matters Too

Born on June 15, 1953, Ana Castillo is a Mexican-American writer. She grew up in Chicago, IL, and later received her a B.A. from Northwestern Illinois University; M.A. from

University of Chicago; and Ph.D. from the University of Bremen, Germany. Castillo is the editor of the journal *La Tolteca*, which encourages people to work together to achieve success.

From a very young age, Castillo used writing as a coping mechanism, expressing what she couldn't say aloud. She published poems such as *Otro Canto* in 1977, *The Invitation* in 1979, and *Women Are Not Roses* in 1984. In 1994, she published *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma*. In 1996, Castillo combined poetry and prose to publish *Goddess of the Americas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe*, followed by *My Mother's Mexican: New and Collected Essays*, which was published in 2015. Castillo also published fiction novels such as: *The Mixquiahuala Letters* in 1986; *Sapogonia: An Anti-Romance in 3/8 Meter* in 1994, *So Far from God* in 1994, *Loverboys* in 1996, *Peel My Love Like an Onion* in 2000; *The Guardians* in 2007, and *Give it to Me* in 2014.

Castillo is known as a Chicana activist who explores political issues within the Mexican community, especially those we never talk about. In *So Far from God*, Castillo boldly raises questions about religion, a powerful phenomenon in the Latino community. In the book, the author traces the journey of a family who is defined by their religious encounters. In the process of putting together the puzzle pieces that make up their reality, the author incorporates the gratifying the bilingual reader (GBR) and radical bilingualism (RB) techniques.

Unlike other books written by bilingual speakers, *So Far from God* does not italicize foreign words. Instead, the switch from English to Spanish appears casually. Castillo stirs away from reverting to Spanish *only* when referring to unknown words and instead mimics the code-switching that occurs in Latinos who speak Spanglish. The first example of this is in the first two words of the book: "La Loca" (19), which refers to one of the daughters. Though Castillo does not include a definition of what this means, she shares La Loca's story, hoping to reveal how the

family picked such a name. We learn that La Loca was a “little body” who had been “possessed by something unknown that caused her to thrash about violently until finally she fell off the bed” (20). Upon reading such a description, the reader may think, “that’s crazy” or “she’s crazy,” both which are literal definitions of La Loca. In this case, GBR allows us to take a wild guess about the name’s significance; though we may not have a dictionary definition, the backstory that Castillo includes helps us infer what “La Loca” may refer to. As the story continues La Loca’s name becomes common, almost as an identifier, and “by the time she was twenty-one no one remembered her Christian name” (25). Convinced that her resurrection is “a miracle, an answer to the prayers of a brokenhearted mother” (23), the townspeople start believing La Loca is a saint, changing her name from just La Loca to “La Loca Santa” (25). The community’s association with religion is so bizarre, it leads them to redefine someone’s identity, as they did with La Loca.

CS in the form of GBR helps analyze Caridad’s role as a character. After being attacked and “left for dead by the side of the road” (33), the family worked toward Caridad’s recovery, which the family referred to as the “Holy Restoration” (43). Though quite traumatic, Caridad’s experience led her to discover a side of herself she had not yet known—one that was influenced by a greater being than herself. Caridad “had changed in an even bigger way” and it was obvious because “on four distinct occasions before she left home, she drifted off into a trancelike state and took on an otherworldly expression” (45). When it first started happening, the family tried to make her come back to life, hoping she was still in her five senses. But after a while, Caridad’s trancelike states led to small glimpses of what the future would be like; she was given the gift of predicting the future. Caridad’s dad, don Domingo “made it his business to pay special attention

to Caridad's don, this faculty of prophecy that even don Domingo could not have imagined having in his wildest dreams" (49).

Doña Felicia took Caridad under her wing, teaching her ways to master the gift she had been given. Unsure of her abilities, Caridad often doubted herself, remembering that as a curandera, she "not only had the health of her patient in her own hand but the spirit as well." What worried her the most was "[giving] out the wrong remedio" and cause "the sick one to get worse, or to go mad, or even to die" (62). Although neither curandera nor remedio are followed by a clear definition, this form of CS is effective. Both Spanish words are common terms used in the Latino community and are therefore not restricting or limiting to one audience. While curandera and remedio are quite generic, their Spanish translation is important because it directs our attention to two "real" elements of the culture. Because the spiritual world is deeply engrained in the Latino culture, it would only be right to keep these terms in Spanish. In other words, when Latinos think of spirits, healers, remedies, and such things, they think of their Latino culture. The beliefs that there are bad spirits originate far from the American culture; therefore, such beliefs belong to the Spanish world. As in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, some of the terms used in *So Far from God* are valuable because of their significance in the Latino community. Had Castillo chosen to use the English version of curandera and/or remedio, the magical realism intertwined in this cultural-oriented book would be lost; in English, curandera would simply be healer and remedio a cure.

GBR and RB are combined to show that CS can simultaneously be and not be inclusive. As Caridad explored being a curandera, she learned about the different healings people sought, an excellent opportunity for Castillo to bring in CS. Doña Felicia taught Caridad about "empacho and bilis; mal de ojo, caída de mollera, and susto (not to be mistaken with espanto or coraje) had

to do as much with the body as with the spirit; and *aigre*, which could be translated into a number of things, the most common being just plain gas (62-3).” For a monolingual reader, none of the terms mentioned above might mean anything. However, bilingual readers have heard of such terms in one situation or another. Whether the reader knows or does not know what *empacho* or *caída de mollera* mean, they have been exposed to such language. Initially, Castillo simply drops these terms, expecting—or perhaps even hoping—the reader has some knowledge of them.

While we do not know what her intention was in dropping so many terms related to the spiritual world, Castillo created an imaginary spiritual world for the reader. As if hearing our concerns, a couple of passages later, Castillo gave the definition of some of the ailments she mentioned, sometimes even including a brief paragraph about how they came about or how to get rid of them. For example, *aigre* is defined as “internal draft,” which “is another way of saying ‘catching a draft,’ only it’s on the inside” (66), and *mal de ojo* is defined as “evil eye,” which “comes from admiring the child too much” (68). The definitions of these terms allow bilingual readers to confirm what they already know or learn something new all the while informing those not so familiar with such a world.

Castillo acknowledges the differences in Spanish-speaking cultures by incorporating radical bilingualism. While some people communicate in cushioned Spanish, which allows us to understand the significance of a word without having to be a fluent speaker of the language, others communicate through radical bilingualism, speaking directly to those of his/her culture. When Caridad, one of the younger sisters, participates in a pilgrimage with Doña Felicia, she falls in love. Though she was excited for the experience since “during [her] growing-up years it had been difficult to take [her and her sisters] all together anywhere because of La Loca’s inability to be around people” (72), Doña Felicia found Caridad hiding away in her “tapalo.”

Despite the contextual evidence, a non-Spanish speaker might not understand what *tapalo* means. All that is told is that Doña Felicia pulls Caridad's "faded away tapalo away from Caridad's grasp" (75). In this instance, the surroundings of the words are not sufficient enough for the reader to assume what the word means. When pulling away the tapalo from Caridad, Doña Felicia compares Caridad to La Loca. But because we've seen many sides of La Loca's personality, we do not know for sure how Caridad is becoming like her, which means we cannot understand why Caridad would be gripping her *tapalo*. If the reader is interested enough or has the cultural background in which this is written, they might have a better idea of the sentence means. If neither of those are the case, Castillo then has just created a wall between the novel and her audience. Because *tapalo* is an insignificant word, the reader may not care enough to learn what it means.

While Castillo helps readers have a better understanding of the spiritual world in *So Far from God*, there are instances where she leaves the reader wondering what she may be referring to. We hear Doña Felicia tell us a bit about her remedies, including how to get rid of *aigre*. To do so, a person must turn to "ventosas" because they are "a tremendous treatment for getting rid of *aigre* in various places in the body" (67). With just enough detail, doña Felicia explains *ventosas* without giving a concrete definition; all we are told is that this treatment "requires the use of a candle" (67). If the reader is unfamiliar with the term, he/she might not be able to picture such ritual being practice despite the narration. By including RB, Castillo is risking losing her audience because some may or may not be able to visualize what she is describing. For example, if an English speaker is told to conduct a religious ritual he/she is unfamiliar with, he/she will not know what to expect. Without anything to make reference or compare to, a person cannot even imagine what something is supposed to look like. In other words, if Castillo's readers have never

heard of *ventosas* nor are familiar with a similar remedy, he/she will not be able to picture how doña Felicia, or any curandera for that matter, would go about such procedure.

If the inclusion of an uncommon word reoccurs with no explanation, radical bilingualism becomes a problem. As Doña Felicia revisits the night Caridad was abused, she remembers dreaming “of la *malogra* . . . [jumping] and [running] about the house with her escopeta” (77). The term la *malogra* shows up in a couple of sentences after that, but the author never defines it. Including this technique can be interpreted as the author speaking directly to any culture that is familiar with such a term, which is either a good thing or bad thing. By speaking directly to a specific group of Latinos, Castillo connects to them, making them recall any experience they might’ve had with the term, whether first-hand or not. However, this can also be an issue as Castillo excludes some Latinos—and really, anybody that is unfamiliar to this—from a world that they may want to explore. The danger in this is that not every Latino culture is the same. For example, if a Spanish-speaking Latino has little exposure to the culture, he/she might feel left out even though he/she is not an outsider.

Similarly, to Alvarez, Castillo demonstrates a clear understanding of language roots. So *Far from God* gives the reader an opportunity to see how powerful a culture’s religious beliefs are. Instead of focusing on her heritage, Castillo “explores both the benefits and liabilities of syncretism, the combination of different religious and philosophical beliefs” (Alarcón 145) in order to show a strong “sense of tradition” (Stavans 38). The spiritual world is a recognizable aspect of the Latino community who believes in “vibes,” or the aura of a person, so by choosing to switch to the Spanish language every time Castillo talks about spirits or ailments, she is recognizing their origins.

Although *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* and *So Far from God* explore different forms of identity—one focuses primarily on the strong connection between an individual and his/her family, while the other calls attention to the power of religion—the characters in both stories are defined by the Spanish language. Instead of speaking only in English, the characters include Spanish in their speech during important experiences that ultimately define who they are. Despite the different uses of CS, the characters’ “real” persona is most present when they are in touch with their linguistically and culturally distinct worlds.

Caramelo: A Mixture

Born on December 20, 1954, Sandra Cisneros is the only daughter of seven kids to a Mexican father and a Chicana mother. The Mexican-American writer is known for the observations and explorations she makes regarding the working-class community. She received her B.A. in English from Loyola University of Chicago in 1976 and her M.F.A. in Creative Writing from the University of Iowa in 1978.

In 1995, Cisneros received the McArthur Foundation Fellowship. Shortly after, she was inspired to found Los MacArturos, a Latino version of the fellowship she received. She went on to found the Macondo Foundation, encouraging writers to become involved, and the Alfredo Cisneros Del Moral Foundation, granting funds to Texas writers. She was Our Lady of the Lake University’s Writer in Residence. She received the Texas Institute of Letters Dobie-Paisano Fellowship in 1984; Illinois Artists Grant in 1986; Chicano Short Story Award from the University of Arizona in 1986; Roberta Holloway Lectureship in 1988; one National Endowment of the Arts Fellowships in 1982 for poetry and another for fiction in 1988; an honorary Doctor of Letters from the State University of New York in 1993; an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters

from Loyola University in 2002; Texas Medal of the Arts in 2003; the Fifth Star Award in 2015; and an honorary degree from the University of North Carolina in 2016 (Cisneros).

The migration of her family from Mexico to the U.S. and vice-versa is present in most, if not all, of Cisneros' writings. In fact, her inability to feel connected to either one of these cultures influenced her to write, exploring both her role in her family—as the only girl—and in the community. Some of her publications include: *Bad Boys* in 1980; *The House on Mango Street* in 1984; *My Wicked Ways* in 1987; *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* in 1991; *Loose Woman* in 1994; *Hairs/Pelitos* in 1994; *Vintage Cisneros* in 2004; *Bravo Bruno!* In 2011; *Have You Seen Marie?* In 2012; and *A House of My Own: Stories from My Life* in 2015.

Caramelo was published in 2002 and was selected as a notable book in “*The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Seattle Times*” (Cisneros). The book won the Premio Napoli in 2005 and was nominated for England's Orange Prize. *Caramelo* is told from the perspective of Celaya (Lala), who is the only girl of seven kids, as is Cisneros. Throughout the story, Lala experiences situations that often leave her unfulfilled, placing her in an in-between box that doesn't allow her to claim either her American or Mexican culture. Cisneros uses code-switching in a different form than Alvarez and Castillo do, focusing on the switch native-Spanish speakers make when they speak English.

Cisneros changes the definition of CS a bit in *Caramelo*, demonstrating the different forms of dialects in one tongue. Although we may think of CS as a technique that can only be used when a person changes from one language to another, it can also be used in the back-and-forth switches from one form of language to another. For example, CS occurs when we alter the way we talk depending on our audience. The English we use around our friends is different than the English we use around our professors; although both forms of communication are types of

Englishes, they can be categorized as forms of CS. Cisneros' play with CS demonstrates that CS is used even without having to switch from one language to another; it can happen within one language. In the first couple of chapters, the characters' dialogue shows just how the Reyes family pronounced some English words. As the family is packing for their road trip to Mexico, Lala takes a second to appreciate the noise around her. The "Chicago traffic from the Northwest and Congress Expressways" is heard simultaneously with "another roar; in Spanish from the kitchen radio, in English from TV cartoons, and in a mix of the two from [Aunty's] boys begging for—*Un nikle* for Italian lemonade" (6). Lala retells exactly what she heard from the boys, allowing the reader to hear the characters. Initially, this form of CS may appear as a bit inconsiderate, almost as if making fun of the boys' speech, but as we learn more about the characters and their family dynamics, we can appreciate the authenticity engrained in it. Cisneros "invents a system of dialogue that borrows from the Spanish" (Stavans 32) by including such dialect. Since we become familiar with Lala's feelings towards the multicultural world she is part of, we can assume that in retelling stories with language such as "un nikle," she is embracing her Spanish language roots, reminding us that although her family knows English, their roots will always remain in Mexico. The family is reminded of this during their annual summer visits to their homeland. Lala says "every summer it's something unbelievable that smells like *hot queques*" (7). Here, the character is imitating the language of their community. Cisneros could've chosen to say "hot cakes" instead of "hot queques," simplifying the language since hot cakes adds little to no value in the overall message. However, in using "hot queques," she gives the readers to opportunity to indulge in the real language of Mexicans, or at least those in Lala's family.

Lala's uncles bluff, saying they receive the entire summer off work to attend their family trips, but Lala knows it's not true. She knows that if her uncles "don't like a job, they quit," saying, "Hell you . . . Get outta . . . Full of *sheet*." The uncles are particular about their bosses too; if "they don't like their boss, they pick up their hammers and their time cards and walk out cursing in two languages" (8), says Lala. In this example, "sheet" is neither part of the Spanish nor English language but a combination of both. In switching from standard English to Mexican English—English with a heavy Spanish accent—Cisneros calls attention to a form of CS we never consider. This is an example of Bailey's definition of CS in which languages twists and turns because the language is bent to become part of the uncles' dialect. Although it does not follow the traditional form of CS, the uncles' language is a demonstrating of such technique because of its switch from one tongue to another.

Despite the numerous times the family has visited the Awful Grandmother's home, the children chose to disregard the rules, sitting somewhere on the roof because they enjoy the view. The Awful Grandmother disapproves of their behavior and scolds them, complaining that the "children raised on the other side don't know enough to answer,— *¿Mande Usted?*?" because they answer "What? . . . in the horrible language, which the Awful Grandmother hears as *¿Guat?*—What?" (28). Because the Awful Grandmother's native language is Spanish, when her grandchildren speak English, she feels disrespected. She takes offense to this, referring to the children's language as a "horrible language." The Awful Grandmother is a traditional character who tries to instill in her grandchildren the Mexican culture, something they haven't gotten enough of since they grew up "on the other side." In the children's Mexican-American culture, it seems perfectly fine to answer "What?" when an elderly asks something; however, the Spanish translation of the word just seems disrespectful to the grandmother, who hears "*Guat?*" Here,

Cisneros shows the cultural barriers that separates her from the children. As with “hot queques,” “what” has no contextual purpose. However, Cisneros adds significance to the word by writing it as “*guat*,” which is what a Spanish-native speaker hears. Again, this is a form of CS because the children’s native language is transformed into the English Awful Grandma associates with the U.S.

Caramelo questions what it means to be a speaker of a language, including scenes in which a character is criticized for not filling the shoes of a Spanish or English speaker. In doing this, Cisneros redefines what it means to be a speaker of a language. For example, when Awful Grandma and Zoila—Lala’s mother—get into an argument, in which Father is expected to pick sides, Zoila offends the grandmother, calling her a “*metiche*” for intruding in her marriage. Zoila’s anger boils because she stayed out of Grandma’s business, hoping the grandma would be the same. Upset that her daughter-in-law is angry with her *mijo*, the grandma responds, “*Atrevida!* . . . My son could’ve done a lot better than marrying a woman who can’t even speak proper Spanish. You sound like you escaped from the ranch” (85). Cushioned Spanish is used in this scene, presenting what a Mexican-American argument might sound like. Despite giving us insight into what can be used as bad talk, Cisneros also calls our attention to an even bigger issue: what is considered being a “good” speaker of a given language. In the scenes prior to this one, Zoila uses both Spanish and English to communicate with the rest of the characters, but not once is her language criticized for being proper or improper. Awful Grandmother’s questioning of Zoila is worth analyzing because it shows that language does indeed influence the identity of the speakers. We see this issue rise when Lala is criticized for the opposite. After transferring schools, she found it hard to fit in with the girls, being called “*bolilla*” or “*gabacha*.” Lala asks, “Who wants to be called a white girl? I mean, not even white girls want to be called white girls”

(354). Those same girls later beat up Lala, commenting, “Think you’re so smart because you talk like a white girl. *Huerca babosa*. You think you’re better than us, right?” (356). Lala doesn’t understand why she is being ostracized for speaking the way she does, after all, she *is* Mexican. Unlike her mother who is criticized for speaking her native language “incorrectly,” Lala is judged for speaking English properly. The inclusion of both of these situations demonstrates the boundaries that languages set for speakers. In one instance, a character is frowned upon for not speaking her mother tongue the way she ought to, as if there was only one way to speak one’s native language. On the other side, a character is frowned upon for assimilating too much, whatever that means. In both scenes, the characters accusing Zoila and Lala incorporate Spanish into their speech, almost as if reminding Zoila and Lala of their roots. Cisneros forces us to rethink the boxes in which we place people who are either native speakers or learners of a language foreign. By connecting such an issue to CS, the author proves that the dialects we express ourselves in does affect the perception others have of us.

While Cisneros does incorporate similar forms of CS as Castillo and Alvarez, the most effective form she uses is one that separates her from other Spanish-speaking writers. *Caramelo* incorporates Spanish as part of the everyday language of the characters, but also demonstrates something that is below the surface—the continuous struggle of Spanish-speakers to conform to a culture that’s not theirs. Although not directly stated, Cisneros’ fight to find her place in both her Mexican and American worlds is seen through the characters, but more specifically, in those whose assimilation is present in their spoken word.

Code-switching in Action

When we think of language, we think of what’s on the surface—a form of communication. However, language is denser than that. Alvarez, Castillo, and Cisneros have

proven that the way we chose to communicate says something about our identity. Torres quotes Evelyn Nien-Ming Ch'ien, saying "'Weird English,'" or any English unfamiliar to us, "'wants to do more with English than communicate what the subject is; it also wants to show who the speaker is and how the speaker can appropriate the language' (8)" (75-6). But this isn't only the case for English; this is the case for any language because aside from its functioning role, it allows us to utilize it as a form of expression. *How the García Girls Lost their Accents, So Far from God, and Caramelo* are examples in which the characters' language "show who the speaker is." To understand "who the speaker is," we must first acknowledge their perspective of the world. In other words, we must look at the things that allow a person to experience the world as they do, such as their native and "learned" tongue. Take an emotion for example. When you think of love, you think of a person *and* a language. Although your experience might be quite different than anybody else's, any speaker experiences this, even if it's unconsciously. It seems silly to associate a language with an emotion, but it's true. As a bilingual speaker, I am convinced that the way I love is influenced by my native language, mostly because the first encounter I had with this emotion was at home. Although I now know the English translation of *te quiero*, feeling loved is tied to my cultural roots and my Spanish language. Alvarez, Castillo, and Cisneros give us an insight into the way their characters loved too. Even further than that, the authors give us an inside scoop into the everyday life of a person who knowingly or unknowingly jumps from one world to another. The "code-switching" in *How the García Girls Lost their Accents, So Far from God, and Caramelo* "is not only metaphorical, but [also] represents a reality where segments of the population are living between cultures and languages" (76). In other words, when the characters revert to CS, they, too, think of the first time they encountered a feeling and the language it occurred in.

The CS in Latino texts reflect the identity of both the speakers and listeners. Though it can be argued that the decision of switching from one language to another is selfish, it is rather selfless. For example, bilingual speakers who use Spanglish to communicate may be thought of as uneducated for not being fluent English speakers. However, speaking Spanglish extends the pool of people who will understand. For example, if someone uses the word *malogra*, as the characters from *So Far from God* do, a non-Spanish speaker might interpret this as inappropriate and might even feel left out. But for the speaker, being able to use *malogra* in its native language allows him/her to connect to his/her culture and community. Code-switching is best defined as the “[m]ixed Spanish-English code [which] is another means for Latinos in the U.S.A. (a) to show unity among themselves as a subset of all Hispanic-Americans, (b) to identify themselves as a group separate from their predecessors’ generation, and (c) to continue to maintain strong emotional ties with their heritage’ (373)” (Derrick 19). While CS is a way of expressing what is significant to us, it is also a way to build connections to those around us. In the same way that there is a personal connection for me between love and Spanish, there is a personal connection between *malogra* and the *So Far from God* community.

To understand who we are and where we come from, we must pay attention to the ways we communicate. When we switch from one language to another or from one dialect to another, we expose a part of ourselves to the world. Choosing to say “hello” over “hola” is more complicated than it seems. In some cases, this decision may be a simply reflection of what language makes us more complicated, or it may be more complicated, reflecting what world we first experienced.

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