

The Use of Spanish as a Literary Device
in Selected Texts by Sandra Cisneros and Esmeralda Santiago

by Natalie Jones

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Introduction

Linguists disagree on exactly how many languages exist, but the most common estimate is usually around 7,000 (Anderson). Of these some seven thousand languages, English has emerged as the foremost language spoken in the United States, with some 83% of Americans responding to a government census as English-only speakers (Ryan). However, the remaining seventeen percent of the population surveyed all spoke at least one other language: that is, approximately 60.5 million Americans. With so many multilingual people living in the United States, one would expect that linguistic diversity would also appear in American novels. Readers have to question what it means to be bilingual, as well as how and why bilingual authors use a second language in their writing.

Merriam Webster defines “bilingual,” in this sense, as “using or able to use two languages especially with equal fluency”; but, for some speakers of two (or more) languages, bilingualism is also closely tied to a sense of personal identity (“Definition of BILINGUAL”). As bilingual author Gloria Anzaldúa states, “Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate” (Anzaldúa). Here, “code-switching” refers not to some sort of cryptography, but to the neurological process by which multilingual speakers change between languages. Even many monolingual people (those who speak only one language) are familiar with the process of code-switching: in a workplace, speech tends to be formal

and free of slang terminology, but the same type of speech patterns would single one out as very odd when among friends at a party. This process of deciding what type of speech is appropriate can also be considered a minor form of code-switching. Anzaldúa is lamenting not the difficulty of code-switching, but the fact that she must constantly translate her thoughts for monolingual speakers of either language. For Anzaldúa and other bilingual people, mixing the two languages in the presence of other bilingual speakers can be comfortable, friendly, and a way to forge a new community. The mixture of Spanish and English that Anzaldúa refers to as “Spanglish” is a common way for bilingual people to interact among themselves, communicating a word in whichever language seems most appropriate at the time. The bilingual community often makes a new home for those who feel excluded by both monolingual communities (in this case, English speakers and Spanish speakers), but in turn runs the risk of excluding monolingual speakers of either language. So why include two languages in a novel, knowing that many readers will be monolingual?

This strong sense of identity and community drives many bilingual authors to write about their experiences, whether their experiences center around learning English, connecting more to their foreign roots, or finding a new identity in a community of other bilingual speakers. According to the same US Census from earlier, Spanish is the second most common language spoken in the United States. This thesis focuses on the works of Hispanic-American authors who are bilingual in Spanish and English, and how those works are influenced by the usage of a language besides English.

Most importantly, however, is the question of what monolingual English-speaking readers can take away from a text with a secondary foreign language. In the simplest of

terms, this thesis argues that foreign language words and phrases are not included randomly. When writing a book with second language elements, an author generally does not want to overly confuse the reader. A phrase here or a word there, at most. Unless the reader is also bilingual, then the inclusion of too many foreign phrases will alienate all but the most steadfast readers with a translation dictionary at the ready. Foreign words are included carefully; cultural concepts or words that do not translate well, for instance, are much more likely to be included in the original non-English language, as opposed to the foreign usage of everyday, less content-rich words. Gustavo Perez Firmat is a literature professor at Columbia University who was born and raised in Cuba until age eleven, when he came to the United States. Perez Firmat speaks fluent Spanish and English, but speaks of a “sort of discomfort with finding [himself] between languages” that is reflected in his bilingual poetry (Perez Firmat). As previously discussed, cultural heritage is particularly important to immigrant families and features prominently in the general body of Hispanic-American literature. Perez Firmat agrees that emigrants from Spanish-speaking countries “hold onto their language as the one sort of portable piece of their homeland. Sometimes people think mother tongue, other tongue. But it's much more complicated” (Perez Firmat).

Along with stories of immigration, a recurring theme in Hispanic-American works is speakers struggling with their sense of identity. Bilinguals who know both Spanish and English sometimes combine the two languages at the same time in conversation with other bilingual speakers to produce a mixed dialect called “Spanglish.” For many bilingual people like Perez Firmat, expression in the form of both languages is sometimes the most accurate way to express one’s thoughts and feelings, even if it’s

somewhat inaccessible to monolingual speakers of either language. Perez Firmat discusses his personal experience with a somewhat disjointed identity as a bilingual speaker, saying “that's what Spanglish represents, this impossible dream of wholeness... Sometimes I have the sense that I'm a different person in Spanish than I am in English... And I think that's a very common experience of bilinguals” (Perez Firmat). Both languages are integral to Perez Firmat’s personal expression. Language is a vital part of culture, as many bilingual authors agree, and culture is a part of identity. Therefore, language itself can be a powerful part of a person’s identity. As mentioned previously, many bilinguals make a new community of two (or more) languages where they are most accepted and understood, as opposed to monolingual societies. This is another example of language as identity, or language influencing identity.

A close reading of the use of an additional foreign language in text is thus vital to a comprehensive analysis of any bilingual author’s work. Ultimately, understanding the role these foreign phrases play on the specific page as well as in the novel as a whole can be the key to better understanding a novel and the culture of the author behind it. If nearly all of a novel is in English, but as little as one foreign word is repeated periodically, the conscientious reader (or curious undergraduate English student) really cannot afford to ignore the purpose behind the inclusion of the word; clearly, it carries a deeper meaning, and understanding this meaning leads to a greater understanding of not only the novel, but also of the rich, non-English-speaking culture that the bilingual author allows readers to glimpse.

The use of Spanish within English-language novels is intentional and provides further information vital to a text’s interpretation. Additionally, the inclusion of Spanish

words and phrases is intended to enrich the in-text world, in ways such as characterizing a figure, delineating separate communities, and enhancing the setting of the novel. This thesis intends to study a Chicana author as well as a female Puerto Rican author to better draw cross-cultural parallels of bilingual characters trapped between two (often contentious) monolingual worlds. Focusing on female authors is an intentional choice for this paper. As already mentioned, female authors are frequently overlooked in favor of male authors, including in the realm of Hispanic-American novelists. Female Spanish-speaking authors are a minority within a minority, but their voices are just as important as their male or monolingual-English counterparts and deserve to be heard. Also, women are sometimes seen as the tradition bearers for cultural heritage given that their gender role generally includes raising the next generation, whereas men are not as traditionally assigned the same responsibility in society. If women pass on cultural heritage, their interpretations of the roles Spanish and a Spanish-speaking culture have in an English-speaking society bear extra importance. Finally, the female authors who publish semi-autobiographical accounts of their move from a Spanish-speaking culture to English-speaking United States mainland experience difficulties that male Spanish-speaking immigrants rarely or never face, including “exotic” sexualization, misogynistic treatment by both English- and Spanish-speaking communities (including strict behavioral expectations, restrictive gender roles, or devaluation of cognitive abilities), and sexual harassment or assault. These experiences are expected also to influence the authors’ use of Spanish. Overall, understanding the texts more fully, including how the authors use Spanish within the novel, has implications for a greater understanding of diversity in the world, even beyond a literary study.

Before describing my research and writing process, I must first mention my approach to cultural differences and terminology in this paper. I am a white person writing about the use of a language I speak at only an elementary level, and cultures of which I am not a member. In this project, as in my daily life, I have attempted to uphold the highest sense of respect and integrity for cultures other than my own. Cultural differences are interesting and valuable, and my research is intended to honor the differences between Hispanic cultures and my own. For example, a recent study of Hispanic people of various backgrounds found that most prefer to be referred to as “Hispanic” rather than “Latino” or “Latinx” (Noe-Bustamante et al.). Following these results, I have elected to use “Hispanic” as a multi-cultural, gender-neutral term for Spanish speaking cultures throughout this paper when a specific background is unknown or comparisons are being made. Language pertaining to culture is vitally important to this research concerning linguistic choices, as language and culture are inherently intertwined.

To study the use of Spanish phrases in English-language novels, the first stage is to research existing studies. Ernst Rudin’s book, *Tender Accents of Sound: Spanish in the Chicano Novel in English* studies the use of Spanish using a literary approach much like this thesis aims to do. Rudin’s approach to analyzing Spanish in the works he selected are similar to the ones chosen for this thesis, and his previous work in this field is invaluable. However, Rudin comments on a general lack of literature by Hispanic-American authors before 1985 and therefore focuses the corpus of his work on male authors. Additionally, Rudin’s book is limited to Mexican-American authors (Chicano/a authors). As previously discussed, female Hispanic-American authors were largely underrepresented in literature before 1985, and the inclusion of their work in this project is intended to explore female

Hispanic-American voices and recognize the differences in their experiences from male authors. After this research was conducted, I needed to acquire the source texts used in the main body of the thesis.

The books chosen for this paper are *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, the short story “Woman Hollering Creek” from *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* also by Cisneros, and *When I Was Puerto Rican* by Esmeralda Santiago. Cisneros is a well-known female Mexican-American author, and her novels and short stories are frequently used in high school and university literature courses. Cisneros is regarded as a key figure in the development of the Chicana literary genre, and including her works in this thesis is almost mandatory given her contributions to the field (Madsen). *The House on Mango Street* is one of Cisneros’ most well-known works, and contains Spanish words pertaining to Hispanic culture, especially regarding food. Additionally, many of Cisneros’ fictional character names have an important meaning in Spanish: for example, naming two helpful characters “Graciela” [Grace] and “Felice” [Happiness] in “Woman Hollering Creeek.” For nonfiction representation, Santiago is a Puerto Rican author who moved to the United States at age thirteen, and her novel explores the differences in culture she experiences between New York and Puerto Rico. This narrative is central to the topic of bilingualism in literature, and even includes a glossary of some of the numerous Spanish terms present in the text. Santiago’s book offers an especially impactful perspective for monolingual English speakers as she depicts a young woman trying to teach herself English. One memorable example is a phonetic rendering of English words from a Spanish-speaker’s perspective, like replacing “common” with the similar-sounding Spanish word “*cómo*.” Additionally, Santiago’s

use of Spanish is likely to differ somewhat from Cisneros' due to their different cultural backgrounds, offering a potentially significant contrast as well as intriguing similarities. The differences are valuable for a more nuanced understanding of the authors' positions, but the similarities are also important for drawing broader conclusions regarding the use of Spanish as a literary device in primarily English texts.

After reading and analyzing the texts, compiling a list of Spanish words/phrases for each text is necessary. Analyzing the usage of these foreign words in terms of literal definition, cultural meaning, and frequency in the text constitutes a significant portion of the thesis. Further analyzing the impact the phrases have on each text provides deeper insight into the usage of the Spanish terms, after which the scope of the project broadens to compare and contrast the different authors' use of Spanish language. Finally, broader connections are made about the individual and collective use of Spanish phrases within English-language novels; for instance, a generational difference in use of Spanish (often, more Spanish appearing in conversations with older characters), or the use of Spanish as a link to cultural identity. The implications of the conclusions contribute to the field of literary research and advocate for cultural diversity in the United States.

Chapter 1: From Mexico to Mango Street

The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros is likely the most well-known of the three texts covered in this thesis. The book features an approximately twelve-year-old female protagonist named Esperanza in a short series of vignettes that take place over a year. Esperanza lives with her parents and three siblings in a low-income Hispanic neighborhood in Chicago. Over the course of the novel, Esperanza experiences puberty and her interests begin to change as she transitions from childhood to adulthood. She begins to have interest in boys and sex, but also finds new dangers as she matures. Female characters feature most prominently in the novel. Esperanza begins to secretly write poetry as a way to express herself as she deals with problems like shame at school for her family's financial background and her experience with sexual assault. Minerva, who is only a few years older than Esperanza and already married to an abusive husband with whom she has two children, is the only person Esperanza entrusts with her poetry. In the latter half of the novel, other women like Minerva appear in desperate situations which Esperanza becomes determined to avoid. Rafaela's husband locks her inside the apartment so that she has to send money down a clothesline to get someone to buy a drink for her. Mamacita is a Mexican bride who is very unhappy and apparently does not wish to leave her apartment. Even Esperanza's close school friend, Sally, marries a man before eighth grade and is cut off from the world in her new house. Esperanza decides by the end of the novel that she will move away from Mango Street where her family lives and have a house of her own, but that she also must return to help the other women of Mango Street escape their living situations.

Cisneros appears to have based much of Esperanza's experiences on her own life, though there are too many differences to call *The House on Mango Street* an autobiographical novel. The similarities, however, are drawn from Cisneros' real adolescence traveling between Mexico and different houses in Chicago with her six brothers (Cisneros, "Mango Street Celebrates 25 Years," "Sandra Cisneros Biography"). The close relationship between the author and the content of the novel emphasizes that Esperanza's experiences, while fictional, are extremely relevant to real people in the real world. Cisneros began writing *The House on Mango Street* at the University of Iowa, where she felt "displaced and uncomfortable as a person of color, as a woman, [and] as a person from a working-class background," much like the feelings Esperanza expresses about her family's financial standing and as a girl growing up (Cisneros, "Mango Street Celebrates 25 Years"). Also like the novel's narrator, Cisneros used to write poetry in school. For Cisneros this led to a lifetime love of literature, culminating in her career as an author. *The House on Mango Street* is notable in the literary canon for introducing more Mexican-American characters to mainstream readers and for its unique style. Cisneros said of *The House on Mango Street*, "I wanted [the novel] to be lyrical enough so that it would pass muster with my finicky [university] classmates, but also open to accept all of the people I loved in the neighborhood I came from" (Cisneros, "Mango Street Celebrates 25 Years"). In other words, Cisneros' simple but lyrical prose is an intentional choice to appeal to an audience of varied educational levels. If Cisneros' style and word choices were intentional, then her inclusion of Spanish words must be similarly chosen with purpose.

The most common Spanish words in *The House on Mango Street* are names, usually names of women in Esperanza's life. Cisneros chose the names of her characters with deliberate symbolic intent. The most obvious example is the character Angel Vargas. Angel is a child of an unknown age with an unspecified but large number of siblings. Esperanza reports that Angel "dropped from the sky like a sugar donut" and died from the fall (30). Angel is the first character to die in the novel, and the obviously religious name is connected to Angel's early ascent to (presumably) the Christian heaven full of angels. Another prominent example of this naming convention is the protagonist, Esperanza. Her name means "hope," and the character has a hope for a better life that drives her actions throughout the novel, especially at the end. Esperanza addresses the meaning of her name directly in the novel, saying, "In English, my name means hope. In Spanish, it means too many letters. It means sadness. It means waiting" (10). Esperanza's view of her name begins a longer exploration of the divide between English-speaking and Spanish-speaking societies, a common theme for bilingual characters. Esperanza interprets her name's connotations as vastly different, perhaps even opposite, between languages. Further reinforcing such linguistic dissonance, while Esperanza is waiting to grow up in the first half of the novel she expresses frustration with her foreign-sounding name and its spelling difficulty. However, near the end of the novel, the Three Sisters emphasize her name and allow her to make a wish (105). Esperanza making a wish and deciding to follow through is an expression of her hope for her own future. While the reader does not receive explicit confirmation, one may assume that Esperanza is embodying her name. She is the next generation, determined to make a better life for herself and powered by her hope. Additionally, her embrace of hope for her future is also

metaphorically an embrace of her name in both Spanish and English. Esperanza no longer views her cultural heritage as shameful or sad, but has accepted that she can be as hopeful in Spanish as she can in English.

In another naming example, the woman Esperanza entrusts with her poetry is named Minerva, sharing a name with the Roman goddess of wisdom. Minerva does show her own intellect in writing her own poetry that she shares with Esperanza, but she also furthers Esperanza's wisdom. Minerva is trapped in a cycle of abuse, and notably, Esperanza expresses her desire for a house of her own on the following page (Cisneros, *Mango Street* 86). She and Minerva are very similar in their ages and love of poetry, and readers assume that Esperanza concludes that she wants a different life for herself, one better and more independent than Minerva's.

Like Esperanza and Minerva, the character Mamacita is interestingly named. According to Mexico City native Laura Martinez, *mamacita* literally means "little mother." However, the word is almost exclusively used to figuratively mean "hot mama." The word carries a strong sexual connotation, as *mamacita* is "inextricably linked to a man's perception of a woman as an object of sexual desire. A man calls you *mamacita* because what he really wants is to get in bed with you and turn you into the mother of his children" (L. Martinez). Mamacita, which appears to be the character's actual name, or at least the only name Esperanza knows, is also used in conjunction with the word *mamasota* in the book. Like *mamacita*, *mamasota* is also used to refer to attractive women, meaning "hottie." Esperanza says that her friend Rachel calling Mamacita *mamasota* is mean, though her reasoning for this is unclear (Cisneros, *Mango Street* 76). Perhaps Rachel intended the word as cruel fatphobic irony, since Esperanza reports that

Mamacita is very fat and had to be pushed out of the cab in which she arrived. No references to Mamacita's beauty seem to be made, only to her sadness at living in Chicago and reluctance to speak English.

Overall, Cisneros' use of Spanish in *The House on Mango Street* is meant to highlight the differences between Spanish-speaking and English-speaking cultures, as well as culturally-significant aspects like gender roles and food. Because language is inherently tied to culture, Cisneros' decision to include Spanish words in an English novel must be viewed as an intentional literary device meant to further support the themes in her work. Cisneros names her characters with each one's overall symbolism in mind, and to a reader with a Spanish background or an affinity for name meanings, the (mostly) Spanish names carry great significance about each character's role in the novel. The use of food words in Spanish is also significant as a setting indicator, reminding the audience of Esperanza's cultural background in a fairly subtle way. Cisneros' lack of italics for her most frequently-referenced Spanish word also helps draw the reader into the novel without the barrier of immediately registering "tamales" as a normally-italicized foreign word. This strengthens the audience's connection not only to Esperanza as the narrator, but also to her Mexican, Spanish-speaking culture.

Chapter 2: Texas and Telenovelas

Sandra Cisneros' short story "Woman Hollering Creek" spans only thirteen pages, but it has over fifty instances of Spanish words or names, making this well-known short story significant to this research. Cisneros tells the story mostly from the perspective of Cleófilas, a Mexican woman who moves to the United States with her new husband. Cleófilas experiences domestic violence and a general disillusionment with her life in Texas, realizing that her life is nothing like the *telenovelas* ("soap operas") she loved to watch. Finally, she goes to the doctor when she is pregnant with a second child, where Graciela, a medical worker, arranges for her friend Felice to help Cleófilas leave the city and escape her abusive husband. As they drive over Woman Hollering Creek, Felice lets out a loud whoop that startles Cleófilas and then makes her laugh, surprising herself. Like other texts by Cisneros, "Woman Hollering Creek" has profoundly feminist themes within an exploration of culture and identity. Gender roles are important to Cleófilas' Mexican background, and Cisneros' use of Spanish reflects the importance she places on gender.

"Woman Hollering Creek" actually has a tie for the most common Spanish word. Both used eight times, *telenovela* and *arroyo* appear frequently in the text. *Telenovela*, as stated previously, means "soap opera," and was one of the consistent entertainments Cleófilas enjoyed in Mexico. *Telenovelas* differ from English-language soap operas by their format. The English-language soap operas tend to have intricate plots with a core cast of characters for many seasons. *Telenovelas* grew out of novels produced for television and radio dramas. The episodes are divided into chapters, like a print novel. They are well-known for being very dramatic and often unrealistic in plots

(“Telenovela”). In her hometown, *telenovelas* were a subject Cleófilas and her female friends could talk about with regularity, and she misses her access to both the television shows and socializing with her friends after her move to Texas (Cisneros, “Woman Hollering” 52). Cleófilas often compares her life to the plot of a *telenovela*, except “the episodes get sadder and sadder” (52). She imagined her married life would be romantic and wonderful, but she is miserable instead. The idea of a *telenovela* is very important to understanding the way Cleófilas views the world, informing her actions later in the story. Using the Spanish word for a soap opera emphasizes the cultural significance the shows held for Cleófilas in Mexico, and now that she is in an English-speaking country, she no longer has access to that form of entertainment and socializing.

The other most frequent word, *arroyo*, means “creek” or “brook.” Cisneros exclusively refers to Woman Hollering Creek by this Spanish word unless using the full English name. The Spanish name for the same creek is *La Gritona*, which could alternatively be translated as “the screamer” or “the screaming woman” (SpanishDict). Cisneros also refers to the legend of La Llorona within the short story as a connection to the water. La Llorona, meaning “The Weeping Woman,” is a Mexican folk story with several variations. The most common version is that a woman’s husband grew to no longer love her and only loved their two children. In a fit of jealousy, the woman drowned her two children and then herself. Upon going to heaven, she is forbidden from entering without her children. The woman was doomed to wander riversides looking for her children, dressed in white and crying (“La Llorona”). The legend of the Weeping Woman has some strong similarities to Cleófilas’ living situation: she is expecting her second child, her husband is cheating on her, and she feels like wailing. While sitting

with her baby on a grassy area by the creek that sounds like La Llorona to her, Cleófilas “Wonders if something as quiet as this drives a woman to the darkness under the trees” (Cisneros, “Woman Hollering” 51). Though the original folktale is a tragedy for the weeping woman, in Cisneros’ text “La Llorona is viewed from a feminist angle, and the model of a passive, wailing woman is transformed into an active, hollering woman that takes charge of her life” (Malli 177). Unlike the tragic ending of La Llorona’s story or a wonderful wedding ending of a *telenovela*, Cleófilas escapes her situation with the help of other women. The women previously mentioned, Felice and Graciela, have names laden with symbolic significance, as do other characters in the novel.

Felice, the woman who drives Cleófilas away from her husband and hollers as she crosses the *arroyo*, is a figure of strength and the happiness that can be found in independence. Suitably, “Felice” means “happiness.” Graciela’s name simply means “grace.” Cleófilas’ Mexican friend Chela’s name means “consolation,” a fitting name for a friend, while in contrast, two of her husband’s friends are named Maximiliano and Manolo, meaning “greatest” and “God is with us.” The men’s names are perhaps meant to be ironic, since they make rude sexual insinuations to Cleófilas, or otherwise may be intended to emphasize the “greater” power of men in traditional Mexican society. The male gender is considered “greatest” and favored by God, leaving women in a rather vulnerable position, as Cleófilas seems to realize by the creek banks with her son. Also in Texas, where Cleófilas lives a miserable and isolated life, her widowed neighbors are named Dolores, meaning “sorrows,” and Soledad, meaning “solitude.” Cisneros has carefully chosen a symbolic, meaningful name for each of her characters. Interestingly, though Graciela guesses Cleófilas is named after “one of those Mexican saints,” I could

find no evidence of a saint by the same or similar name, nor any meaning for the name at all (54).

Cleófilas is named uniquely in a cast of characters with symbolically significant names, so one may assume that the lack of name meaning is also significant. Perhaps Cisneros means to suggest that Cleófilas' actions are comparable to a martyr's, since Graciela considers this possibility. Another likely explanation is that Cleófilas needs a special name to be the star of her own life that she so often compares to a tragic *telenovela*. Cleófilas says she would have to change her name to get a happy *telenovela* ending, to "something more poetic than Cleófilas. Everything happened to women with names like jewels. But what happened to a Cleófilas? Nothing. Nothing but a crack in the face" (53). But though she does not achieve the television romance she once longed for before her disastrous marriage, Cleófilas does get a somewhat happy ending. Her story ends with her laughing as she and her children successfully escape her abusive husband. The uniqueness of Cleófilas' name may be Cisneros showing that her main character may not have a jeweled name, but she can still find happiness for herself.

"Woman Hollering Creek" has a highly concentrated amount of Spanish for a relatively short story. The Spanish is not only used by Cleófilas in her private thoughts, but also by other characters in conversation. A laundromat worker speaks to Cleófilas in Spanish to ask if she has understood a rule (46). Graciela speaks with mixed English and Spanish to her friend Felice, at one point even combining the languages to express the common phrase "goodbye" as "*Bueno* bye" (55). Similarly, Cleófilas describes Felice's speech as "a Spanish pocked with English," and Cisneros gives Felice a complementary amount of italicized Spanish words in the English short story (55). In other words, the

presence of Spanish permeates the entire short story. Most of the characters speak and think in Spanish, and Cisneros preserves this aspect of their identities by including Spanish words and phrases even in the English-language story.

Spanish in this short story is also used once again to show the divide between cultures. One instance of Spanish early in the story is “*en el otro lado*,” which means “on the other side,” in a reference to the other side of the Mexico/United States border (43). Though the major conflict of the story is personal, concerning Cleófilas’ disillusionment with married life, a secondary conflict is Cleófilas adjusting to life in the United States instead of Mexico. A laundromat worker informs her that “in this country [the United States] you cannot let your baby walk around with no diaper and his pee-pee hanging out” because that would not be “nice” (46). Very little is nice about Cleófilas’ life in Texas, as she is cut off from her Mexican friends and family and still isolated from making new friends in the United States. Her use of Spanish often relates to her longing for home, for example, when she thinks wistfully of her Mexican hometown, or the many *telenovela* characters she references in stark contrast to her own living situation. Using Spanish for the phrase “on the other side” is a purposeful emphasis on the division between the United States and Mexico, not only geographically, but culturally.

Like in *The House on Mango Street*, Cisneros continues to use Spanish to draw attention to cultural differences. Cleófilas often speaks of her life in Mexico with Spanish terms, and tries to bring in those same terms to her life in the United States with limited success. For example, Cleófilas longs for the restful, shaded town square, the *zócalo*, in her Mexican hometown (50). The use of Spanish here, rather than simply stating “town square” in English, draws attention to the gathering place of friends that Cleófilas no

longer has access to in the United States. Unlike Cleófilas, who seems to speak only or primarily Spanish, her saviors Felice and Graciela both speak in Spanglish, a mixture of Spanish and English, for they are a mixture of Hispanic (presumably Mexican) and United States cultures (whether through birth or residence). Spanish in “Woman Hollering Creek” is, with few exceptions, used for words pertaining to Mexican culture and Cleófilas’ longing for her previous living situation.

This is similar to Cisneros’ use of Spanish in *The House on Mango Street*, in which the majority of Spanish words were related to food. Many of the instances of Spanish in *The House on Mango Street* are household-related words. Because cooking is traditionally a feminine activity and Cisneros concentrates on female characters, perhaps the novel has more opportunity for food-related Spanish words to occur than other types of Spanish words. Some examples of food mentioned in the novel are *frijoles* (refried beans), *tamales* (meat, beans, and cheese wrapped in dough and cooked in corn husks), and *tembleque* (Puerto Rican coconut pudding). Cisneros mentions *tamales* three times in the novel, which is unusual since most instances of Spanish in *The House on Mango Street* are words only used once. First, Esperanza compares a man’s feet to *tamales*, saying his feet are “fat and doughy like thick tamales” (Cisneros *Mango Street* 39). Later, the Latin American food is referenced twice at a baptism party that Esperanza and her family attend (Cisneros, *Mango Street* 47). All three times Cisneros chooses not to italicize “tamales,” even though she italicizes other food-related words like “*tembleque*.”

The reasoning for the lack of italics could be the simple acknowledgement that much of the English-speaking audience would be familiar with *tamales* as a food item, and there is no English equivalent for the Latin American cultural food. Another possible

reason might be Cisneros' desire not to mark the word as foreign. Italicizing words in another language draws attention to them in the text, perhaps unnecessary attention to a word only describing a food item. Not italicizing a foreign word allows the reader to continue more smoothly and treats the foreign word as an ordinary inclusion in the story much like how the food item is an ordinary inclusion in Esperanza's daily life. Food is an intrinsic part of culture, just like the town square or soap operas that Cleófilas misses in "Woman Hollering Creek." As Rudin's book notes, "Mexican Americans... associate Spanish with family life, a sense of togetherness and belonging, with a nostalgic view of childhood" (Rudin 48).

In both works, Cisneros uses Spanish as a way to strengthen the main character's connection to family and, by extension, to Mexican culture. Cisneros's work blends a scattering of Spanish words fluently into the majority of English. The mixture of the two languages is especially prominent in Graciela's speech in "Woman Hollering Creek" and in the speech of older characters in *The House on Mango Street*. By using more Spanish when discussing Mexican culture, Cisneros demonstrates that culture and language are inseparable. Language is a vital part of culture, and Cisneros' intentional inclusion of Spanish words surrounding cultural strong points like food and older relatives reinforces this belief.

Chapter 3: Religion and Rural Puerto Ricans

Like Cisneros, Esmeralda Santiago uses Spanish to reinforce cultural comparisons. *When I was Puerto Rican* is the first of three autobiographical memoirs by Santiago and covers her childhood in rural Puerto Rico and her adjustment to life in New York as a thirteen-year-old. Santiago describes her parents' dysfunctional marriage and her responsibilities as the oldest of a large and growing family (in total, eleven children). Life in her rural town of Macún was isolated from much of the world, and young Santiago felt a rebellious sense of pride in the term *jibara*, a Puerto Rican colloquial word defined in the glossary of the book as a "Rural Puerto Rican with distinctive dialect and customs" (Santiago, *Puerto Rican* 273). Increased strain on her parents' marriage and her brother's injury in a bike accident led Santiago's mother to take her children to New York where they settled in Brooklyn. Santiago describes navigating a new school and learning English. The first installment of the memoir trilogy ends with Santiago's acceptance to the Performing Arts High School in Brooklyn.

The second half of *When I was Puerto Rican* is central to my exploration of bilingualism and a multicultural background as differentiating features. Many immigrants, especially children, try to assimilate into the new culture to gain acceptance instead of being viewed as different. "[Santiago] hates that word, 'assimilation.' When she was young, she tried to adapt to her new home, but as she grew older, she got tired of trying to conform" (Alfonseca). Not conforming to Anglo-American society allowed Santiago to write her memoir, and her voice as a female Puerto Rican who migrated to the contiguous United States is incredibly valuable. One of the main questions she receives about her landmark work, however, is about the past tense verb in the title.

Santiago explains in a video that one of the reasons for the title is that upon a return visit to Puerto Rico after twelve years in the United States, some Puerto Ricans “many of whom had not left the island, did not think I was Puerto Rican enough... It was a very painful time for me, because I had made every effort to maintain my Puerto Rican culture, my language, my connection to the island” (Santiago, “Title Question”).

Santiago’s Spanish remains a very important connection to her childhood home and her family members still living in Puerto Rico. “It was a book, [Santiago] said, written in English but lived in Spanish, as it chronicled the formation of her new multicultural identity” (N. Martinez). Spanish influences Santiago’s choice of English words, but her book also has a very high number of Spanish words. In fact, Santiago includes a glossary at the back of the book for some of the most common terms. Every chapter is headed by a Spanish phrase or saying as well, translated into English. Spanish permeates every part of Santiago’s memoir.

The Spanish preceding each of Santiago’s chapters varies in nature. As an example of these leading Spanish phrases, a later chapter is introduced by a Spanish pun. The quote reads, “*De Guatemala a guata-peor,*” which Santiago translates as “From Guatemala to guate-worse” (Santiago, *Puerto Rican* 133). However, this pun relies on some knowledge of Spanish that Santiago does not translate. *Mal* means “bad” in Spanish, so the pun could also be translated as “From guate-bad to guate-worse,” but then the wordplay on the place Guatemala is lost. This phrase is indicative of the tone Santiago uses throughout the following chapter, in which she describes a bad situation becoming worse, while still acknowledging the humor throughout. Humor and especially wordplay can be difficult to translate between languages and cultures, but the tone of

finding some humor in a bad situation is universal. Santiago's use of the leading Spanish phrase here helps readers understand that authorial intention. In another instance, one of the earliest chapters is preceded by the phrase, "*Al jibaro nunca se le quita la mancha de plátano,*" which Santiago translates underneath as, "A *jibaro* can never wash away the stain of the plantain" (7). As discussed previously, the concept of a *jibaro* is very important to Esmeralda's personal identity. This phrase opens a chapter in which Santiago recounts rural Puerto Rican life as a young child, which shapes her as a person throughout the rest of the novel. The phrase used here may be intended as derogatory when said by others, much like the word *jibaro* itself, but for Esmeralda, who enjoys thinking of herself as a *jibara*, the phrase may have a different personal meaning. In this way, the opening phrase may be more of a comforting one for Esmeralda, knowing her upbringing cannot be eroded by time or immersion in English-speaking American culture. This opening phrase introduces the concept of a *jibaro* and what it might mean culturally, and the chapter then goes into more detail. Both examples here, and others throughout the text, use the Spanish phrase to enhance the content of the following chapter. This also adds Spanish variety to the text, though some foreign words recur more often than others.

One of the most-used words in *When I was Puerto Rican* is *jibara* (with gender/plurality variations of the same word). This is likely because Santiago identified so heavily as a Puerto Rican girl from out in the country. Young Santiago, referred to here as Esmeralda for clarification from discussing the author in the present tense, is not more likely than any other character to use Spanish in the book. Santiago chooses for Spanish to be in the mouth of nearly every character. Older characters seem to use

Spanish somewhat more than Esmeralda or her siblings. This may simply be reflecting Esmeralda's young age in the first half of the novel, showing that her parents know new words and concepts that Esmeralda has yet to learn. But Esmeralda herself uses Spanish words even in the earliest part of the memoir, at only four years old or so, more than the simple *Mami* and *Papi* ("mom" and "dad," respectively) used consistently throughout the book.

Spanish is also mixed with English by the same speaker. When Esmeralda is attending a middle school in New York, she talks with another Spanish-speaking friend "in Spanglish, a combination of English and Spanish in which we hopped from one language to the other depending on which word came first" (258). For example, Esmeralda says to her friend, "*Te preguntó el Mr. Barone, you know, lo que queridas hacer when you grow up?*" which, if written only in English, would be "Were you asked by Mr. Barone, you know, what you want to do when you grow up?" (258). Speaking in Spanglish is common for bilingual speakers, for like Esmeralda says, sometimes a word comes faster in one language than in another. Santiago also uses an interesting form of English-as-Spanish in her transliteration of Esmeralda's understanding of English words. Examples of this technique are numerous. When preparing to audition for the Performing Arts High School, Esmeralda is instructed to learn a monologue. The opening sentence is "You belong to a type that's very common in this country, Mrs. Phelps - a type of self-centered, self-pitying, son-devouring tigress, with unmentionable proclivities on the side" (261). However, Esmeralda has only learned the monologue phonetically after being told not to worry about the meaning of the words. Her rendition of the same sentence appears in her mind as, "Ju bee lonh 2 a type dats berry cómo in dis kuntree,

Mees-sees Felps. A type off selcent red self pee tee in sun de boring tie gress wid on men shon ah ball pro klee bee tees on de side” (264). This transliteration is useful to readers who are native English speakers. Esmeralda’s version of the sentence is difficult to process, imitating the initial difficulty she has with English. Writing English with Spanish phonetics is an explicit invitation for English-speaking readers to consider another person’s experience. Decoding the sounds of the Spanish-sounding sentence into something comprehensible as English is similar to the struggle of any person trying to learn a foreign language. Without much official support from an English as a Second Language course, Esmeralda’s perception of English is anchored in her knowledge of Spanish and takes time and practice before she can fluently use English for its complete meanings instead of its mysterious individual sounds.

Perhaps influenced by her firsthand knowledge of trying to learn a new language only through self-taught books, Santiago includes a Spanish glossary at the back of her text. This is unusual compared to both of Cisneros’ texts. Santiago’s glossary is not a comprehensive list of vocabulary, but she translates the most frequently-used Spanish words for the convenience of English readers. In light of the topic of this thesis, the glossary creates an interesting question. Why include Spanish at all if the author must provide translations in the back? One of the most obvious answers is, of course, that plenty of readers would have enough knowledge of Spanish to not require a dictionary or glossary. But more importantly, monolingual English readers also do not need to rely on the glossary to understand the story Santiago tells. Her Spanish words are often placed in conjunction with an English equivalent anyway. For example, Santiago begins every chapter with a Spanish phrase of some type, often relevant to the upcoming chapter. She

consistently translates the phrase into English below. This allows readers of either language to comfortably understand the heading that influences the rest of the chapter. However, Santiago also chooses not to translate some Spanish words, either in the text or in the glossary in the back. From these, an English reader could still likely understand the general meaning of the word from context. Essentially, Santiago shows that Spanish is part of the characters' lives. They do not owe English readers a translation of every thought or turn of phrase. Many Spanish speakers in the United States have experiences similar to Santiago's, in which a child learns English and translates for the parents, or a young adult struggles to learn English without the appropriate resources. If a monolingual English-speaking reader wishes to understand every word of Spanish in the book, then that person can do more research into the experiences of immigrants who learned another language like Santiago. By including the glossary, Santiago is making an effort to include monolingual English-speaking readers. But she also is clearly showing that her book was not made with English-only speakers in mind. Santiago is bilingual, and like many other bilingual speakers, she may feel most comfortable speaking in a mixture of the languages she knows. I quoted bilingual author Gloria Anzaldúa in the introduction of this thesis, who said her bilingual tongue would remain "illegitimate" unless she is given the opportunity to speak in a mixture of Spanish and English, thereby expressing her thoughts most truly. Santiago uses enough casual, undefined Spanish terms that readers may conclude Santiago also believes she can most honestly express herself through use of both Spanish and English at the same time.

Finally, Santiago uses Spanish frequently in religious contexts. This is particularly interesting because Esmeralda's family is not particularly religious. When she asks her

father if their family are Catholics, he replies, ““Yes. But not very good ones”” (44). The reason for this is, apparently, that they do not attend church, but still believe in God. Many characters mutter the expression, ““*¡Ay Dios Mio!*”” which translates to “Oh, my God!” (70, 271). Older characters, especially women, seem to have an investment in religion and in saying prayers and benedictions in Spanish. Some examples from the text are Esmeralda’s grandmother who makes the narrator attend church and the wise woman who chooses Esmeralda to close the eyes of a deceased infant in a traditional ceremony. These characters and others like them in age and gender have a higher tendency to be given italicized Spanish phrases than other characters. For some phrases, like the aforementioned *¡ay Dios mío!*, age and gender seem not to factor in the frequency of utterances. But for many sayings and exclamations or words used in a domestic setting, older women are much more likely to use Spanish in Santiago’s book in everyday ways. This use of Spanish allows Santiago to subtly show the generational gap between characters, like displaying that younger characters are generally less interested in traditional religion. Additionally, when Esmeralda moves to the United States with her family, she becomes more separated from her parents’ generation as she tries to become more American to fit in at school, while her mother and older relatives retain their cultural heritage more strongly. The divide of Spanish words is reflective of the generational divide within Esmeralda’s family.

Chapter 4: Comparisons and Conclusions

Cisneros and Santiago have some common themes in their works. Santiago's book is a coming-of-age story. Esmeralda learns about polite behavior, navigates turbulent family dynamics, and faces challenges at different schools. Additionally, because of her gender, Esmeralda faces sexual harassment on a few different occasions, beginning at a young age. When Esmeralda is a preteen, probably around eleven, she takes piano lessons from the principal of her school. Her mother cautions that she is almost a young woman, *casi señorita*, and that she doesn't trust the instructor. After a few lessons, Esmeralda notes that he commented on what outfits were especially beautiful, and eventually she realizes that the dress he especially liked also gives anyone standing above her a clear view of "the slight mounds, like egg yolks, that had recently begun to ache on [her] chest" (Santiago, *Puerto Rican* 178). In a later example, Esmeralda is in eighth grade, likely thirteen years old. She sees a trucker park on the street below her apartment window and he begins to masturbate simply at the sight of her. Esmeralda has mixed feelings, and eventually offers the man a wide smile after realizing she was having her first sexual experience, despite it being very one-sided. The man is startled by her smile, and Esmeralda says of his sudden disinterest, "Whatever he'd wanted from me he didn't want anymore, and I was certain it was because I'd been too willing to give it to him" (240). This has undertones of rape and pedophilia, as Esmeralda is still a minor despite being considered "*señorita*," literally, a "young woman." In Esmeralda's culture at the time, being considered *señorita* is marked by a girl having her first menstruation cycle. The change signifies Esmeralda's entry into adult society, allowing her to wear bras and have more responsibilities. Her own uncle, called Chico,

also makes sexual advances on Esmeralda when she's a young teenager. He offers her money if she opens her blouse, pleading with her and using her nickname, saying, "Come on, Negi... I'm family" (248). When she refuses, the next day Chico waits until she is brushing her hair. While her arms are up from her sides, he nonconsensually pinches her nipple and warns her not to tell anyone, tossing her a dirty, ragged dollar bill as a reward for her silence. For reference, a dollar in 1961 would be worth about \$8.65 in 2020 ("\$1 in 1961 → 2020"). Esmeralda uses the money for an ice cream sundae and seems to think no more about it (248).

These instances of sexual advances in Santiago's work go along with Esperanza's experiences of rape or being catcalled when wearing high heels for the first time in *The House on Mango Street*. Esperanza says she doesn't remember the details of her rape, a common symptom of trauma (Leong, Stephanie et al.). Cisneros' gender impacts all her writing heavily. She even dedicates *The House on Mango Street*, one of her earliest publications, "A las Mujeres [sic]," or in English, "To the Women" (Cisneros, *Mango Street* vii). Female characters feature prominently in *The House on Mango Street* and the mysterious Three Sisters forcefully remind Esperanza to take care of the people (especially the women) she will leave behind when she leaves Mango Street. "You must remember to come back. For the ones who cannot leave as easily as you," (105). The "ones who cannot leave as easily" are likely women like the ones appearing in the rest of the novel. Most of the other female characters around Esperanza have miserable lives. Some are married at very young ages, some are locked in their houses forbidden to have contact with the outside world, many are beaten by their fathers or husbands, and some, including Esperanza, are sexually assaulted by men. Esperanza decides to leave Mango

Street and its grim fates for women like her, but she intends to return to help other women trapped in cycles of abuse and poverty.

Cisneros and Santiago both show that simply existing as a woman is enough for a man to find sexual interest. Moreover, the sexual interest is consistently harmful in one way or another, whether through violence, lack of consent, or pedophilia. Choosing female authors was intentional for this paper, and this is one excellent example of why gender representation matters. Both Hispanic authors describe multiple inappropriate or even traumatic sexual encounters from a woman's perspective, a viewpoint that is vastly different from a male author without the same experience with systemic sexism present in modern societies.

Both authors use Spanish to differentiate generational gaps between characters, show a separation between Hispanic culture and Anglo culture, and emphasize the importance of cultural heritage as a part of identity. Though the use of Spanish is frequent in Santiago's book, older characters are still more likely to use complex Spanish sentences or unusual Spanish words than Esmeralda or her peers are. Similarly, Esperanza speaks less Spanish than her mother or other older neighbors. Both authors also use their texts to show a sharp divide between Spanish speakers and English speakers, a trench often bridged only out of necessity by bilingual children. Esmeralda teaches herself English by reading increasingly difficult children's books at the local library in New York, and has to translate for her mother and other Spanish-speaking women at the welfare office. In *Mango Street*, Mamacita cries when her baby begins to mimic the English commercials he sees on television, and her husband yells at her repeatedly to "speak English" (78). This rather antagonistic relationship between Spanish

and English speakers (or in other contexts, simply a Spanish speaker's personal antagonistic relationship with learning English) creates a cultural divide. In turn, this means instances of Spanglish and bilingualism at work are important. Bilingualism brings both sides together in a new way, though the combination is not always met with positive reactions. The linguistic divide also draws attention to the cultural divide. As previously discussed, *Mango Street* employs many Spanish words in relation to food. Santiago's book is similarly outfitted with Spanish words specifically pertaining to Puerto Rican culture and familial connections, like *barrio* ("neighborhood"), *abuela* ("grandmother"), or *jibara* ("rural Puerto Rican woman"). A "key function" of using a foreign language in a text is "to signify a character's condition as an outsider," and both Cisneros and Santiago use Spanish to separate characters in various contexts (Azevedo 1154).

Both authors also explore themes of sexism and domestic abuse. "Woman Hollering Creek" is about a woman's escape from her abusive husband, and Esmeralda's mother hits her children up until Esmeralda is strong enough to stop her as a teenager about to enter high school. When asked if Latin culture normalizes the mistreatment of women, Santiago responded,

That's not a way of excusing it by any means, but I do think this man just thought this was the way you are: a macho. Your wife belongs to you; you treat her this way... I don't think [abusive mindsets persist] necessarily in the Latin communities [alone]. My work with domestic violence happened, in fact, in a non-Latin community, in southeastern Massachusetts. This attitude is very prevalent among the men and the women who were part of the program that I was working on. But I really think there is something in the Latino culture, the

machismo, and this whole sense of men being coddled by women -- that I think contributes to abuse. (Greene)

“Machismo” is a term for an aspect of Hispanic culture involving gender role expectations for men. “[Machismo culture] includes the set of behaviors and rules of conduct that are inculcated into boys by our society as being strong, tough and independent, showing no emotion,” meaning, for example, that young men or boys are not expected to ask questions in school (Newman). In another definition, machismo is “said to be a compensation for powerlessness and weakness, a futile attempt to prove one's masculinity” (Breshears 3). Machismo culture influences men to remain silent for fear of appearing unknowledgeable, and therefore less in control of the room, unlike the cultural expectations of what a machismo man should be. As two researchers explained, “machismo is one of many sociocultural problems that present themselves in the early years of school, which, if unaddressed, ‘lead to many problems that will debilitate the Latino for the rest of his life’” (Newman). However, some researchers caution that “machismo has served as a useful myth for social scientists to perpetuate stereotypical depictions of Mexican-Chicano culture,” and that machismo should not be applied broadly to explain the actions or attitudes of Hispanic men (Breshears 2). To summarize from above, Santiago believes machismo culture contributes to the cycle of abuse against women, but also seems to believe the cycle can be broken.

Cisneros seems to be advocating for a similar purpose, supporting women in a culture built on the concept of machismo. In “Woman Hollering Creek,” Cleófilas has a large family like Cisneros’, saying she was “*la consentida*” of her household of six brothers (47). *La consentida* is translated in the novel as “the princess,” but can also be

translated as “the darling,” “the pampered girl,” or simply, “the spoiled” (SpanishDict). Additionally, Cleófilas is a passive and obedient wife who suffers at her husband’s hands, much like the women Esperanza describes in *The House on Mango Street*. The appearance of abused, confined wives in two of Cisneros’ works shows that she recognizes elements of sexism in Mexican (and also Chicano) culture. Cleófilas is fully expected to stay home with her children and give her husband meals when he demands them, even when he doesn’t follow the gender expectations for men (namely, fixing things around the house and financially supporting the family). The use of Spanish regarding gender roles is another predominant category in the ways both authors incorporate Spanish words. “*La consentida*,” “*mamacita*,” and “*señorita*” are a small sample of similar words both Cisneros and Santiago use in their texts to highlight the sexism, restrictive gender roles, and violence against women present in the societies they portray. While all three problems are present in Anglo-American society, they appear differently in Hispanic culture and are treated as different by the authors. The use of Spanish confirms that cultural concepts like a girl becoming “*señorita*” are “other” and separate from English-speaking society, in the same way the use of Spanish separates Hispanic and American foods in Santiago’s text and *Mango Street*.

Even such a small sample of authors and texts can lead to some useful overall conclusions. Spanish in all three novels is used to enhance the reader’s experience. The use of Spanish contributes to the setting of the world and brings the characters to life. Real people use more than one language, and so do the realistic bilingual characters in each of these three texts. Secondly, both authors frequently use Spanish to illustrate a cultural divide between a Hispanic culture and Anglo-American culture. Cultural (and

therefore linguistic) identity is an overwhelmingly prevalent theme in all three texts. Esperanza and Esmeralda both struggle with their identities at school and among friends. Esmeralda especially struggles to balance Spanish and English after moving to New York, trying to hold onto her family and culture while also attempting to survive in a new place with a new language. Cleófilas struggles with her identity as a wife and mother as well as her new role in a foreign country. Other minor characters, like Mamacita, also grapple with English and Spanish coexisting in the same mind. In all three texts, Spanish is frequently used when referring to family or domestic activities, as discussed, which reinforces the bond of one's language as an integral part of one's culture. While sometimes this occurs simply because a word has no English equivalent, both authors use Spanish words in place of even ordinary English words. Spanish is inseparable from Esmeralda's Puerto Rican heritage. Spanish is the language Esperanza turns to when playing with her Spanish-speaking neighbors. Spanish is the language of older relatives for both characters, the language used to talk about the family back in Mexico for Cleófilas, the language that means home. Spanish even makes its way into Esmeralda's language at school, when she speaks in fluid, shifting Spanglish to a friend. This thesis shows how foreign language can decisively be used as a literary device that has great effect on the audience.

If further research is conducted, I would suggest expanding the corpus of source texts. This paper has covered only three works, one of them a short story, and only two authors from two different cultures. While this research is a good springboard, a wider body of data would allow for more generalized conclusions not only about how and why Spanish-speaking authors incorporate Spanish into their works, but also how and why

any multilingual author would include foreign language words and phrases in any primarily-English text.

Bilingual authors are important to both English and Spanish speakers. Cisneros has spoken about how her multilingual background impacts her work. During an interview she commented that *The House on Mango Street* has “a distinctive voice that is uniquely mine—and that voice is one of a person speaking Spanish in English” (Cisneros “Interview with S.C.”). She continued to discuss the impact of Spanish on her writing, even when her writing was in English, saying, “I write with the syntax and sensibility of Spanish, even when there isn’t a syllable of Spanish present. It’s engrained [sic] in the way I look at the world, and the way I construct sentences and stories” (Cisneros “Interview with S.C.”). As Cisneros herself said, her cultural background is absolutely vital not only to the content of her books, but also the formation of each sentence and the choosing of what Spanish words to include. Finally, for many people, life is not lived in a single language. So texts, especially texts about bilingual characters, should certainly not be confined to just one.

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