« A Name More Like the Real Me »

Shifting Names and Languages in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*

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Abstract: The bilingual Mexican-American child narrator in Sandra Cisneros's 1984 *The House on Mango Street* grapples with names and words to question their different meanings. Names and words in English ground bilingual characters in the United States, whereas names and words in Spanish recall their ethnic heritage and the situations in which they are treated as outsiders. Living in what Gloria Anzaldúa calls a borderland between Mexican and Anglo-American culture, the narrator, wishing to change her first name, learns to construct her identity through the stories she tells. Children in this novel oscillate between understanding names and words as arbitrary, in the Saussurian sense, and investing them with the power to determine a person's or a thing's destiny. The bilingual narrator's linguistic sensitivity helps her deconstruct and criticize fixed notions in Latino and Anglo-American communities. Bilingualism makes the narrator more sensitive to the possibilities of language and allows her to help her community by telling their stories.

Keywords: Chicano literature, borderlands, Cisneros, self-narrative, bilingualism

Résumé : Dans *The House on Mango Street* (1984) de Sandra Cisneros, la narratrice, une enfant mexicano-américaine bilingue, engage une lutte avec les noms et les mots pour s'interroger sur leurs différentes significations. Les noms et les mots en anglais ancrent les personnages bilingues dans un environnement spécifique, celui des États-Unis, tandis que les noms et les mots en espagnol rappellent leur héritage ethnique et les situations dans lesquelles ils sont traités comme des étrangers. Vivant dans ce que Gloria Anzaldúa appelle une zone frontalière entre la culture mexicaine et la culture anglo-américaine, la narratrice, qui souhaite changer de prénom, apprend à construire son identité à travers les histoires qu'elle raconte. Les enfants de ce roman oscillent entre deux attitudes : considérer les noms et les mots comme entités arbitraires, au sens saussurien du terme, d'une part ; d'autre part, l'investissement des mots dans le pouvoir de déterminer le destin d'une personne ou d'une chose. La sensibilité linguistique de la narratrice bilingue l'aide à déconstruire et à critiquer les notions figées dans les communautés latino et anglo-américaines. Le bilinguisme accroît la sensibilité de la narratrice aux possibilités de la langue, tout en lui permettant de venir en aide à sa communauté, dont elle raconte les histoires.

Mots-clés : Littérature chicano, zones frontalières, Cisneros, récit de soi, bilinguisme

The bilingual Mexican-American child narrator in Sandra Cisneros's 1984 bestseller *The House on Mango Street* grapples with people's names and words to question their

different meanings. Names and words create sources of confusion insofar as they identify individuals and things but do not necessarily reveal their identity. Names and words in English ground bilingual characters in the United States, whereas names and words in Spanish recall their ethnic as well as linguistic heritage, their belonging to Spanish-speaking communities, and the situations in which they are treated as outsiders in Anglo-American society. In the beginning of the novel, Esperanza, the first-person narrator, wishes to change her name to identify her true self. She, however, learns to construct her identity through the stories she tells and not simply through her name. In multilingual environments, names are sources of stories as they reveal genealogies and attempts to assimilate. Esperanza oscillates between understanding names and words as arbitrary, in the Saussurian sense, and investing them with the power to determine a person's destiny.

Composed of forty-four vignettes, *The House on Mango Street* is a coming-of-age story about a Mexican-American girl struggling to consolidate her identity and accept the place that she calls home as part of that identity[1]. Esperanza Cordero is a « border women », « *una chicana* », growing up between Mexican culture and Anglo-American culture, speaking and hearing both Spanish and English[2]. She seeks out a language to identify herself as well as the various collective groups to which she belongs, namely women refusing to be subservient, women who have been victims of male violence, Mexican-Americans, Spanish speakers, people of color, and people experiencing economic hardships. The vignettes create a web of stories revealing the conflicts between the different aspects of the narrator's identity and her attempts to reconcile her divergent desires. Manuel Martín-Rodríguez reads *The House on Mango Street* as an illocutionary speech act, meaning an utterance that performs an act by saying something, that « opens up a new kind of narrative space for Chicanas and Latinas[3] ». Indeed, by translating conversations and telling silenced stories, the narrator offers a glimpse into the struggles and hopes of a multicultural and multilingual community.

Identity formation occurs in what Homi Bhabha calls a « third space » in-between cultures as different cultures « give rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable[4] ». For a multilingual child, this third space involves mixing languages, translating, and questioning how different signifiers can represent a single person, idea, or thing. Esperanza's difficulty understanding who she is stems from a double alienation as a female in a patriarchal society and a person of color in Anglo-American culture. She is, as Gloria Anzaldúa defines Chicano women's situations, « alienated from her mother culture, "alien" in the dominant culture », and therefore she « does not feel safe within the inner life of her Self[5] ». The fragmented nature of the novel, comprised of stories about the narrator and stories about her neighbors and family

[1] Critics have debated over whether *The House on Mango Street* is a novel or whether it is a collection of short stories. I refer to it as a novel.

[2] Anzaldúa, Gloria, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Aunt Lute Books, San Francisco, 2012, p. 19.

[3] Martín-Rodríguez, Manuel, *Life in Search of Readers: Reading (in) Chicano/a Literature*, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 2003, p. 75.

[4] Bhabha, Homi (1990), « The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha », *in* Rutherford, Jonathan (dir.), *Identity/ Community, Culture, Difference*, Lawrence &Wishart, London, p. 210.

[5] Anzaldúa, Gloria, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

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members, highlights how Chicano identity can be experienced as an accumulation of diverse elements identified in different languages[6]. By narrating her own story and the stories of others, Esperanza enters « a relational ethic of contingency » based on the principle that everyone possesses « a personal identity that *is* irrefutably her story[7] ».

Esperanza's attentiveness to linguistic diversity helps her criticize fixed notions in Latino and Anglo-American communities. Like the heroine of Cisneros's 2002 novel *Carmelo*, Esperanza moves back and forth between English and Spanish and therefore notices « subtle differences and slippages of meaning » between the two languages[8]. Consequently, she develops « a heightened awareness of the contingency of meaning in both tongues as well as their different modes of signifying[9] ». *The House on Mango Street* presents bilingualism as a tool heightening the narrator's awareness of the possibilities of language and allowing her to help her community by telling their stories, critiquing patriarchal practices, and condemning racism.

1 Naming the Self and Being Named

Esperanza's name is the starting point from which she negotiates her bilingual identity and learns to appreciate the beauty of linguistic diversity. Her first name designates her as a figure of hope as well as a figure of despair, « *desesperanza* », as she longs to change her name. Prior to the fourth vignette, « My Name », the narrator is only identified through first-person pronouns. Suggesting that her name is responsible for her split identity, this vignette presents her first name as having different meanings, sounds, and memories in the two languages she speaks: « In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting. It is like the number nine. A muddy color. It is the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, songs like sobbing[10] ». Hope/*Esperanza* is born out of misery as one waits and hopes for something better. Like the nine levels of the underworld, « *esperanza* » is far from the ideal. Present in art and music, « *esperanza* » remains a constant in Chicano culture as members regularly hope to improve their situations in the same way that the narrator's father listens to lamentations mixed with hope every week.

Inheriting her first name from her great-grandmother, the narrator situates herself in a genealogy of women hoping for a better future. Her great-grandmother, « a wild horse of a woman », tried to avoid marriage and then, as Esperanza imagines her, sat by a window mourning her freedom after she was forced to marry[11]. Proud to be related to freedom-loving women, Esperanza refuses to embody the submissiveness imprisoning her foremothers: « Esperanza. I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit

[6] Akers, John (1985), « Fragmentation in the Chicano Novel/ Literary Technique and Cultural Identity », *Revista Chicano-Riqueña*, vol. 13, n° 3-4, Bloomington/Houston, p. 124.

[7] Cavarero, Adriana, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood* (translation by Paul Kottman), Routledge, New York, 2000, p. 87.

[8] Johnson González, Bill (2006), « The Politics of Translation in Sandra Cisneros's *Carmelo* », *Differences « Reading with Barbara Johnson »*, vol. 17, n° 3, Brown University, Providence, p. 4.

[9] *Idem.*

[10] Cisneros, Sandra, *The House on Mango Street*, Arte Público Press, Houston, 1983, p. 10.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

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her place by the window[12] ». The narrator wants to abandon her neighborhood rife with poverty and sexism; however, other characters urge her to study hard and come back. At the end of the novel, Esperanza announces her plan to leave and later return to Mango Street to help those who cannot escape poverty, racism, and sexism. Carrying the weight of histories of hope and despair, the narrator's coming of age is in fact a reckoning with her name as she hopes to change not only her situation but also Mango Street.

The narrator's name marks her as a Spanish speaker and therefore different in Anglo-American society. As Anzaldúa stresses, « ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity[13] ». Throughout the various narratives, the Spanish language labels characters as members of Chicano or Latino communities and outsiders in the dominant Anglo-American society. When the narrator's non-Hispanic classmates and teachers attempt to pronounce *Esperanza*, the name sounds discordant and disagreeable whereas, in Spanish, it sounds desirable: « At school they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth. But in Spanish my name is made out of a softer something, like silver[14] ». Emphasizing Anglo-Americans' difficulties saying her polysyllabic name made up of letters pronounced differently in Spanish and English, the narrator suggests that, because of her name, monolingual English speakers do not recognize her in the same way as other Latinos. Her split feelings about her name situate her in a border space where she dislikes how her name sounds strange in the hegemonic society yet wishes to hold on to its musicality when spoken in her linguistic community.

Names in *The House on Mango Street* are infused with religious allusions. The narrator's last name Cordero means « lamb », a symbol of Christ suffering as well as a sign of gentleness, innocence, and purity. « *Cordero* » contrasts with the « wild horse of a woman » from whom the narrator received her first name. This tension between her first and last names hints at how the narrator must negotiate her desire to run free and her Catholic education teaching her to be placid.

Nicknames are a way to hide the weight of biblical names or allow individuals to oscillate between different identities. Esperanza perceives her name as softer and more beautiful than her sister's « thick » and « uglier » name, Magdalena[15]. Magdalena adopts a nickname whereas Esperanza feels stuck with her name: « Magdalena who at least can come home and become Nenny. But I am always Esperanza[16] ». Derived from the biblical figure Mary Magdalene, Nenny's unabbreviated name symbolizes penance and discipleship. Following her older sister, Nenny suggests that, as a symbol of hope, Esperanza is destined to lead other young women. Esperanza's aunt who dies after a long illness is first presented as « Aunt Lupe », and then the narrator clarifies by giving her unabbreviated first name: « Her name was Guadalupe[17] ». Suffering but kind and encouraging, Aunt Lupe, like the myth of the Virgin of Guadalupe who

[12] *Idem.*
[13] Anzaldúa, Gloria, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, *op. cit.*, p. 81.
[14] Cisneros, Sandra, *The House on Mango Street*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
[15] *Idem.*
[16] *Idem.*
[17] *Ibid.*, p. 58.

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appeared before a young man in Villa de Guadalupe and asked him to erect a church in her honor, acts like an apparition asking Esperanza to continue reading and writing as a way to commemorate her life. Shifting between biblical names and nicknames, Aunt Lupe and Nenny oscillate between imposed identities and self-constructed identities.

Nicknames reveal how names are malleable yet difficult to eliminate. Introducing her neighbor's Puerto Rican cousin, Esperanza doubts her knowledge of the young women's name: « Her name is Marin or Maris or something like that[18] ». Henceforth, the narrator refers to her as Marin suggesting that Marin's story, not her name, constitutes her identity. Another neighbor self-identifies as Meme; however, his mother persists in calling him by his name given at birth: « His name isn't really Meme. His name is Juan. But when we asked him what his name was he said Meme, and that's what everybody calls him except his mother[19] ». Meme/Juan possesses a dog that also has two names, « one in English and one in Spanish[20] ». Meme/Juan creates two versions of his identity corresponding to the language he speaks at home, Spanish, and the language he speaks outside the home, English. Throughout the novel, Esperanza marvels at the plasticity of other characters' names because names house individuals. Just as people can change spaces, they can change names. Nevertheless, they constantly return home, to their given names, which seem impossible to erase completely.

The child narrator wishes to rechristen herself and distance herself from « the encoded lesson of female submissiveness » passed down through the generations[21]. Esperanza wants a name that represents her authentic self, living in a border space, and not just her visible self, a person of color in a predominantly white society: « I would like to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X. Yes. Something like Zeze the X will do[22] ». *Lisandra*, the Spanish spelling of *Lysandra*, was the Queen of Macedonia in the third century BC whose name in Greek Λυσάνδρα means « liberator ». *Maritza* is the name of a river that runs through Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey. In 1968, the Bulgarian-French singer Sylvie Vartan recorded the song « La Maritza » evoking her nostalgia for her homeland. *Zeze the X* perhaps references the title character of Ángeles Vicente's 1909 novel *Zezé* about a woman fighting against the traditional model of Spanish masculinity and endeavoring to find her identity. All of these names reference various elements making up the narrator's identity: her desire to improve the living conditions in her community, her nostalgia for her parent's culture, her anger with patriarchal violence, and her quest to know who she is. This struggle to find an adequate name, a signifier for herself, highlights her sensitivity to language as she contemplates the implications of different names.

Names define social interactions as individuals identify each other through their first names. For the Chicano narrator, announcing her name means announcing her

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 23.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 21.
[20] *Idem.*
[21] Rivera, Carmen Haydée, *Border Crossings and Beyond: The Life and Works of Sandra Cisneros*, Praeger, Santa Barbara, 2009, p. 31.
[22] Cisneros, Sandra, *The House on Mango Street*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

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Spanish-speaking heritage and her role as a figure of hope. When Esperanza befriends two sisters, the eldest introduces herself as Lucy and her sister as Rachel before asking Esperanza, « Who are you? ». The moment of self-identification provokes an anxiety about how others will react to her name followed by relief when they accept her as Esperanza: « I wish my name was Cassandra or Alexis or Maritza – anything but Esperanza – but when I tell them my name they don't laugh[23] ». The names Cassandra, the Trojan priestess whose accurate prophecies are ignored, and Alexis, a first name derived from the Greek verb ἀλέξειν meaning « to protect », hint at Esperanza's mixed desires to defend her heritage but also to flee it and free herself of what she considers to be a burden.

Interacting with characters who recognize the need for *esperanza*/Esperanza, the narrator learns to accept and appreciate her first name as well as the mission that it symbolically bestows on her. In line with Adriana Cavarero's notion of narrating the self, Esperanza's relations with others who recognize her as possessing a unique story confer unity to her identity. When three elderly sisters move to Mango Street, one asks Esperanza what her name is and then qualifies it as « a good good name[24] ». The woman repeats the name as she talks and connects it to Mango Street: « When you leave you must remember to come back for the others. A circle, understand? You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street. You can't erase what you know. You can't forget who you are[25] ». Esperanza reckons that the elderly woman read her mind when she wished to leave Mango Street and become someone else. Like the three witches in *Macbeth*, the sisters seem to prophesy who Esperanza will become.

Inscribed on tombstones and published in obituaries, names constitute one of the most lasting memories of a person. The vignette entitled « Geraldo No Last Name » describes an undocumented immigrant whom Marin met at a dance right before he was killed in a drive-by: « Geraldo. That's all. Green pants and Saturday shirt. Geraldo. That's what he told her[26] ». Geraldo becomes a sort of John Doe that no one can identify: « No address. No name. Nothing in his pockets[27] ». Because he was not Marin's boyfriend nor an intimate acquaintance, the narrator asks why his death matters and imitates discourses denying undocumented immigrants their individuality, especially if they do not speak the dominant language: « Just another *brazer* who didn't speak English. Just another wetback[28] ». Neither a Spanish word nor an English word, *brazer* designates an immigrant farm worker, « *bracero* ». In Texas, shortly after World War II, Mexican-Americans already living in the United States used this derogatory word to refer to recent Mexican immigrants participating in the governmental bracero program. *Wetback* is a slur used primarily by white Anglo-Americans to refer to illegal immigrants. Originally, the term, dating back to 1920, was applied to Mexican immigrants who entered the United States by crossing the Rio Grande and therefore arrived wet. These slurs and the repetition of « just

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 15.
[24] *Ibid.*, p. 104.
[25] *Ibid.*, p. 105.
[26] *Ibid.*, p. 65.
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 65-66.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 66.

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another » reveals the extent to which recent arrivals from Mexico face discrimination from not only white Anglo-Americans but also Chicanos. Geraldo has no last name and no community.

After his death, Geraldo is reduced to his first name, because those who witness his death – Marin, the police officers, and the hospital workers – ignore his story. Moreover, his family will never learn of his death and mourn him: « His name was Geraldo. And his home is in another country. The ones he left behind are far away, will wonder, shrug, remember. Geraldo – he went north… we never heard from him again[29] ». As Lilijana Burcar argues, Geraldo's « anonymity entrenched by his legally racialized status as the ultimate other is a marker of his utter disposability[30] ». By telling his story as a worker sending money back home, the narrator attempts to create an identity for Geraldo and for other undocumented workers whose humanity remains unrecognized when they have no proof of possessing a last name or the right to live in their host country. In doing so, the narrator translates what a name fails to communicate.

2 Linguistic Possibilities and Childhood Word Play

The possibility of multiple names for one person or one thing brings into question if a person or an object can be reduced to one single identity. As a bilingual child, the narrator is particularly attentive to how people speak and how words can be altered, translated, and invented. Playing with the malleability of words and the arbitrary relationships between signifiers and the signified, the narrator discovers the impossibility of fixed meanings as well as her capacity to name or to refuse to name things and people.

The languages people know influence how they perceive the world and themselves. When Esperanza tells her friends that Eskimos have thirty different words designating snow, Rachel states that her cousin has multiple names: « She got three last names and, let me see, two first names. One in English and one in Spanish…[31] ». A multitude of names for a single person or a single phenomenon brings into question how each name presents the person or phenomenon differently. If different terms for snow designate distinctly different types of snow, is Lucy's cousin two different people depending on whether she is identified by her English or Spanish name? Names that depend on the linguistic context or names pronounced differently based on the linguistic knowledge of the speaker split individuals as their interlocutors modify their self-identification.

Naming is a powerful act allowing individuals to define how they perceive the world. Esperanza's classmate Darius looks at a large cloud and identifies it as God suggesting that just as God named what exists in Genesis, a child can designate an object as God and make God exist: « That's God, Darius said. God? Somebody little asked.

[29] *Idem.*

[30] Burcar, Lilijana (2018), « Shortcomings and Limitations of Identity Politics and Intersectionality in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* », *Acta Neophilologica*, vol. 18, n° 1-2, University of Ljubljana Press Journals, Ljubljana, p. 32.

[31] Cisneros, Sandra, *The House on Mango Street*, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

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God, he said, and made it simple[32] ». The ease with which he names the cloud exemplifies how everyone has the right to name what they see using the words they choose to employ. When Esperanza tells her friends that clouds have at least ten names, Nenny questions if people's names are as arbitrary as the names of objects or if names are capable of determining identities: « Names just like you and me?[33] ». When Esperanza tells her that all of the clouds they see that day are cumulus, Nenny decides to give each cloud a unique name: « That there is Nancy, otherwise known as Pig-eye. And over there her cousin Mildred, and little Joey, Marco, Nereida and Sue?[34] ». Each cloud possesses an identity instead of being lumped together as clouds in the same way that the narrator attempts to present Geraldo as a unique individual and not « just another » immigrant. Interspersed among the names of the clouds, Rachel and Esperanza argue and call each other « Chicken lips », « Cockroach jelly », and « Cold *frijoles*[35] ». This battle of names ends with a list of the four girls' names showing that they are simultaneously objects of others who perceive them as names and subjects invested with the power of naming others.

Throughout the novel, repetition and enumeration allow the narrator to explore the different possibilities of words. In the same way that a multitude of signifiers can identify one signified, one word can identify numerous objects, people, or phenomena. Showing that the word « cats » designates vastly different cats, Esperanza repeats the word as she lists the types of cats her neighbor owns: « Cathy who is queen of cats has cats and cats and cats. Baby cats, big cats, skinny cats, sick cats. Cats asleep like little donuts. Cats on top of the refrigerator. Cats taking a walk on the dinner table[36] ». The unchanging signifier cannot inhibit the signified from evolving and diversifying. In this sense, Esperanza's name is not a predetermined prophecy but rather a myriad of possibilities.

Playing with words, the narrator subverts oppressive notions of « cultural coherence and fixity » through a « deceptively childlike patter[37] ». When Esperanza's neighbor Cathy leaves Mango Street because « the neighborhood is getting bad », the narrator uses the first-person plural pronoun to identify Mexican-Americans as the supposedly bad neighbors inciting white European-Americans to flee: « people like us keep moving in[38] ». Later in the novel, the narrator creates a split between *they* and *we* to highlight how racism divides communities: « They think we're dangerous. They think we will attack them with shiny knives[39] ». Skin color, like last names, defines who belongs to the groups identifying as *we* and *they*: « All brown all around, we are safe. But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight[40] ». As Anzaldúa

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 34.
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 36.
[34] *Idem.*
[35] *Ibid.*, p. 37.
[36] *Ibid.*, p. 13.
[37] Rosaldo, Renato (1991), « Fables of the Fallen Guy », *in* Calderón, Héctor ; Saldívar, José (dir.), *Criticism in the Borderlands: Studies in Chicano Literature, Culture, and Ideology*, Duke University Press, Durham, p. 85.
[38] Cisneros, Sandra, *The House on Mango Street*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
[39] *Ibid.*, p. 28.
[40] *Idem.*

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explains, borders « define places that are safe and unsafe » by distinguishing *us* from *them*[41]. By refusing to name the *us* and *they*, Cisneros presents racism as a problem for all people of color, not just Mexican-Americans. This openness to the struggles of different oppressed populations living in the United States justifies the narrator's use of English to tell her story.

3 A World of Two Languages

Language plays a crucial role in constructing one's identity. It acts as « a symbolic marker of identity that, among other things, enables a particular group to distinguish itself from others[42] ». Switching between Spanish and English or borrowing words from one language while speaking the other is one of the ways that Spanish speakers in the United States move between various identities. Questioning the significance given to arbitrary signifiers, Esperanza engages in what María Lugones calls *"world"-travelling*, meaning the movement away from the « mainstream construction of life » in which she is an outsider to « other constructions of life where she is more or less "at home"[43] ». Esperanza manipulates languages to create worlds of sense. These constructed worlds are not to be confused with utopias. For Lugones, a *world* is « a description of experience[44] ». Traveling between different *worlds* allows an individual to shift from « being one person to being a different person[45] ». As the narrator uses Spanish words in her predominately English-language narrative or translates reported speech, the novel demonstrates how she moves between Anglo-American worlds, Mexican-American worlds, and worlds in which both languages and cultures are present.

Cisneros underscores that bilingualism contributes to a linguistic richness and not a poor understanding of one or both languages. The vignette describing Esperanza's mother as a highly intelligent and cultured woman, unable to continue her education because of her poverty, presents her bilingualism as a skill: « She can speak two languages. She can sing an opera. She knows how to fix a T.V.[46] ». Bilingualism allows individuals to navigate different spaces in addition to making them cognizant of the pliability of language.

Presenting diverse uses of language as valid, the narrator disrupts the norms of standard American English by using colloquial grammatical structures and Spanish terms. Esperanza is attentive to the way people speak English with different structures, vocabulary, and accents that reveal aspects of their stories. For example, she notices that the jukebox repair man, living in a northern state, « speaks with a Southern accent[47] ». An avid reader, the narrator makes her superior knowledge of the English

[41] Anzaldúa, Gloria, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
[42] Sánchez-Muñoz, Ana (2017), « Tempted by the Words of Another: Linguistic Choices of Chicanas/os and Other Latinas/os in Los Angeles », *in* Rosales, Jésus ; Fonseca, Vanessa (dir.), *Spanish Perspectives on Chicano Literature: Literary and Cultural Essays*, The Ohio State University Press, Columbus, p. 80.
[43] Lugones, María (1987), « Playfulness, "World"-Travelling, and Loving Perceptions », *Hypatia*, vol. 2, n° 2, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 3.
[44] *Ibid.*, p. 11.
[45] *Idem.*
[46] Cisneros, Sandra, *The House on Mango Street*, *op. cit.*, p. 90.
[47] *Ibid.*, p. 71.

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language explicit by correcting Lucy's grammar: « Her was born here, but me I'm Texas. You mean *she*, I say. No, I'm from Texas, and doesn't get it[48] ». Nonetheless, Esperanza tells her story in colloquial English with nonstandard grammar: « I had to prove to me I wasn't scared of nobody's eyes[49] ». The narrator switches between Standard American English and urban spoken English accentuating her attachment to her cultural milieu even though she wishes to leave it. Her failed attempt at correcting Lucy's English reveals her desire to use her education to elevate her community but also her community's need to be heard in its own language. Esperanza's linguistic knowledge allows her to deconstruct the principal language of her story to reveal the different aspects of her identity influenced by her Spanish-speaking environment, her interactions with English speakers from low-socioeconomic homes, and her love of reading and writing.

Mimicking acts of code-switching, the movement back and forth between two languages in a single communicative exchange, the novel occasionally inserts italicized Spanish words into the dialogues among Chicano characters. For example, when Esperanza and Nenny discuss how they will move when they develop womanly hips, they wish to be like « *merengue* » or « *tembleque*[50] ». Code-switching demonstrates a refusal to identify with one language or one linguistic culture. For Anzaldúa, this refusal to identify solely with Anglo-American or Mexican cultural values is paramount to Chicano culture which she defines as « a synergy of two cultures with various degrees of Mexicanness or Angloness[51] ». For Brian Lennon, a literary work « cannot capture the silent and private art of a divided, multiple, plurilingual self » but can only express it in a « vulgar and public form », in which one language becomes a sort of ornament[52]. The occasional Spanish words in italics serve as reminders that Spanish is always present in Esperanza's narrative.

Reported speech incorporating Spanish words suggests that the speakers communicate in Spanish and the narrator translates what they say. A conversation between Esperanza and her father uses Spanish to highlight the most important and the most intimate elements: « Your *abuelito* is dead, Papa says early one morning in my room. *Está muerto*, and then as if he just heard the news himself, crumples like a coat and cries[53] ». Describing an encounter with a fortuneteller, the narrator uses the Spanish term for spirits to indicate that this notion of spirits comes from Mexican culture and not Anglo-American culture: « Good, she says, *los espíritus* are here[54] ». Switching to Spanish, the narrator accentuates how her cultural and linguistic heritage remains integral to her identity, her experiences, and her perception of the world.

Italicizing Spanish words and certain English words in reported speech, the narrator highlights how, for Spanish speakers, English is a foreign language in the same way that Spanish is a foreign language for English speakers. In the vignette « No Speak

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 15.
[49] *Ibid.*, p. 72.
[50] *Ibid.*, p. 51.
[51] Anzaldúa, Gloria, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, *op. cit.*, p. 85.
[52] Lennon, Brian, *In Babel's Shadow: Multilingual Literatures, Monolingual States*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2010, p. 14.
[53] Cisneros, Sandra, *The House on Mango Street*, *op. cit.*, p. 56.
[54] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

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English », the narrator refers to a new neighbor by her nickname *Mamacita*. By italicizing her name, the text emphasizes her foreignness in her new country. The reported phrases that *Mamacita* speaks in English likewise appear in italics: « I believe she doesn't come out because she is afraid to speak English, and maybe this is so since she only knows eight words. She knows to say: *He is not here* for when the landlord comes, *No speak English* if anybody else comes, and *Holy smokes*[55] ». *Mamacita*'s partner implores her to speak English and accept her new home instead of wishing to go back to her hometown. When her baby mimics the Pepsi commercial that he hears on the television, *Mamacita* laments the fact that he is learning the language of this foreign country: « No speak English, she says to the child who is singing in the language that sounds like tin. No speak English, no speak English, and bubbles into tears[56] ». Speaking English means consuming Anglo-American culture. Since culture determines « the version of reality » that an individual perceives, the mother fears that her son will grow up with a view of the world significantly different from hers[57]. Refusing to speak a language indicates a refusal to accept the language's culture as one's own. Italicized, the English phrases that *Mamacita* utters stand out as different from the English the narrator uses. Indeed, for *Mamacita*, English is a language used for survival, not for expressing oneself or building relationships.

The novel further highlights the strangeness of English, this tin-sounding language, by explaining how it sounds to English-language learners. Upon arriving in the United States, the narrator's father understood the dish « ham and eggs » as one word « *hamandeggs* ». Because this was the only word he knew, it constituted all his meals until he gained more vocabulary. His later refusal to eat ham and eggs suggests that the feeling of powerlessness experienced by immigrants arriving in a country where they do not speak the dominant language leaves a lasting scar[58]. By presenting English as an oppressive language that immigrants and children of immigrants must speak, the novel establishes Spanish as a homey language, the language that the speakers choose to speak in safe spaces.

The child narrator is simultaneously a storyteller and a translator sharing the stories of her multilingual community. Given that she can write in two languages, her writing becomes an « acte de langage » in which the decision to write in a certain language takes part in the literary process[59]. At the end of the novel, Esperanza begins her story again but, unlike in the first vignette, she identifies herself as the teller. In this final vignette, the narrator explains how storytelling frees her by allowing her to be more than just a girl who lives on Mango Street: « I write it down and Mango says goodbye sometimes. She does not hold me with both arms. She sets me free[60] ». She needs her community and their stories to write. Writing transforms her into a figure of hope for her community as she makes it visible in a nation that ignores its needs[61].

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 77.
[56] *Ibid.*, p. 78.
[57] Anzaldúa, Gloria, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
[58] Cisneros, Sandra, *The House on Mango Street*, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
[59] Gauvin, Lise (dir.) (1999), *Les Langues du roman. Du plurilinguisme comme stratégie textuelle*, Presses de l'Université de Montréal, Montréal, p. 10.
[60] Cisneros, Sandra, *The House on Mango Street*, *op. cit.*, p. 110.
[61] In many Chicano novels, a character becomes a writer, such as in José Antonio Villarreal's 1959 novel *Pocho*, or is an avid reader, like in Eusebio Chacón's 1892 *Tras la tormenta, la calma*. For Martín-

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By writing as if she were translating or as if she were creating the utterances that the characters are unable to say, Esperanza gives a voice to those whom nobody hears or whom monolingual English speakers fail to understand.

The House on Mango Street shows how multilingualism gives birth to a linguistic awareness that allows children to see beyond fixed identities. Moreover, the accumulation of names in the novel reveals how groups of names constitute communities and families. Playing with words and names, the bilingual child grapples with what she can make of those words. Just as Esperanza learns to accept her name as a marker of her belonging to a family and a linguistic community, she also realizes that a name cannot represent all of the diverse elements making up her identity. In the same way, a single signifier hardly illustrates the diversity of a given thing or phenomenon. The narrator's linguistic awareness encourages her to welcome the various possibilities of words and names that come together to tell stories.

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