

Identity and Language Use in Adolescent Latina/o Literature

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how characters in adolescent Latina/o literature use and reflect on both English and Spanish languages, bilingualism and how language use informs a character's identity. In this thesis a particular emphasis is placed on code switching as a literary device in adolescent Latina/o literature. Investigations on code switching point to this, that many authors use code switching as a way for authors and characters to show the difficulties of living between two cultures. I examined the works of three accomplished authors of Latina/o adolescent in this investigation: Benjamin Alire Sáenz's *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012), Julia Álvarez's *Before We Were Free* (2002) and the *Tía Lola Series* (2009), and Pam Muñoz Ryan's *Esperanza Rising* (2004) and *Echo* (2015). The struggle to find one's identity as an immigrant in the United States can emotionally compare to the struggle of an adolescent trying to balance their struggles of identity and this similarity of identity definition can be seen in all of these works. I argue that these authors use code switching and discussions on bilingualism as a device that helps articulate the exploration of the protagonist's search for identity into adulthood. Code switching and bilingualism are used to juxtapose the childhood and adult stages of the characters. These serve as ruptural elements that defy the generation of the parents and the cultural expectations. Code switching further serves as a mechanism through which protagonists reject and accept aspects of their identity development, from homosexuality to economic status. In a parallel way, I explore the importance of

adolescent Latina/o literature as a referential axis for Latina/o youth in their process of development. This genre plays a role in development by showing strong, non-stereotypical characters who can help shape Latina/o identity for the next generation in the United States. Because adolescence is the stage in life where the individual goes through a time of questioning identity and development, this thesis shows that adolescent Latina/o literature may be best suited to show the process of growing up as compared to mainstream adolescent literature and gives a concrete metaphor for the challenges that many adolescents face.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the importance of language use in adolescent Latina/o literature through three different authors of this genre: Benjamin Alire Sáenz, Julia Álvarez, and Pam Muñoz Ryan. It focuses most especially on how code switching or inserting Spanish in predominantly English texts is used by these authors to show the process of identity formation that happens during adolescence.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my students. Most especially, I dedicate this to Sarahy, Luis, Jaime, and Alison, who initially made me realize how important it is for Latina/o students to read in Spanish. You work so hard to keep Spanish alive in your lives and are shining examples for so many others.

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Chapter One:

Introduction

It is a worn out statement that Latina/os are one of the fastest growing groups in the United States. According to the 2015 census more than 56 million Latina/os live in this country, and the percentage of Latina/os in districts from sea to shining sea is rising with each passing year.¹ This is a critical group to consider in a number of social-cultural spheres. Politicians often vie for the Latina/o vote, economists talk about the potential and power of Latina/o consumers, and school districts often focus specifically on the test scores of Latina/o students.² There are consequences, however, with politicians and the media categorizing this diverse group of individuals from a wide array of countries, with different values and cultures under one term. With such diversity, how can we define what it means to be Latina/o? While it is an important question to consider for the present generation, the first and second generation immigrants, it is potentially even more important for the next generation.³ Will the next generation retain their Spanish language? Will they continue to celebrate the holidays and maintain the cultural traditions that their parents practiced? Will the religious values and customs of their parents continue to thrive in this new country? Alternatively, will they assimilate to the United States and lose aspects of their culture as many groups of European immigrants did in the early 20th century? Who is teaching young Latina/os what it means to be Latina/o in the United States?

¹ In attempts to make Latin American terminology more inclusive, many have started to change Latina/o to Latinx to disassociate gender from this cultural appropriation. For the purposes of this thesis, I will continue to use Latina/o in order to be consistent with commonly recognized terminology but acknowledge more inclusive, modern terminology as well.

² Now reaching over \$300 Billion according to Julia Álvarez's research in *Once Upon a Quinceañera*.

³ The terms "first generation," "second generation," and "third generation" were originally developed by Van C. Tran to give more concrete terms to talk about immigration in the United States. First generation refers to immigrants who come to the United States of America as a permanent residence, second generation describes their children, while third generation describes their grandchildren. Immigration is much more complex than these basic terms; however, it gives a basis for categorizing populations (Shenoy).

Julia Álvarez investigated this idea of what it means to be a Latina woman in her novel *Once Upon a Quinceañera* (2007). Curious about the cultural phenomenon of the elaborate birthday party for fifteen-year-olds and the heavy debt that the family incurs, she questions what society is insinuating to these young women with regard to this expectation of a lavish party. Álvarez inquires throughout the novel whether or not these festivities subconsciously tell young girls that commercialism, beauty, and child rearing are the most important values? Conversely, she also asks what positive outcomes arise from this tradition: are we empowering young women with an ancient Aztec tradition that connects them to their heritage?⁴ Álvarez also questions the modeling of *machismo* for young boys and whether this teaches them to be empowered leaders, or encourages them to be violent and diminish their self-expression. Where is the next generation learning what it means to be Latina/o? Is it from their parents who bring traditions from the old country? Is it television and the internet often portraying Latina/os as poverty-stricken, bringing drugs and gang violence?

Furthermore, how is the media portraying Latina/os? What are young Latina/os learning about this identity as they look to television and the internet? Hugo Balta, president of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists and a respected producer for a variety of national outlets, is concerned about how stereotypical portrayals of Latina/os are affecting national perceptions and how these perceptions are affecting the Latina/o community as a whole (Exstrum). He criticizes the fact that often, Latina/os are represented through a particular stereotype in the media: unable to hold a job, looking, or speaking a certain way. For example, when casting the roles for the movie of the

⁴ In her novel, Álvarez investigated where the tradition of the quinceañera came from. Many girls celebrating the quinceañera claimed that it was “an ancient Aztec tradition” (89). When Álvarez actually investigated the veracity of this statement, she found that Websites and Quinceañera guides cite the same two sources when defining this ritual as an “ancient Aztec tradition” and that there is not enough facts to support this claim. Álvarez argues that at the very least the celebrations of today are nothing like the practices of the Aztecs (111-119).

musical *West Side Story*, the two lead Puerto Rican characters María and Bernardo were given to white American actors. The only Puerto Rican who obtained a speaking role was Rita Moreno who played Anita. She said, when discussing the role, “I understood that character with my eyes closed, there was nothing about that character that puzzled me. When it came to the candy store scene, where the boys are calling me these terrible names ... it opened a wound that must have been there that I had forgotten about, that I had willfully forgotten about for years and years and years...it was the first time that that kind of racial hatred was depicted in a movie, in a very real way” (Bosch).

When it comes to the news, the words *illegal immigrant* are repeated together, promoting a misconception about the number of Latina/os who live undocumented in this country and giving the perception that these human beings themselves do not have the right to exist in America (Exstrum).

With such repetition of this vocabulary, the perception becomes, in a sociopolitical sense, that Latinos are predominantly undocumented and that they are dangerous to citizens of the United States. A survey conducted after the 2016 Presidential Election but before Donald Trump’s inauguration found that “half of all Hispanics are worried about the deportation of someone they know” higher than with previous administrations and “41% of Hispanics say they have serious concerns about their place in America [after Trump’s election].” Rocío Rivadeneyra published a study that examines how these harmful images affect the adolescent Latina/o community (Rivadeneyra 393). This study agrees with Balta’s claims demonstrating, in television, Latina/o characters are three times as likely to be portrayed as lawbreakers than European characters (Exstrum 394). Furthermore, Latina/os were likely to be cast in lower class positions and appear less articulate than other nationalities (395). Though it is hard to quantify, this study did find that Latina/o adolescents were affected by the images that they saw on television of Latina/o characters and helped them construct their image of what it means to be Latina/o (411). The participants in this

study often preferred to watch Spanish-television, as they stated the stereotypes in Spanish-language television were less severe and offered a more balanced perspective on their nationality (410-411).

An overlooked place when talking about portrayals of Latina/os in media is in adolescent literature. Because Latina/o adolescents seem to find more balanced depictions of their culture in Spanish-television rather than television in English, we might ask: would the same be true for literature? When beginning this study, I aimed to find children's books published in Latin America. Most often, I found translated versions of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* by Jeff Kinney (2007) and other top-selling novels from the United States. This remained true as I continued to investigate Spanish book publishers in the United States and abroad. I conducted a search on the largest book publishers worldwide who published novels or published in Spanish: Lanic, Random House, Hachette livres, Grupo Planeta, and Scholastic. After this research, I found a consistent trend: that children's books were available but Spanish books for young adults were translated or produced in the United States and Spain. Scholastic, for example, has 300 books in their *En Español* division for students below grade three and only sixteen novels for students over this age all translated from English (Scholastic). *Grupo Planeta* featured authors from Spain or popular translated works from the United States (Grupo Planeta). *Hachette Livres* has eleven publishing locations in Spain and only one in Mexico for professional books (Hachette Livres). Similar results were found for Random House and Lanic (Random House, Lanic). Even when reading Latina/o adolescent literature, the characters themselves were often reading books published in Europe or the United States. Alma Flor Ada in her novel *Island Treasures, Growing up in Cuba* (2015), for example, features an avid reader but the protagonist is found reading *Little Women* (1868) or *Heidi* (1881) (Ada). In *Esperanza Rising* (2004), Abuelita mentions reading *Don Quijote* (27) another European novel. Though these are classics and inarguably important in literature, it is interesting that the characters never mention

reading any authors from their respective countries. The reality is, books from Latin America, originally published in Spanish, are just not available for adolescents, unlike the easy availability of Spanish-language television and music.

In contrast with this publishing house reality, many are starting to see the value of diversifying the characters and experiences present in children's and adolescent novels. Therefore, there have been efforts by organizations to increase multiracial characters in children's books and increase the number of Hispanic authors writing within the United States.⁵ Julia Álvarez even cites this as one of her main reasons for writing the *Tia Lola* series (2002): so that children in the Dominican Republic will have something to read with familiar faces in its chapters (Manzano). This can be seen as an uncomplicated problem; why does it matter what adolescents in the Latina/o community are reading? Educational scholars argue that adolescent and children's literature does matter. In our public education system, Latina/o students often lag several grade levels behind their Caucasian classmates and often lack fundamental reading skills (Gallagher 368). Studies and academic sources agree that when students are far more likely to succeed when the literature they read reflects their cultural reality and contains characters who look and act as they would (Temple et al 57). Latina/o students need to encounter characters in their literature who are of their race and heritage, authentically representing their culture in an articulate, intelligent manner. Students need role models who are going to college, overcoming adversity, and using their Latina/o experience to better contribute to the melting pot of the United States. After reviewing the effects of Latina/o stereotypes in television, it is easy to see why portrayals of Latina/os in literature are important for youth in this community and worthy of investigation.

⁵ This was emphasized in *All Children Read: Teaching for Literacy in Today's Diverse Classrooms* by Temple, Ogle, Crawford, & Freppon (2011). The disparities in minority scores and how the type of material that they read affects their literacy growth was emphasized in *Readicide* by Kelly Gallagher (2009) and *Reading Latin America* by Graciela Italiano (1993). Increased attention to Latina/o authors was discussed in *Thinking en Español* by Jesús Rosales (2014).

Defining Adolescence and Adolescent Literature

When considering adolescent literature, it is important first to consider the target audience. How we define adolescence shapes the information and stories that are contained within their books and is essential to understanding authors of this subcategory. Defining adolescence can be done in terms of society, identity formation, and biology and is not as universal as one might expect. Though the terms “adolescent” and “young adult” can be defined differently depending on the context, for the purposes of this investigation, they will be used synonymously as publishers and booksellers often view adolescent literature and young adult literature interchangeably. Despite the fact that human beings have always experienced stages of development, childhood and adolescence themselves are relatively modern constructs. Historically speaking, children were seen as “mini-adults” and expected to help their family obtain resources, working alongside their parents (Lerer 1-2). Children were viewed with indifference or what we would now consider to be neglect or abuse (Lerer 1-2). Investing in children economically and emotionally, or considering the innocence of childhood as a time of play and self-discovery exists only in the modern world (Lerer 2). When accepting the modernity of childhood, it is only natural to realize that though it is a frequently-used term, it is not one that has universal acceptance in its definition and is up to scholars to interpret and debate its application.

The basic definition of adolescence is that it is the transition between childhood and adulthood. Many sources use age as a way to construct adolescence. In a vernacular, Western sense it is referred to as the “teenage years” (Moshman 5); however, scholarly sources are quite varied on a numerical age. *The Society for Research and Adolescence* defines the ages as 10-19, *The Journal of Adolescent Research* contains discourses about individuals between the ages of 11-22 (Curtis 2) and

finally *The Journal of Adolescent and Family Health* defines it as ages 10-18 but could include individuals of 9-26, (Moshman 5). There is such a variety of age ranges in defining this transition period because many factors are considered when constructing adolescence since different individuals experience the milestones of growth at different points in their development. For example, biological changes such as puberty, physical growth, and achieving sexual maturity each have their own markers and the varied age ranges in which individuals experience these markers make them challenging to use as defining characteristics of adolescence (Curtis 9). David Moshman argues that almost all definitions of adolescence consider psychological development, making it the core of what it means to be an adolescent (1). This can also present a problem because even psychological development is open to a variety of interpretations and can circle back to include the biological development of the brain, and even an individual's pathology (Moshman 2). For example, one's mental health affects the anxieties, self-awareness, and insecurities that shape adolescence, making it near impossible to chart adolescence based merely on psychological factors.

Furthermore, culture plays a role in defining adolescence as some cultures see the end of adolescence as when an individual gets married, completes their education, or achieves financial stability (Moshman 5). These definitions are problematic as some individuals continue their education into adulthood, financial stability is a forced necessity amongst some adolescents, and the expectation to get married or conform with familial norms varies from culture to culture and individual to individual (Curtis 3-4). For the purposes of this thesis, the term "adolescence" will be used to refer to those in the emotional and physical transition from childhood to adulthood. In essence, it is the shift between a self that is entirely dependent on the parent for identity and basic necessities, to the development of an individual who can provide for themselves and forming a unique sense of self. All of the novels in this investigation deal with characters who are in the

process of transition from a dependent to a self-sufficient individual, defining what their heritage and culture means for themselves outside of their family unit.

Likewise, most scholars agree that in this time of adolescence, identity formation is at the core of development. It is essential, therefore, to consider how scholars explain identity formation concerning adolescence. According to Harold Grotevant, identity formation is defined as “the exploration of alternatives and the commitment to choices” (204). It is during adolescence that this exploration takes place. During this transition period, individuals often discover their sexual identity, what their heritage means to them, as well as define their morality and ideals. Young children define themselves in primary ways using concepts like their names, families, physical characteristics (such as hair color or height), abilities, interests, and homes (Moshman 67). As we develop, however, our identity shifts from being defined by these external forces to internal ones like ideology, personality, and other abstract concepts (67).

Two key theorists that are relevant to this investigation on adolescent literature, Erik Erikson and James Marcia, discuss how identity is influenced and formed during adolescence and then maintained into adulthood. According to Erikson, identity is primarily formed in adolescence and is influenced by one’s personality (91-3). This was different from previous scholars, like Sigmund Freud, who believed identity was primarily formed in childhood (Moshman 68). According to Erikson, it is during adolescence that an individual deals with feelings of “mistrust, shame and doubt, guilt, inferiority and futility” ultimately leading to an acceptance of our individuality and a sense of “who am I?” (128-134). It is through this questioning that an ideology of an individual is formed and becomes more stable, even though it can still make gradual shifts throughout a person’s lifetime. Marcia agreed with most of what Erikson postulated about identity formation, especially in regards to its happening during adolescence. For Marcia, the idea of identity formation also included

broader concepts like a commitment to one's "vocation, sexuality, religion and political ideology" (Marcia 14-22). Marcia continued his theory stating that those entering adolescence fall into two categories: one category of adolescents would be the "identity diffused" who seem to live day-by-day without a strong sense of self or commitment, and those whose "identity is disclosed" who do have a clear sense of vocation, sexuality, religion, and political ideology mostly determined by their parents (cited in Moshman 71). According to Marcia, although one's identity is not unchangeable after adolescence, the goal of this time is to provide further resolve to one's sense of self, to start to define life choices. Along these same lines, a core theme within adolescent literature is finding one's identity, moving away from familial identity into a self-definition of what one's purpose is, and what one's place is in society. Though age, psychological, and biological factors were considered in the definition of this transition to adulthood, with respect to this investigation, identity is the primary focus when considering this transition from childhood to adulthood. In line with the concerns of scholars on the topic of adolescence and identity formation, all of the young adult novels considered here feature characters who are struggling with these questions and often conclude the novels with a firmer sense of self and a direction for their future.

The definition of adolescence can then be applied to the field of literature, especially when considering the intended audience. Like defining "young adult" or "adolescent," there are many disagreements about what constitutes adolescent literature. In the technological era, many websites and organizations seek to set standards for what is age-appropriate for readers. However, because what is acceptable varies from family to family and culture to culture, these institutions have a difficult time determining what is appropriate for any given age or grade level. Further complicating the matter, with young adult literature comes a wide range of reading levels, especially when it comes to minority communities. Just because a child has the physical ability to read a book, does not

mean that they are mature and ready for all of that book's content; likewise, an adolescent might have outgrown the concepts addressed in a "third grade novel" but not have the ability to read beyond this level (Temple, Ogle, Crawford, Freppon 59-64). There is, therefore, no rulebook for what kind of language or what reading level authors should use when writing to any specific age-range or grade. This is overall a positive thing as it allows adolescent authors to write for a broad range of audiences and focus more on the message being written than the state guidelines that he or she intends to meet.

Unlike the concepts of "childhood" and "adolescence," children's literature is a concept that is as old as stories themselves. Children's literature and young adult literature were often lumped together and have only recently developed into two separate entities. Storytelling began in oral traditions. This is where children's literature was also born, in stories told by the parent generation to pass on beliefs, culture, or simply to entertain the next generation (Lerer 17-18). Especially in Western Societies in the Middle Ages, as the Catholic Church began to focus more and more on the child of Jesus, storytelling was used as a way to pass on morals to the next generation. During this time period, children's literature also developed in complexity: "The presence of that Christ child helped make medieval Europe into something of an *aetas puerorum*, an age of children. At times poignant, at times powerful, images of the baby Jesus show everything from the child lying in the manger or suckling at the Virgin's breast to symbolic, even surreal, visions of the child emerging out of the raised host at the Mass" (Lerer 42). With this focus on the holy family it led to changes in the changes in children's literature and the sacred nature of childhood.

With early book publishers and the invention of the printing press in the mid-1400s, Aesop's fables (which have often been considered the earliest official children's books starting orally in the late 6th century BCE) began to be published specifically for the child audience (Lerer 35-40). By the

18th century, Ruan became a center for children's book trade and Pierre Jules-Hetzel (also the publisher of popular author Jules Verne), set standards for publications for children and marketing books to younger readers (Lerer 17-25). The expansion of children's literature eventually reached the United States: in the mid-1800s, libraries began to receive funding and awards were created for children's authors. This all helped to create a profitable business of selling text to younger readers (17-25). Today, the publication and sale of young adult or adolescent novels in the United States is a four billion dollar industry. The United States remains one of the top publishers for this category of literature in the world.⁶

Despite the fact that children's and young adult literature are the highest area of growth and the most profitable area for publishing houses, literature for non-adult readers is rarely considered a serious academic area of study (Lerer 15-25). Readers who are still in school are often required to read novels as part of their academic practice, yet these novels are rarely investigated beyond a simple literature review. In contrast, works in adult novels dealing with serious topics, communicating important messages about society can be considered works of "literary merit," these kinds of novels stray away from what is widely read by the masses and part of popular culture (Nealon, Giroux 194-201). The success of an adult novel can be judged based on this literary merit. Young adult literature is different: even if it deals with serious, complex issues, its success is still widely determined by its popularity and gross book sales (Lerer 17-34). However, in *Children's Literature: A Reader's History, from Aesop to Harry Potter*, Seth Lerer argues that it is this very popularity that makes children's literature important. Children's literature is a reflection of the society at large; it is a window into understanding current cultural phenomenon (17-34). Considering all of the identity formation that happens during childhood and adolescence as stated by a variety of scholars, it is reasonable to conclude that children's and adolescent literature is inherently important

⁶ Statistics were taken from the Association of American Publishers 2016 report.

because it has the greatest power to influence and change the life of its reader. Young adult literature has the real possibility of exposing a reader to a new point of view, to a perspective they had not considered and making a real change in how they view the world. Knowing this, it is only logical that adolescent literature would be studied in the realm of scholarship and this paper aims to be a part of that scholarly discussion along with scholarly journals such as the *Horn Book Magazine*, *School Library Journal*, and the *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, which are important sources for this study.

Defining Latina/o Literature and Code Switching

It is also necessary to define the terms Latina/o and Hispanic, in particular examining how they will be used throughout the rest of this investigation. There is not one precise definition as to what these two terms mean, and many individuals in vernacular language use them interchangeably (WonderWhy). Hispanic is a term which means “from Spain” and is used to encompass those from this country and those who are from countries that were part of Spanish colonization (WonderWhy). The CDC similarly defines Hispanic as “[including] any person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race (1).” Latina/o, contrastingly, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, refers to “A person Latin American origin or descent.” This means that anyone immigrating from, or with a heritage from Central America, South America, or the Spanish-Speaking Caribbean could be considered Latina/o (Oxford).⁷ Both terms have been used by United States agencies to create a separation and “otherness” when regarding individuals from Spanish-speaking countries (Taylor, et al).

Additionally, those with this heritage in the United States are not universally in agreement over what these terms mean or which they prefer. The Pew Research Center has found that 51% of people in

⁷ This definition is also used by government agencies in the United States such as the CDC.

the United States identified as “Hispanic” prefer to use their country or parent’s country of origin when defining their race and culture. Because Hispanic has a deeper association with a time of colonization and Latina/o is more encompassing to those with Latin American descent this term was used more prominently throughout the investigation. Specifically, the three authors read are of Mexican and Dominican heritage; however, I saw similar trends in other adolescent Latina/o literature not expanded upon in this thesis. The authors of the novels I chose are all of Latin American heritage and the characters they write about are either residents, immigrants, or are the children of immigrants from a Latin American country.

Most sources agree that Latina/o literature in the United States began with a linguistic relationship with its neighbor Mexico in Chicano literature (Rosales 263, Torres 75-76, Schmidt 40).⁸ There is a deep and fluid history to the Mexican border and a conflicting number of identities as the border was pushed back and forth across the inhabitants over time. This history is important as it affects the idea of identity in Latina/o literature and also plays a role in the early development of Chicano literature. Starting with the Spanish *conquistadores* throughout Latin America, many missionaries and native inhabitants were pushed north towards what is now Mexico and the United States to gain Spain a better stronghold in the region (Bosch). Later, as the United States enacted a philosophy of Manifest Destiny and under then-President James Polk, the United States annexed what is now California and other Southwestern States. Tensions eventually led to the Mexican American war and the annexation of what is now Texas (Bosch). Mexican immigrants were first welcomed as a source of cheap labor during a time of development, however, were accused of stealing United States citizens’ jobs and were paid to return or forced to return to Mexico during the Great Depression. However, as soldiers left to fight in World War II and their cheap labor was

⁸ The term “Chicano” started as a derogatory term to refer to those who came to the United States from Mexico. Over time, those with Mexican ancestry started to adopt the term as a form of empowerment (Bosch).

needed, Mexicans were incentivized to again cross into the United States (Bosch). Even though treaties had led to legislation guaranteeing land rights to Mexican citizens who chose to stay in this area of the United States, prejudices persisted and many previously wealthy landowners lost their properties. Mexicans were lumped with other minority groups and forced into segregated school systems. Mexican students had high dropout rates and less than one in a thousand graduated from college (Bosch).

The term *Chicano* eventually developed as Mexicans in the south looked for a unifying term to claim as their identity and push forward for equal rights. According to Jesús Rosales, Chicano literature began when plantation owners needed Spanish as a way to maintain control and community with the workers through the various waves of immigration that happened between Mexico and the United States (256-275). These translators for plantation owners had somewhat of a higher status and lived a dual life between Spanish and English (273). With this duality of life, Chicano literature was born. There was a continuing divide in economic power between Chicanos and other Hispanics and their Caucasian counterparts. Activists such as César Chávez and Dolores Huerta in the 1960s led a series of peaceful protests against the established farming system to demand better wages and working conditions for Mexicans working in agriculture. This eventually led to the creation of the National Farmworkers Association which continues to work for and ensure rights of workers today (Bosch). Likewise, Chicano literature has a more prominent place in American literature today and is continuing to grow as the value of multiculturalism continues to be recognized in the publishing industry.

The term *Latina/o* developed as activists realized agglomerating United States residents with a common Latin American heritage would give them greater political and economic power (Bosch). This kind of grouping has benefits, but it also can attenuate a rich culture that varies from region to

region of Latin America. This is the danger of grouping all Latina/os as one in the same despite their vast differences. Julia Álvarez, one of the authors studied here, echoed this concern in an interview for the 2009 F Scott Fitzgerald Award for *Once Upon a Quinceañera* (2007) which is the only book that she has written that was commissioned. She explained that Penguin Publishers was selecting authors with subsequent social topics and she was selected to “do the Latino Topic.” She explained, “I always get nervous when they do that, you know, because we’re a varied group. An all Latina/o topic? I mean, how about being a human being as a Latina/o topic?” She then realized that there was a value in looking through the lens of one aspect of Latina/o culture, the *Quinceañera*, that could give a window into the development of the Latina/o community (Huergo). Authors, investigators, and members of the community are all encountering a similar problem: there is a value in looking at individuals from a similar region, previously colonized countries of Spain together as one entity, yet there is something that is lost when Latina/os are looked at under this all-encompassing term.

Likewise, there is some value, some commonality in looking at Latina/os as a whole, especially with literature. Though as a society, we tend to lump all Latina/os together, many different contributions added to the diverse flavor of this literature in the United States (McNeese 48). Latina/o literature encompasses all works written by authors who share this heritage. Generally associated with Latina/o literature are themes of family, showing authenticity to a Latin American culture from food to religion to cultural practices, magical realism, a focus on the spiritual, and accurately conveying the Latina/o experience in this country (McNeese 75).⁹

⁹ Magical realism is a genre of narrative fiction or a narrative strategy often associated with authors belonging to the Latin American Boom. It consists of using magic within a storyline and accepting it almost as reality. For example, someone putting a curse on someone else or deceased members of a family coming back to life and talking to the characters. It is an important part of the spirituality that resides in Latin American writing (McNeese 88). Graciela Italiano argues that magical realism is so prevalent in Latino literature because of the struggles that this community has faced. In many communities, relying on the supernatural and the spiritual seems more beneficial than relying on a government or circumstance to better your position.

Since the birth of Chicano literature in the 1800s with contact between Spanish and English through plantation owners and workers, this literature has continued throughout the United States' history. However, multicultural studies and multicultural literature started to gain national prominence in the later part of the 20th century with the rise of activists such as Cesar Chávez fighting for the rights of Mexican Americans (Rosales 410). With protests like the Los Angeles walkout where students demanded better educational opportunities, school systems started teaching Chicano history and hired more Mexican and Latina/o teachers and principals. It is not surprising, then, that Latina/o literature in recent years started to become more popular as it was studied in the schools and then in universities (Busch). This has happened through a variety of programs and a further acceptance of this type of literature. Through the course of investigating the authors in this thesis, I found that many of these authors were able to gain prominence as Latina/o authors through programs that tried to diversify the pool of authors in American Literature by encouraging writers from minority backgrounds. For example, in *Once Upon a Quinceañera*, Álvarez notes programs that empowered her such as "Women's Way" that allowed her to break out as a Dominican writer (217-19). She says, "Lucky for me, a great day was beginning to dawn in American Literature, ethnic writers who, like their earlier Afro-American counterparts had been eating in the kitchen, were starting to be welcomed to eat at the big table of American Literature" (217). Benjamin Alire Sáenz was part of a movement that started a bilingual studies sector in the Creative Writing Department in El Paso (Ballí). He firmly believed that students living so near the border, who had lived their whole lives in two languages or who had learned a second language should have the creative power to write in both. Sandra Cisneros, author of the widely acclaimed novel *The House on Mango Street* (1984) discussed in an interview with Edwards, the fact that before she was a writer, she was a teacher in an inner-city school and saw first-hand the power of teaching novels in which

students could see characters with their heritage, characters who looked like them. She read *100 Years of Solitude*, by Gabriel García Márquez and captivated the students so strongly that they started their own chains of gossip around the book (Edwards). These and many more writers talk about how much reading other Latino or Latin American authors influenced them in their writing and careers.

This thesis first examines how Benjamin Alire Sáenz, Julia Álvarez, and Pam Muñoz Ryan reflect on bilingualism in adolescent literature, and then study how code switching functions as the primary way in which these authors incorporate motifs about language and identity into an English text. Furthermore, code switching is often used as a way for authors to show a conflict of identity since many recent immigrants struggle with being caught between two different countries and code switching can help portray this life in between two cultures. The struggle to find one's identity as an immigrant in the United States can emotionally compare to the struggle of an adolescent trying to balance their struggles of identity, which can be seen throughout all of these works highlighted through this literary device. Code switching as defined by Chad Nilep is "The practice of selecting or altering linguistic elements so as to contextualize talk in interaction. This contextualization may relate to local discourse practices...or it may make relevant information beyond the current exchange, including knowledge of society and diverse identities" (1). Marcus Kracht and Udo Klein note that "Speakers tend to mix two or even more languages in their utterances. The switch between languages may occur even within a single sentence. This is the phenomenon of code switching" (314). MacSwan argues that "Code Switching is widely used in bilingual communities worldwide, and has been found in government documents, literature, religious works and song" (xxiii).

In the realm of literature, it is a linguistic feature that involves switching from the primary language of a text to a second language to establish authenticity and convey meaning (Rosales

1967). Because many Latina/os switch between languages throughout their day-to-day lives, it only makes sense that code switching would appear in their writing as well to show an authentic pattern of speech and legitimization of culture (Schmidt 40). Many authors talk about the joint nature of language and culture. A direct translation is impossible in literature, even if the phrases were accurately translated, there would be some culture, some deeper meaning lost. By including Spanish words in Latina/o literature, there is a sense of “ethnic kinship” and inherent cultural connection (Italiano 121-122).

Code switching is an important focus in Latina/o literature because it is one of the things that sets it apart from other multicultural writing. Many scholars make comparisons between African American writers and Latina/o writers because they are struggling with many of the same social problems such as oppression and poverty; however, code switching is unique to this category. For example, Rosales talks about how Chicano literature (a subcategory of Latina/o literature) is often compared to multicultural literature because the characters and communities are often facing similar issues.¹⁰ Additionally, Italiano talks about how the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s was important for Latin American writers as well as African American writers (121). She also cautions of the danger of thinking of any group as experiencing one shared oppression but does find benefit in these shared experiences. Furthermore, many writers such as Dean Franco compare Chicano and African American writing as a means of comparing a struggle against prejudice. Finally, McCracken compares the style of Latina authors to those of African-American women in the publishing sphere (192).

According to Margaret Schmidt, code switching in a literary sphere is used in three main ways. First, it is used to add a Latin flair to writing, showing aspects of the culture including food,

¹⁰ The term “multicultural literature” is used by Rosales as well as other writers such as Temple, Charles, Ogle, Donna, Crawford, Alan, & Freppon, Penny to refer to literature written by or authentically featuring characters from a minority background.

dance, or celebrations. It is also used to highlight the struggle between two cultures as well as the difficulty of learning English or the prejudices that Hispanics face in America. Finally, it is used to show the blending of two cultures, what is kept from the “old world” and transferred to the new home (Schmidt 41). According to Kracht and Klein code switching challenges the idea that “language is a homogenous code” (313). In a world where monolingualism is not the norm they challenge, “If language is a relation between the signifiers and the signified, what is then *two* languages?” (313-4). Code switching, in this way, adds a layer of complexity to writing and reading.

All of these uses and variations on code switching are important in literature but especially so when considering the intended audience. Although they can be enjoyed by a bilingual audience, code switching is often written for monolingual readers. For example, this sentiment can be seen in an interview with Edwards when Sandra Cisneros talks about how important it is to her that her book be considered “Literature” not “Mexican Literature,” that her books are not just for Latina/os, rather for everyone. Additionally, Schmidt talks about this when describing how Latina/o literature and writing in English for a monolingual audience helps “transcend the marginalization of their culture” (40). Previously, I discussed the importance of adolescent, Latina/o literature for Latina/o students, as sources of articulate, intelligent role models. Equally important, monolingual readers need to find these same challenges to traditional, cultural stereotypes. When these stereotypes are challenged in literature, it leads to an acceptance and a normalization of these minority individuals and cultures in society, they cease to be the “other.” Authors like Cisneros seek to be a part of this defiance of stereotypes. A fundamental motive of Latina/o literature is to push beyond traditional images of Latina/os and expand on what this means for readers (Rosales 287-319). Language is imperative, in our globalized, post-colonial culture, the language you speak can determine opportunities for advancement and one’s ability to reach the global market. Code switching is a way of pushing back

against the massive force and power of English in this society (Kondali 101-103). Considering this, it is important for this code switching and reflection of language to be done effectively and appropriately. Torres does this by evaluating the effectiveness of different kinds of code switching with respect to a monolingual audience (43). However, the presence of code switching is what remains most important, as code switching is a refusal by authors to live in one particular culture. More than just legitimizing a culture, it is employed by authors who embrace being fully Hispanic as well as fully belonging to the United States (Schmidt 40). Authors model this for their readers when they use code switching in a text.

The majority of scholarly writing on code switching debate whether or not it is an effective way for Hispanic culture to reach mainstream America.¹¹ Most specifically, scholars debate how code switching is used by authors and whether or not this well-intentioned inclusion is beneficial towards this mission. Torres best sums up how Latina/o authors use Spanish in their writing. First, authors may include words that are easily understood by the monolingual reader such as *hola* or *adiós*. Second, authors will write in Spanish with a direct English translation following. This is especially common with songs or idioms included in a Spanish text (Torres 43). A third way that authors utilize Spanish is by writing in this language and not providing a translation in the following text. Torres argues that this is most effective for promoting Hispanic culture and forcing the monolingual reader to fully understand the difficulties of living in two worlds at once; however, critics argue that this only lessens the readership of this minority literature (Torres 43). A new way that authors are incorporating a kind of code-switching in their novels is by writing in “Weird English” or writing in English but in a way that mirrors Spanish speech (Ch’ien 4). This could

¹¹ For example, this is a heavily discussed topic in *Reading Latin America* by Graciela Italiano, *Limitations of Code Switching in Chicano Literature* (2011) by Margaret Schmidt, *In the Contact Zone: Code-Switching Strategies by Latino/a Writers* (2007) by Lourdes Torres. Additionally, these ideas are discussed in *Weird English* (2004) by Evelyn Ch’ien and *Arts of the Contact Zone* (2002) by Mary Louise Pratt.

include the use of idioms or odd phrases that make sense but are unusual in English but common in Spanish (Schmidt 40). Though it may seem like a minor element of the text, many scholars discuss code switching in literature and these various methodologies that authors use to add Spanish to their writing. The aim of much of this research is to debate whether or not italicizing Spanish, adding translations that directly follow instances of code switching, or adding glossaries to the ends of books legitimizes Spanish and the mission of Latina/o literature. These arguments are ignored in this particular investigation of code switching; I give little attention to which types of code switching authors used but rather focus on how this code switching and language reflection was used within a work.

Corpus of Texts:

For this investigation, I chose the following authors and works: Benjamin Alire Sáenz's *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012), Julia Álvarez's *Before We Were Free* (2002) and *Tía Lola Came to (Visit) Stay* (2001), and Pam Muñoz Ryan *Esperanza Rising* (2004) and *Echo* (2015). I chose these authors for their commitment to writing adolescent novels in the realm of Latina/o literature. All three authors are winners of the Pura Belpré Award, which is given to a Latina/o writer who helps promote and celebrate Hispanic culture in the United States (ALSC). I also chose them for their frequent and varied uses of code switching within their novels.

As is true with most adolescent literature, little attention has been given to the books that are mentioned above in academia. Even when the authors mentioned in this study were discussed, such is the case of Julia Álvarez, only the adult novels of these authors were studied, not their adolescent literature. I would, however, like to argue that code switching and reflections on language use can be best studied and explored through adolescent Latina/o literature. Almost all authors discussing code

switching and language choices write about the fact that it is a way for an author to show a struggle with identity, of being caught between two worlds: that of the homeland and of this new country.

Likewise, most psychologists are in agreement that adolescents struggle with their identity and are straddled between the world they grew up in and their future, undiscovered and full of possibility.¹²

This investigation aims to prove that there is an undiscussed duality between the adolescent Latina/o experience in America and the traditional United States' adolescent experience of balancing oneself, defining what the parent culture will mean in the face of the new identity created by the next generation. Adolescent Latina/o literature frequently explores the themes of identity and acceptance, themes that are essential and relatable to all adolescents in an age of transition. It is a marriage in literature that works perfectly together: adolescent Latina/o literature gives a concrete metaphor for this struggle, reconciling with the past and looking toward the future. I would additionally argue that Latina/o authors use code-switching and reflections on bilingualism and language intentionally, not only to add a Latin American flair or show a concrete struggle regarding heritage but also to draw the reader in or create a break in the story. It is in these moments of Spanish in a majority-English text that the reader is caught off guard, a sense of friction in the fluidity of the reading experience. Latina/o authors of adolescent novels use these moments of breaking in the story to draw attention to and make concrete the experience of growing up, of being in transition from child to adult.

The authors I study, Benjamin Alire Sáenz, Julia Álvarez, and Pam Muñoz Ryan, are not the only authors who show these qualities in their works, but are exemplars of the craft that adolescent authors use in Latina/o literature. Though they exemplify the uses of code switching, bilingualism and language, and appeal to adolescents, they are not exceptions. Other authors such as Alma Ada

¹² This is a prominent part of the positions taken by Erik Erikson and James Marcia who are key theorists on adolescent psychology (Moshman 68, 87). Freud also believed that adolescence was important for childhood identity formation, however he focused mainly on childhood as the genesis of an individual's personality formation (Lerer 232).

Flor, Francisco Jiménez, Sandra Cisneros, and Esmeralda Santiago also demonstrated uses of code switching as a metaphor and ruptural element to say something about adolescence, social issues, and the experience of growing up. I do not discuss the works of the latter authors in order to allow this investigation to focus and investigate a few works in detail. The novels I chose for this investigation were also all written from the year 2000 up to the present, giving a modern scope to the adolescent literature I study. In contrast, the works by Esmeralda Santiago (*Cuando Era Puertorriqueña* 1994), Sandra Cisneros (*House on Mango Street* 1984), Francisco Jiménez (*Cajas de Cartón* 1997), and Alma Flor Ada (*Me Llamo Maria Isabel* 1993) were primarily published in the early 1990s. Regardless, the trends observed in these novels were common across adolescent Latina/o literature and have important implications when it comes to reaching adolescents and especially minority students.

This thesis is divided into five chapters, beginning with this introduction to these topics. Chapter 2 focuses on Benjamin Alire Sáenz and his use of code switching and language reflection to show adolescent characters beginning to define themselves as both being from the United States as well as owning their Mexican ancestry. The authors use this conflict of identity to explore how characters accept and take ownership of a homosexual identity in between these two competing cultures. Chapter 3 focuses on Julia Álvarez's reflections on language use in her novels to show a generational divide between parents and their children in transition. Authors use this language as a dividing factor between various stages of development and growth in characters. Chapter 4 focuses on Pam Muñoz Ryan and how code switching makes more concrete different socio-economic issues related to language as well as how language can show a connection to a cultural group. Chapter 5 focuses on the importance of adolescent Latina/o literature as a force for positive language identity and its place in academic investigations.

Chapter Two

Benjamin Alire Sáenz: Writing on the Border

Benjamin Alire Sáenz is a living embodiment of the duality of identity in Hispanic culture in the United States. He was born in 1954 on the border of the Mexico in Picacho, New Mexico. As one of seven children, resources were limited. His mother worked as a factory worker and house cleaner, his father as a cement finisher. After finishing his education, he spent a great deal of time traveling and studied theology in Europe and Tanzania (Ballí). A former Roman Catholic Priest for the Diocese of El Paso and an openly gay man, this duality is personal to his own life between being a homosexual and a Catholic. In his writings, he fights to normalize homosexuality (Ballí). In an interview after receiving the Pen Faulkner Award in 2013, he talks about his personal struggle with identity and how the border between the United States and Mexico is often seen as a character in his work, imposing this dual cultural identity. *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012) is one of his more well-known works. He writes almost exclusively adolescent Latina/o literature, and he identifies with and feels the power in writing for readers in this age group (Ballí).

Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe is a captivating novel about two fifteen-year old boys growing up in El Paso on the border of Mexico. Ari is an outcast and a loner, contemplating how to spend his summer. He is continually working through the brokenness of his family, from a father who is suffering post-traumatic stress disorder after fighting in the war, to a brother whom no one speaks about who is living out a sentence in prison. The plot begins when Ari meets Dante, a seemingly kind and equally eccentric boy who offers to teach him how to swim. Dante and Ari quickly become friends enjoying the trials and tribulations of adolescents, including working summer jobs, fighting off summer boredom, and defying the requests of their parents. It is clear that both are more sensitive than the typical adolescent male protagonist. This especially gains

importance when Ari saves Dante's life after Dante runs into the street to save a wounded bird. The reader comes to understand, before the two protagonists do, that they have romantic feelings for each other. Dante expresses that he is in love with Ari and comes out to him that he is gay part-way through the book and Ari remains his friend even though he claims he is straight. Both characters are of Mexican heritage, but not knowing whether or not to accept or reject this Mexican identity the border plays a vital role in this novel. It is a novel about struggling against whom you are "supposed to be" as defined by your community, your heritage, and your family, and discovering a more profound sense of self in the secrets of the universe.

As is typical with many adolescent authors, not many scholarly articles have been written on *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*; however, it has been widely reviewed and praised in children and adolescent book journals. Reviewers such as Cheryl Youse in the *Library Journal*, Karen Coats in *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* and Cynthia K Ritter in *The Horn Book Magazine* praise the novel's attention to a witty teenage voice, its thought-provoking messages, and its encouragement for those struggling to find their own identities. One article that has been written about this novel is "Boys Kissing in the Desert" by Ralph Poole which focuses on the contrast of the two protagonists, Dante and Ari. Their near-opposite personalities and their manner of expression are completely different, yet it is their falling in love and the combining of their two lives that ultimately sets them free (125). While this is an important angle for the novel, I want to investigate it from a different angle, viewing Dante and Ari not as opposites but on the same journey of identity development and acceptance of their homosexuality.

I chose to work on *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* not only because it is a prime example of code switching used to call the reader's attention to growth, change, and the duality of identity, but also for the numerous awards it has won within the adolescent literary world.

*Aristotle and Dante's*¹³ cover is littered with awards and recognition. Winner of the Pura Belpré Award, the Stonewall Book Award, the Lambda Literary Award, the Printz Honor Award, and the Pen/Faulkner Award, it is a clear example of Latina/o literature making its way in mainstream publishing (Youse). This chapter examines how Sáenz makes deliberate choices to use Spanish in a predominantly English work to highlight the adolescent struggle of being defined by one's choices. Furthermore, in Sáenz work, characters reflect and discuss language use with frequency. This frequent use of Spanish acts as a metaphor that shows how two different generations interact with their Mexican heritage and how these interactions affect their overall identity. As this novel is a love story between two boys, issues of homosexuality and how this identity affects their Mexican identity are also at play in the language used throughout the book.

Importance of Words and Explicit Code Switching

Early on in *Aristotle and Dante*, it is clear that words are inherently important in the plotline. While this is first established through the motif of “favorite words,” it later continues into code switching throughout the novel. Favorite words are a way for Ari and Dante to describe the characters and experiences surrounding them. For example, Ari says that “struggling” is his parents’ favorite word (14). Dante continues by saying that “responsibility” is his mother’s favorite word (28). The two protagonists bring up vocabulary words and discuss their meanings with frequency. Also, having the right words is an important theme throughout the book and essential to the main characters. Dante’s father is an English professor, and his dialogue is characterized by articulate phrases and advanced vocabulary. This is seen as an authentic and important part of defining his character. When Ari borrows Dante’s word “inscrutable” to describe his parents, he feels like a fraud. For Ari, words have this high value; they have a certain power saying, “words were different

¹³ *Aristotle and Dante* will be used from now on.

when they lived inside you” (28). Sáenz makes it clear from the beginning that the words we use matter in defining who we are and how we establish our identity.

Having the right words and using words to define identity is a common motif throughout all of Sáenz’s works. One clear example of this can be seen in *The Inexplicable Logic of My Life* (2017) a more recent novel by Sáenz when characters engage in the same kind of arguing over the correct words and even have a “Word of the Day.” Sal and Sam, the two main characters are best friends from early childhood. They use the phrase “Word of the Day” or “WTD” as a communication tool to establish a main sentiment or event that happened throughout the day. As their friendship expands to include a homeless classmate named Fito, so too does their “Word of the Day.” In this way, the characters in his novels are often building their relationships through specific word choices. This is important for two reasons; one, it highlights the need and difficulty in finding the right words to express yourself and your identity. Second, for an author that prides himself on bilingualism in his writing, it is clear that code switching and vocabulary choice are never done without intention; these are essential tools to convey something specific to the reader, as I will establish in the following pages.

In addition to the importance of words, code switching itself is discussed amongst the characters in *Aristotle and Dante* more than in any other novel I read for this investigation. Sáenz as an author sees the importance of code switching in literature and published an article about it, entitled “Where Spanish and English are Good for Each Other” (2010). In this article, he advocates for bilingual students to learn to write in both languages. He also talks about how empowering it is to use both English and Spanish in his work, and how it more realistically reflects what living on the border of the United States and Mexico is like (Sáenz). It is clear that Spanish and English do work symbiotically in this work as well as in his other pieces of literature.

Ari and Dante themselves often talk about code switching explicitly to make a point about the relationship between culture and language. An example of this discussion on language is seen when the two boys are listening to Dante's parents: "We could hear his parents talking in the kitchen because the window was open. His mother was talking in Spanish and his father was talking in English. 'They do that,' he [Dante] said. 'Mine too,' I [Ari] said" (43). The author does this primarily to normalize the experience of code switching. Though it is also used as a metaphor in adolescent literature, it is important not to forget that code switching is an everyday phenomenon common in many Latina/o's experiences with their families and friends. Many authors use code switching to add this sense of authenticity to the work. However, these explicit discussions of code switching have another purpose in this novel: they help to establish a mixing of cultures that exists in two generations and the differences that exist between them. When code switching is found in the parents' conversations, for example, there is a distinct wall between the two languages. One speaks full sentences in English while the other speaks full sentences in Spanish or entire conversations are had in one language or the other, even though both seem to be native Spanish speakers.¹⁴ Ari, Dante, and other adolescent Latina/os in the novel throw Spanish words into their everyday conversations, for example, they will put in a word or two of Spanish within an English phrase. For the parents, the straddling of two cultures is more separated: they live in the culture of their old country and the culture of the United States. For the children, the straddling of two cultures knows no boundaries: they are constantly mixed throughout their lives.

The other way that language is explicitly discussed throughout the novel is in the idealization of English. Using English, in a way, for Sáenz is a means of taking ownership of a language. After his 2013 interview for the Pen Faulkner Award, he is quoted saying, "No one needs permission to

¹⁴ Though it is never stated explicitly, it is alluded throughout the book that both of Ari's and Dante's parents are immigrants from Mexico. This can be seen in the amount of family they have in Mexico, their stronger identification with Mexican culture, and the struggles that they've had to deal with in their lives.

“speak the English language...language doesn’t belong to me, it belongs to all of us,” and this is shown in the way his characters react to both Spanish and English (UTEP). Ari and Dante have similar language and cultural experiences: they both come from parents who, though not stated explicitly, are immigrants from Mexico. Both protagonists grew up speaking Spanish and English at home, though both use language to express deep-rooted pieces of their personalities. Ari talks about how when he was ten his primary goal was to speak perfect English, that he did not care about how he looked or what he did but he had made up his mind not “sound like another Mexican” (94). He adds, “I was going to be an American. And when I talked I was going to sound like one.” (94). For Ari, it is clear that cultural identity is tied to language. This coincides with Ari’s usually negative comments about Mexico and his heritage. When he talks about himself as being Mexican, it is usually in a negative context. He says, “I’m just more Mexican...Mexicans are a tragic people...you’re the optimistic American” (20). The sentiment here is very similar to the previous quote, there is a sense that being Mexican is not a good thing. This is seen throughout the book as Ari continues to attribute Mexicans with negative, stereotypical ideas. He is almost unsurprised when the first girl he kisses, Ileana, can’t go to prom with him because her real boyfriend is in a Mexican gang (223). Again, when he explains to his mother that he might get a job mowing lawns he responds to her objections by saying, “Too Mexican for you, Mom?” (237). Speaking perfect English seems to be Ari’s way of working around this identity. He criticizes that which is Mexican and idealizes the United States and English. This contrasts with Dante, who speaks English well, yet uses circumlocutions and rich vocabulary. Language is what makes Ari an ordinary American, but language is what separates Dante: it is something for him to play with, something that adds quirkiness to his character.

Another example of the idealization of English and its role in the novel can be seen in Ari's mother's excitement about Dante's father being Latina/o *English* professor. Even as the mother holds *Bless Me, Ultima* in her hands, a novel by Rudolfo Anaya (a well-known Chicano author), she says, "How wonderful...when I went to the university, I never had one Mexican-American professor. Not one" (99). The reader sees Ari's mother proud of her Mexican heritage, she values Mexican-American professors, she values Mexican-American literature, but she is most proud that a Mexican-American has entered the realm of English professorship. Both Ari and his mother have an idealization of English; however, Ari idealizes this language to push away his Mexican heritage while his mother idealizes it as a way of celebrating it. This duality of language further separates the parent generation and the younger generation in acceptance and rejection of Mexican heritage. This reflects what Sáenz has said about code switching in his article. He explains that code switching should be used as an asset to English literature, not in competition or an antagonist to English literature. For the author, code switching is a unifying force, and this is reflected in the mother's celebration of Mexican-American literature. Sáenz says in "Where Spanish and English are Good for Each Other":

Today, in the Americas, we live in an age of violence and suspicion. Rather than thoughtfully solve the issues that confront us, many choose to speak a language that divides us. There is much talk of building walls. Where is the talk of building bridges? This is the tragedy of our times. But on this border between two countries, in our program, the young people of the Americas come together. They want to write. And when they leave, they leave with dreams of a common language.

Ari wants to abandon his Spanish in favor of English; he does not want to be another Mexican, his mother uses Spanish and English to enhance her life and has a more mature view of the contrasting languages that Ari himself holds.

Code switching itself is used throughout the novel to establish the fact that the main characters, Dante and Aristotle, are entangled in two cultures. Spanish is a way of separating the new generation from the parent culture. The parent culture is attached to Spanish throughout the book. This is seen, for example, in Ari's mother's church friends who come over and say things to Ari like "Let me look at you. *Dejame ver. Ay que muchacho tan guapo. Te pareces a tu papa*" (9). This is supposed to be something affectionate and harmless, but it bothers Ari, primarily because the use of Spanish seems fake or not really a part of him. Though not stated explicitly, the reader can assume that Ari grew up in a world full of Spanish based on how prevalent it is in his parents' dialogue and in quotes like the one above where the adult members of the community speak in Spanish. Ari is still connected to the world of his parents, which is the world of his childhood but is starting to separate and develop his own identity. We see this as Ari takes ownership of a new identity separate from that of his parents. He starts to value English and the way that Dante speaks with such eloquence. He also takes physical action to separate himself from his parents. In the beginning of the book, he is known for helping his mother with her charities simply because he has nothing else to do (9). Later in the book, he gets a summer job despite his parents' objections, which allows him to meet different people, earn his own money, and make even more of his own decisions. This struggle to accept a Mexican identity for the adolescents in the book is not always clear or as simple as a checkbox on a form, but a constantly evolving and murky definition that changes.

With this rejection of his parents' identity, Ari's view of Mexican identity changes as the book progresses. In the beginning, Mexico and Spanish are used to establish a contrast between

Mexico as something nostalgic and happy and Mexico as reminiscent of a sad past. For example, at the beginning of the novel, the song “La Bamba,” an upbeat song that Ari enjoys on the radio, is immediately associated with its composer Richie Valens and his tragic death in a plane crash. This contrast is seen again later in the book when Ari is suffering from a fever. He is dreaming when, again, the song is playing in the background accompanied by images of dying, falling sparrows, and Dante holding Richie Valens’ limp body (60-61). Other examples of Hispanic culture being used to juxtapose the happy and sad memories of Mexico is the Carlos Santana t-shirt given to Ari by his father for his birthday (9). While a gift from his father is supposed to be a happy thing as well as the celebration of a birthday it brings him sadness because of the emotional distance experienced between Ari and his father because of his father’s PTSD as an ex-soldier and the unspoken tragedy of losing Ari’s brother Bernardo to crime and prison. This same contrast is again present when Ari criticizes his parents for going out to dance wedding dances together. Ari says, “Mexicans. They loved wedding dances. They wanted to drag me out with them but I said no thanks. Watching my parents dance to Tex-Mex music was my idea of hell” (204). The identity of “being Mexican” is one that is under questioning throughout the book. It is constantly subjected to this same duality of something that is nostalgic, a place of happy memories and family, as well as a place of extreme violence. At points, Ari tries to reject a Mexican identity associating it only with drugs, unskilled labor, immigration, violence, and gangs. Ari even jokes with his mother saying, “I’m going to join a gang...I’m Mexican, isn’t that what we do?” (Sáenz 60). This is said with the intention of hurting his mother, with separating himself from her and the Mexican identity she carries. It is not clear whether or not Ari’s and Dante’s parents are immigrants from Mexico; however, it is clear that Ari’s mother has experienced a harsh life of poverty before receiving her education. Ari says, “My mom had a thing for the poor. She’d been there. She knew things about hunger that I’d never know” (8). His

mother is connected to this poverty-stricken border life in the Chicano community. As the reader, though it is not explicitly stated, assumes that both Ari and Dante were born in the United States based on the way that they talk about their country and *El Paso*. Because of their birthplace, the parent generation has more pride in its home country; they retain larger, more cohesive pieces from their past. The child generation lives more in between these two cultures. Ari's mother, for example, says "I'm an educated woman. That doesn't un-Mexicanize me" (237). Neither "being American" or "being Mexican" ever mean just one thing. Different positive and negative attributes are given to both cultures, and this happens within the space of parent-child conversations.

Another example of this parallel between language separation and generational separation is in the use of nicknames. Poole explains that nicknames are an important plot point because it is the initial thing that brings two very different boys together: commiserating over the oddity of their names (125-6). One of the very first conversations that Dante and Ari have, their original point of connection is their traditional, philosophical names. Furthermore, in Saénz's work, he uses names as a way to show a cultural connection. For example, names or nicknames are often the result of an acceptance or rejection of one's heritage. The idea of having two different names or having a "real" name with a "fake" one is important in establishing this heritage and identity acceptance in this novel. For example, when Ari responds back, introducing himself to Dante, he says he is "Ari" which comes from "*Aristóteles Ángel*," he says it with a strong, Spanish accent to emphasize its ridiculousness (17). Here, the author is making it clear that Ari wants to separate himself from his ethnicity whereas Dante is more accepting, keeping his full name. Naming and renaming is a motif throughout the novel especially when the boys discuss "Why do Mexicans love nicknames?" (38-9). The issue of Ari's name comes up later in the novel when he says: "Every guy I knew who was named Angel was a real asshole. I didn't care for Aristotle either. And even though I knew I was

named after my grandfather, I also knew I had inherited the name of the world's most famous philosopher. I hated that. Everyone expected something from me. Something I just couldn't give. So I renamed myself Ari" (84). Here we see Ari again attaching his full name Aristóteles Ángel to his Mexican heritage, more specifically through his grandfather. His renaming of himself is closely connected to his finding an identity separate from what everyone else expects from him or anticipates. When Ari brings up the Mexican nicknames again, this is the springboard for Dante's question; "it bothers you that you are Mexican, doesn't it?" and further discussions about how this Mexican heritage affects who they are in the United States (40).

I would argue that their names have an additional theological connotation. In the Bible, when a protagonist changes their name, it signifies a life-altering moment in that person's life. Saul becomes Paul when he stops persecuting Christians and converts, Simon becomes Peter when he becomes the father of the Church. Given Benjamin Alire Sáenz connection to theology and the Catholic Church, it makes sense that he uses this choice of names or naming oneself to signify a critical emotional choice for the character. An example of this kind of contrast is seen when Dante first introduces himself saying that he tried to use the English version "Dan" but it felt "fake" (17). Immediately the reader is drawn to Dante. He is an unusual character who runs into the street to save a wounded bird, he reads poetry, and he is an artist in everything he does. At the same time, Dante is an authentic character. He seems to know who he is and is true to this persona, even if it does not fit neatly into the surrounding culture of the community. In this way, Ari and Dante show Marcia's theory of identity formation perfectly. Dante is identity foreclosed, with a pretty strong, clear sense of self and Ari is identity diffused, taking things day by day with no clear direction. The way that they react to their names and the way they introduce themselves highlights this contrast.

Though a plethora of names are used and thrown at each other, possibly the most important “naming” takes place when Dante calls Ari a *pocho* which he defines as a “half-assed Mexican” (43). This code switch takes place throughout the book mostly when the two protagonists are trying to define what it means to be Mexican. In the conversation that follows its first use, Dante almost tallies up all of the things that don’t make them Mexican; they do not live in Mexico, they do not know anything about Mexico. In response, Ari says, “we speak Spanish,” to which Dante responds, “not that good” (44-45). This quote, first and foremost, demonstrates how closely language is tied to the identity and the importance of code switching in this novel to show this contrast of identities; Ari uses Spanish as the very thing that makes him Mexican. Later in the novel, the word *pocho* is used again when Dante explains why his extended family does not like him; he is a “half-assed Mexican” (87). Dante even qualifies the sentence by adding “My Spanish isn’t great” showing the importance of language in defining identity. Dante’s identity as a Mexican is later tied to his homosexuality. As will be discussed later when considering the implications of code switching on their homosexuality, Mexico is a majority Catholic. Its culture has not been overwhelmingly accepting of homosexuality. Dante feels this even though he lives in the United States and almost feels rejected by who he “should” be (87).¹⁵

Not only is code switching through naming meant to serve as a separation point between parents and their children but between much older or much younger siblings. This starts with Ari explaining that his family treats him as a *Mascoto* or family pet or mascot (13). They do this as a way of coddling him in hopes that he will not turn out like his older brother. Just as he feels being caught between Mexican and the United States’ culture, not belonging to either, he furthermore doesn’t feel like he fully has a place within his own family. His sisters are twelve years older than he

¹⁵ According to the Pew Research Center 2014 findings, 81 percent of Mexican residents identify as being Catholic and 90 percent of Mexicans in the United States claim that they were raised in the Catholic faith.

is and seem to belong more to his parent's generation. Though Ari knows very little about his brother and has few memories of him, Bernardo is strongly associated in Ari's mind with everything he associates with Mexico. Bernardo is in jail, and he is ignored and almost non-existent in their family life. He is the kind of Mexican-American that his parents and sisters do not want Ari to become, involved in drugs, violence, and gangs. Code switching further serves as a separation point between these siblings and himself. This can be seen when Ari has a dream about him being across the border and says: "*Vente pa'aca, Bernardo...*I thought that if I only knew the right words or spoke them in the right language, then he would cross the river. And come home. If only I knew the right words. If only I spoke the right language" (77). It is interesting that even though Bernardo is in jail in the United States, Ari imagines him across the border. More than just a greater physical separation between the two characters, this is also connected with Ari's stereotypical visions of Mexico: a place of gangs, drugs, and violence. Again, Ari feels this Spanish would be the right way to connect with the sibling that he does not know and to reach out to the past he does not understand. Spanish is the metaphorical bridge point that cannot be crossed between these two siblings. Names as a way of accepting or rejecting a culture is furthermore seen when Dante is picking out names for his future sibling. He first selects only male names, then picks names that are stereotypically Mexican such as Joaquín, Javier, Rafael, and Maximiliano. Dante does this because he feels like a failure to his culture; instead he hopes that his future sibling should be all of the things to Mexican culture that he cannot give due to his homosexuality. He selects a Mexican name to make him "feel more Mexican" (269); for Dante, naming the child sets his brother on a path to this perfection of a stable, idealized Mexican identity.

Code Switching and Homosexuality

Sexual identity is a key theme throughout the novel. Poole points out that Latina/o culture has an “inclination towards homophobia” and so Sáenz work has an important place in the realm of Latina/o literature (126). It is clear that, especially for Dante, the conflict with his homosexuality is deeply rooted with his conflict over his Mexican identity, even going so far as to say, “I still don’t really know if I’m a Mexican. I don’t think I am. What am I, Ari?” (172). Dante feels unworthy of his Mexican heritage because of his homosexuality. Likewise, as soon as Ari starts developing a homosexual identity, his feeling that he is not truly Mexican becomes more deeply rooted. This is seen when they are flirting back and forth and Ari responds; “I could feel myself turning red. Even guys with dark skin like me could blush” (72). Here we see again, attention is drawn to Ari’s dark, Mexican skin in a moment when his homosexuality is brought into question. In a way, the author is saying, even Mexicans can be gay. Some scholars such as Ben Sifuentes-Jáuregui in *The Avowal of Difference* comment that the concept of “coming out of the closet” is in and of itself American (3). He suggests that a refusal to accept the identity of being identified as being gay or a lesbian might be a post-colonial refusal to be put into categories, to be defined by these external, Western constructs (1-5). It is true that Ari, as would be age-appropriate for a teenager, does not want to be identified with these labels and instead seeks to be his true self. However, his non-acceptance of his homosexuality has more to do with the fact that he thinks being a homosexual is not allowed in Mexican culture than a refusal to live by a series of labels.

As mentioned alongside the importance of words as cultural metaphor throughout the book, language commentary helps highlight the difficulty in finding the right words to express gender relationships and romantic feelings. Early in the book, Ari is disgusted as he hears another, straight, male teenager refer to a girl as being “like a tree covered with leaves. You just want to climb up and tear all of those leaves off...I’m a poet...A poet of the body” (16). It is clear, early on that Ari is not

comfortable with these “normal” relationships, and it is specifically the language that they use to describe their relationships that bothers him. His disgust over this conversation is the first indication that he might not be happy with his sexual identity. This metaphor of the difficulty of language and the difficulty of sexual relationships is possibly best shown when Ari has a dream about Dante, “And then he said something to me in English and I couldn’t understand him. And I said something to him in Spanish, and he couldn’t understand me” (77). This is then continued when Ari says “There are some words I’ll never learn to spell,” as he and Dante write letters back and forth while away about their experiments with kissing different genders (155). Here the two languages serve as a metaphor, it is clear that they have a romantic interest in each other but, they have a lack of the right words or the right way to express their feelings; they lack the right words to describe and define their sexuality. The author is highlighting the strict definitions of the terms surrounding homosexuality in the United States. Ari and Dante do not seem to fit the descriptors of a “homosexual.” They seem to lack the correct words to define themselves, their identity, their feelings, nor their potential relationship. Furthermore, as is clear from Sáenz’s writings on code switching, he believes that Latina/o literature and novels that utilize code switching are not strictly for a bilingual audience. I think here the metaphor is even stronger for the non-Spanish speaking audience: not being able to understand one’s sexual identity or understand romantic love at all are seen as being comparable to not understanding a foreign language.

One incident that uses code switching and highlights these mixed conflicts of identity is when Charlie Escobedo knocks on Ari’s door and confronts him. Charlie’s conversation with Ari is important first because it makes Charlie controversial because he embodies a negative Mexican stereotype that Ari holds. He asks Ari, “You ever shoot up?” when Ari responds with a negative and adds that he doesn’t want to, but Charlie insists by saying, “You should try. It’s fantastic. You know

we could score some and go out into the desert in your truck and, you know, get high. It's sweet. So sweet, dude" (205). He is involved with drugs and has an apathetic personality. Second, he is the first person to suggest to Ari, explicitly, that he is gay. He is the direct point of contact between Ari's struggle to adopt his Mexican identity and his homosexual identity. Their conversation is punctuated with words and phrases in Spanish;

And then he got mad and called me a *pinchi joto* and all sorts of other names and he said he was gonna kick my ass all the way to the border...and didn't I know that nobody liked me because I thought of myself as Mr. *Gabacho*...Mr. *Gabacho*...I hated that. I was as Mexican as he was...And I said, Why don't you get someone else to do drugs with you, *vato*?...And he said, You're gay, *vato*, you know that? (205)

It is interesting here that the author chooses to use the word *pinchi joto* instead of *faggot* in his dialogue. Both words have a strong, negative connotation, but by using code switching here, they are not only talking about being gay but being Mexican. Furthermore, as Vinodh Venkatesh points out, calling someone a *joto* or a faggot has greater stereotypical and social connotations that go with it than simply calling someone a homosexual (41, 53). It is a phrase almost without translation though it has a derogatory connotation (210). This is further reinforced when Ari is referred to as a *Gabacho* or someone who is a foreigner. In a way, Charlie puts forward a debate that has been present in Ari's mind throughout the entire book: does being gay make someone less Mexican? Ari is in greater conflict over the fact that Charlie sees him as a non-Mexican than he is over Charlie's referring to him as a "faggot." Ari, in a way, sticks to his Mexican heritage, pointing out that he is as Mexican as Charlie.

Another situation where code switching serves as the contact point between a competing Mexican identity and identity is when Ari confronts Julián Enríquez. Julián assaulted Dante after he

discovered him kissing another boy. Ari hears about this after the fact and is extremely upset by how injured Dante is in the hospital and wants to get revenge. As Ari and Julián argue, they throw phrases back and forth such as “Nice wheels, *vato*” or “*Chingao ese*, what the shit’s wrong with you man?” (314). He uses Spanish as a way to make himself seem more macho before he beats up Julián. In a way, this whole incident brings into question what it means to be gay. At this point in the novel, it is clear to the reader that Ari has romantic feelings for Dante even though he is not aware of it himself, yet Ari is not the traditional image of a gay boy. He beats up people, he is a loner, he hides his feelings. An added layer to Ari’s unique status is, as a homosexual, he is not a traditional Mexican. This scene nicely shows this, he is just Ari, not fitting into one socially accepted identity of either of these identities: homosexual nor Mexican. Both the “Mexican identity” and “homosexual identity” have certain stereotypes and associated characteristics. All of these stereotypes are acknowledged by the author, yet the characters do not fit these characteristics. In this way, Sáenz promotes to the reader that just because an individual accepts an identity doesn’t mean they have to take on all of the stereotypes that come with that identity.

Code Switching as a Resolution

While highlighting the battle between these various identities, code switching also serves as a form of resolution between them, especially through family meals. Even though Mexico is presented in many different ways--both favorable and unfavorable--the cultural conflicts are partially resolved through food, bringing everything back to the calm and safe space of the family. This is seen first when Ari becomes dangerously ill and has nightmares questioning everything that makes him who he is from his sexuality to his relationships with his family and to his absent brother Bernardo. When he wakes up, however, it is the aroma of his mother’s *sopa de arroz* that helps cure him (64).

An important moment that shows the duality of cultures and an ultimate acceptance of both is when Ari's mother is making *tamales*. He starts off by repeating how much he loves tamales and why he loves them. A contrast is immediately made when Ari explains, "I like to warm them up in the oven which was really strange because that wasn't the standard way of warming up tamales. I liked the way the oven sort of dried out the tamales so they got a little crispy and you could smell the corn leaves sort of burning and smelled really great" (211). In a way, this incident is a reprieve giving Ari permission to love his Mexican identity through his love of *tamales*, but then also to be more than this one signifier. As stated previously, Ari frequently attributes negative, stereotypical images to a Mexican identity, however, as is seen here, the idea of being Mexican can mean more than one thing. He can still enjoy Mexican tamales, even if he does not cook them in the traditional manner. Likewise, a parallel situation will happen when Ari finally admits to himself that he is gay. Though Mexican culture is traditionally Catholic and opposed to gay marriage, Ari's Mexican identity does not have to mean the same thing as what is traditionally accepted in Mexican culture (Poole 126). Ari learns throughout the novel that he can choose what being Mexican means for him, that it does not come with a set list of labels and lifestyles.

A further example of Mexican food as being a uniting force within the book is when the two boys decide to get *menudo* after visiting the desert. Ari is surprised that Dante enjoys *menudo* because it is a very Mexican dish, claiming that this makes him a real Mexican. Dante responds by asking, "Do real Mexicans like to kiss boys?" and Ari responds, "I don't think liking boys is an American invention" (273). Like Ari and the tamales, this is another situation in which the author is suggesting that Ari and Dante both can choose what their Mexican identity means for them. Even though Dante cannot see it quite yet, the author is suggesting that Dante can love kissing boys and love being Mexican. Furthermore, the conflict between the two cultures and two sexual identities is

at play but can be put aside for the love of a certain kind of food. Food is a consistent part of Mexican culture that neither Ari or Dante can give up, it is what keeps them Mexican while allowing them to choose their own paths and own identities.

Though English and Spanish are both important throughout *Aristotle and Dante*, in a way Spanish often has the final say: it is a way to show that both identities are acceptable and open to a variety of interpretations. It is often in these moments when Spanish is used that the characters can finally get the closure they yearn for, that they are finally able to express what they have been feeling for a long time. This can be seen, for instance, Ari's mother is having a conversation with him about their family she says, "*Hijo de mi corazón*, I'll tell you a secret. You help me bear it. You help me bear all my losses. You, Ari. [Ari responds] don't say that, Mom. I'll only disappoint you... [mother responds] No, *amor*. Not ever" (322). Also, when his parents sit Ari down and try to talk to him about coming out, Ari's mother says, "Don't, *amor*. *Te adoro*. I've already lost a son. I'm not going to lose another. You're not alone, Ari. I know it feels that way. But you're not" (349). The mother has been somewhat closed off and unable to discuss some of the conflicts that the family has faced throughout the book. She does not talk about Ari's father's time in the war and subsequent depression, she does not talk about Bernardo the brother lost to jail, and she does not talk about what she has realized for a long time, that Ari is gay and hiding it deep inside of himself. It is only in the last few chapters of the book that she and Ari's father can confront each of these struggles. It is a distinct choice that the author makes to have these conversations littered with Spanish. In this way, Spanish is a comforting force, different than the *machista* way that Ari used it before. It is a way of reassuring the reader that everything is going to be okay, no matter what these identity struggles lead to there will always be acceptance and family. In a way, all of these conflicts come to a close. Like with the food, Spanish is not only the language of intimidation, of the negative stereotypes that Ari

associated with Mexican culture, it is a language of resolution and family. The characters find that it is okay to be Mexican and American, that neither of these forces are at odds with their homosexuality or their identity.

Sáenz uses code switching in a variety of ways throughout his novels and especially in *Aristotle and Dante*. Code switching is a vehicle that he uses to highlight various issues and struggles faced by adolescents, especially those dealing with identity struggles in the border towns of the United States. Both Dante and Ari are near-textbook representations of Marcia's identity formation categories. Dante begins the novel with his identity foreclosed, he is relatively confident and has a clear sense of self and belonging; much of this sense, however, has been determined by his parents. Ari, on the contrary, is a character who has his identity diffused, he has a nonchalance about his future, about who he is. As the book progresses and Dante starts questioning his sexuality he switches to identity diffused and Ari, as he learns about his sexuality and his brother becomes more identity foreclosed. Though these switches may not have been intentional by the author, it shows that he has achieved his objective of showing teens going through real identity struggles. Through this constant questioning by the protagonists, the author has presented two authentic teens who are in transition from childhood to adulthood. Saenz uses code switching as a way of separating his characters from the typical stereotypes, it is his way of giving a fresh and personal take on national debates.¹⁶ As a Mexican-American, it is interesting to note that he does not fail to include the negative stereotypes associated with Mexico: drugs, violence, laziness, and controlled by the Catholic Church. Instead, he puts forth a novel that shows these stereotypes and then defies them, highlighting these moments through various styles of code switching. In "Where Spanish and

¹⁶ Gay marriage is legal in Mexico, however it is still a highly contested issue. The country is strongly influenced by Catholic values and leans toward traditional values, the country is advancing in terms of marriage equality. The book, however, tends to focus on the more traditional side of Mexican attitudes towards gay marriage (Bell).

English are good for Each Other” Sáenz said, “Placing students together who come from different cultural, political, and literary traditions has been more an asset than a hindrance to their learning experience. Even the fact that they come here with varying degrees of skills in their non-native languages seems to add depth to the experience. In the classroom, we are always focused on language and the meaning of words” (1). In many ways *Aristotle and Dante* achieves this goal. It is intended for and enjoyed by both bilingual readers and monolingual readers, all with different cultural experiences with regard to the border between the United States and Mexico. All of the intended audience can learn from the messages of identity that are explored in the novel. Code switching in this novel is the author’s way of saying Chicano and Latina/o authors are important, they are worth listening to, and they have much to offer the scene of American literature.

Chapter Three

Julia Álvarez: From Niña to Woman

Julia Álvarez is a renowned author in the realm of Latina Literature. She was born on March 27, 1950 and grew up in the Dominican Republic until age ten when her family was forced to leave because of their involvement with the overthrow of the dictator Rafael Trujillo. Her most well-known novels are for adults and include: *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991) and *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994). As she has become a more experienced author, she has written several novels for younger readers such as *Before We Were Free* (2002), *Once Upon a Quinceañera* (2007) and *The Tía Lola Series* (2001), as well as picture books *Where do they Go?* (2016) and *The Secret Footprints* (2000) (Biography.com). As someone who fled her home in search of safety, straddled a difficult world between two cultures, the themes of home and foreign, as well as love and loss, appear frequently in her novels (*Once Upon a Quinceañera*). She is currently living in Vermont and is a writer-in-residence at Middlebury College (Biography.com).

Before We Were Free (2002) is a novel about Anita who is living in the Dominican Republic in the time of the Trujillo Regime.¹⁷ Even though Álvarez writes about what life was like under the dictatorship and features political relationships in her other novels, *Before We Were Free* stands apart from other novels about political turmoil because it makes brutal conditions understandable and appropriate for younger readers (Adams). Not knowing another life, Anita is originally naive about the oppression that the government imposes on their lives, and she is also unaware of her family's opposition to the government. The story includes many layers of secrets and lies. The reader, with Anita, has to figure out what is truly going on, as a plan builds to overthrow their leader.

¹⁷ Rafael Trujillo was a dictator in the Dominican Republic who rose up in the military to seize power in 1930 (Roorda 6-10). He used intimidation tactics to win the 1930 Dominican Election and establish martial law. He would act as the nation's leader for 31 years (32). He combatted resistance through his police force, killing off or imprisoning those who resisted. He established a government of violence. In an attempted genocide, he ordered the Haitian Massacre in 1937 killing thousands of Haitians (127).

At the story's climax, her father and brother are put into prison for treason and Anita and her mother are forced to live in the closet of a friendly embassy-neighbor family. Anita records events as they happen in her diary and matures as the situation around her becomes more and more serious. This tense novel ends in the United States as the characters have to learn to start over and experience a new country of hardships and opportunities.

Tía Lola came to (Visit) Stay (2001) is a novel about Juanita and Miguel, two siblings living through the recent divorce of their parents. Coming from the bustling city of New York City to start over with their mother in Vermont presents many different challenges. They move from a world of diversity to a small community in Vermont where no one seems to understand their Latina/o heritage. Making matters more complicated, their Tía Lola from the Dominican Republic comes to help their mother with household activities and get adjusted to her new life. The four protagonists represent four different perspectives on accepting and rejecting a Dominican heritage and what it means to fully accept yourself within a culture. Taking on a variety of serious topics, Álvarez attacks these issues often using humor, playing with words and code switching to show the complexity of an issue, highlight a moment, or just entertain the reader.

Álvarez often reflects on and uses a blend of Spanish and English in her works which makes her an important author in this investigation. Torres argues that Álvarez uses this device effectively while still making it palatable to a mainstream, larger audience (Isaacs 68). Ellen McCracken further points out that she uses code switching as a “ruptural” element that breaks the reader’s flow to draw their attention to something specific about the plot or characters (29). Despite this praise, most critics and scholars focus on her novels such as *A Wedding in Haiti* (2012) and *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994) which are intended for an adult audience. When authors do mention her adolescent and children’s novels, it is usually in passing. For example, Ksenija Kondali’s describes *Before We*

Were Free (2002) as the “young adult” “family left behind” version of *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (105). This is also seen in the *New Latina Narrative*, where McCracken highlights many aspects of Álvarez’s style in a general sense that appear in both her adolescent and adult novels. Furthermore, McCracken’s talks about color and Dominican culture brought into Álvarez’s books, and only uses her adolescent novels as a brief example (27-32).

While the idea of identity is important in many of the scholars who discuss Álvarez’s novels, rarely is this concept of identity attached to code switching, and even less frequently is it attached to identity as it relates to her adolescent novels. Scholars focus on the role of gender, ethnicity, and class in defining one’s identity and how these different factors shape her characters (McCracken 6). One interesting example of this investigation into identity is McCracken who argues that Álvarez’s characters’ struggle with their Latina/o identity is similar to the way that women have struggled with their identity in society. She highlights how well Latina/o literature is suited to discuss and work through these conflicts of womanhood and identity (27-32). This identity struggle needs to be discussed concerning to adolescent literature as well, as adolescents are in the stage of life where identity is being brought into question the most. Álvarez’s adolescent literature is equally suited to tackle these growing pain identity issues. The attention these works have received is scarce with the exception of several reviews. Rarely do authors look beyond the plotline of these works in their analysis. I aim to critically analyze the action of these novels and examine how Álvarez’s specific word choices and code switches reflect the struggle of identity between two different cultures as well as the struggle between the stages of growing up. Sáenz’s works use reflections on language to show a separation between two groups of individuals, the parents and the children, and Álvarez does use language in this way. However, Álvarez additionally uses these reflections on language to show the

growth of her dynamic characters. Language, in her novels, is part of the character's growth, and this growth often takes place in the background of the political conflict of living under a dictator.

Code Switching Separating Adulthood and Childhood

In Álvarez's novels for adolescents, there is a conflict between what it means to be a child and what it means to be an adult; Spanish is often the separation point between these two identities. This makes sense based on Álvarez's own experiences with languages and how code switching played a role in her life as well as the life of her family. Language is at the very heart of her authorship. In an interview for the 2009 F Scott Fitzgerald Award, she said:

I think the pivotal moment for me becoming a writer was coming to this country as a 10-year old ... having to learn English and pay attention. You know, when you're learning your native tongue, you learn it intuitively, instinctively as a kid. When you're learning it when you're a little older you have to be thinking, why are they saying it this way instead of that way? Why that word instead of that word? What's the little shade of difference between *amiable* and *friendly*? You're learning these things which as a writer you have to relearn even in your own language when you become a writer...I think that experience of immigration, and of learning English as an older speaker really turned me into a reader which is the beginning of being a writer.

She also reflected on how she is both Dominican and American, somewhat caught in between two cultures and the languages that separate these two cultures. She explains that she came of age in the United States and wanted to learn English to be like everyone else in America, but then realized that she had to maintain this connection to the culture and language of her parents--she belongs to

America and to the Dominican Republic. She contrasted this experience with her father explaining that he “came in his forties to this country, he had already come of age, he was not re-inventing himself as you are when you are coming up, that he had already become a person in one world and now he was in this world...he couldn’t quite belong except for this area of Brooklyn.” There is a separation in Álvarez’s novels between the child and the adult. The younger generation belongs to the country of their ancestors as well as the United States taking ownership of these two identities almost equally. The adult generation’s relationship with these two countries is more separated, there is less mixing of the two identities. This complex comparison of identity continues throughout Álvarez’s adolescent novels.

Some further insight into this generational contrast through the use of English and Spanish can be found in her non-fiction, semi-autobiographical writing *Once Upon a Quinceañera*. When she talks about disagreements between these two generations, the younger is somehow blending the two while the older gives advice and commands in Spanish. The expression “*yo también tuve mis quinces*” is used by adults to show that they too understand what it is like to be fifteen, that they too had their *quinces* (2). Also the phrase; “*Nadie aprende en cabeza ajena*, nobody learns in somebody else’s head” is given further passing on advice in Spanish adages (196). Álvarez uses Spanish as this separation point, the young, almost fifteen-year-old talking in English with a few sprinkled Spanish words here and there, being two identities at once. This contrasts with the older generation giving commands in Spanish, trying to pass down their wisdom which is rooted in their home country. This is more than just code switching as a ruptural element, something to draw the reader’s attention to the cultural divide between these two generations: it is a reflection of Álvarez’s personal relationships with language and her family. The way that these immigrants think about their new country and their language is affected by where they came of age. In this novel, Álvarez also talks

about the many disagreements she experienced with her own Dominican mother throughout her lifetime and so it is no surprise that this theme continues throughout her novels as a constant disconnect between the old and the young (190-204).

In *Before We Were Free*, Álvarez does the same thing, using code switching to break the reader's fluidity and draw attention to conflicts between the old and the young. Lauren Adams described the novel as "A story about a girl growing up too quickly," and sometimes code switching is used to express this sorrow of someone who needs to leave their home and experience the horrors of a dictatorship. For example, when Anita's father says; "It's *una vergüenza*...a shame that children can't be children anymore in this suffering country," a break is made in the syntax to add weight to this statement (874-75). This is seen again when the parents are discussing together and saying that they "are not about to let their kids grow up dumb *brutos* just because of the dictatorship" (1213). Spanish is also used to show how adults view Anita's progress as she becomes an adult. As Anita is growing into a young woman, it is easy for the reader to get distracted and sidetracked with the disasters of her everyday life, from the constant and mysterious murderers to the lack of freedom and forget Anita is maturing and changing. The Spanish word *señorita* is directly translated as "woman" or coming of age. The Spanish idea of *señorita* is used to bring the reader back and mark these moments of Anita growing up. Beyond this, the word *señorita* itself cannot be translated, when Álvarez uses this, she does not mean *woman* in a universal sense but all of the identity that comes with being a Dominican Woman, to come of age in this culture. When Tío Toni says at the beginning of the book; "And this *señorita* isn't far behind" it seems like a far-off thing, that Tío Toni is exaggerating; Anita is far from being a woman (893). When Tío Toni says this, Anita thinks of all the physical evidence that she is not a woman yet; her breasts have not developed, she has not gotten her period. This contrasts to the point later in the book when Anita does get her first period and her

sister exclaims, “my baby sister’s a *señorita*” (1087). The reader has already experienced Anita making more mature decisions and having to deal with life in a selfless way. She goes from not knowing who the SIM are to taking their danger seriously and comforting others around her when they strike.¹⁸ She starts off whining and getting into petty disputes with her family members and then is later reassuring them, and not complaining even when she and her mother need to live in a closet for months at a time.

While the reader sees Anita growing emotionally, the body is a physical marker that gives a tangible sign of her growth into womanhood. In the beginning of the book, becoming a *señorita* was a good thing, she wants so badly to be a woman and doesn’t appreciate it when her parents and sister treat her like a baby and feels proud whenever anyone treats her like she is a woman. An example can be seen at the beginning of the book when her sister Lucinda is crying over the fact that much of their family has moved away and Anita handles the situation with calm and innocence and her father acknowledges this. Anita stands tall, thinking to herself, “I feel proud to be acting more mature than Lucinda, but the truth is, I’m just as sad even if I’m not showing it” (187-188). However as time has passed, Anita has now learned “what *El Jefe* does to *señoritas*” and the news is seen as an unfavorable milestone (1089).¹⁹ She makes sure that Lucinda will not reveal her secret, this step into womanhood to anyone. She wants to keep her childhood, using it as a kind of protection. Lucinda reads a card from El Jefe reading, “*Para la linda Lucinda, flor de la patria, de un admirador.*” Again, Spanish is used to highlight this moment where attention is drawn to Lucinda’s womanhood. Their mother responds, “I told you to keep that shawl over your shoulders,” attributing this unwanted attention to Lucinda’s development and womanhood (998). Anita is not allowed to be a

¹⁸ The SIM (Servicio de Inteligencia Militar) were the secret police of Rafael Trujillo subdue any attempts at rebellion or opposition amongst the people. They are strongly featured in *Before We Were Free* as well as *In the Time of Butterflies* and described by Anita’s mother as “*Policia Secreta...they go around investigating everyone and then disappearing them*” (213).

¹⁹ *El Jefe* refers to Trujillo the dictator of the Dominican Republic during this time.

child, she has to grow up so fast, but she also must hide her womanhood, the sexually predatory dictator does not allowed to transition into this next phase of life. She is caught in between these two stages of development simply trying to survive a difficult situation.

Spanish is further used as the language of Anita's past, it is the language used when her parents treat her like a child, while English is the language of her ultimate future in the United States. This is a metaphor but also a reflection of Álvarez's personal experiences with language discussed earlier in her F Scott Fitzgerald author interview. Spanish exists as a separation between the younger Anita, who needs to be told what to do, and the adolescent Anita, who is mature and has survived a great deal. For example, as was discussed with *Once Upon a Quinceañera*, Spanish is frequently used in commands or reprimands. Whenever Anita is reprimanded by her parents or another adult, it is almost entirely done in Spanish. For example, her mother exclaims; "*Anita, por favor*" when she is tired of her daughter asking so many questions about their country and being a curious child (270-1). When her father asks her what she is doing sitting in their own living room Anita exclaims, "Honestly *Papi* I live here!" to which he responds; "sorry, *amorcito*, you startled me" (281). When her mother asks her to stop writing in her diary or wants to soften a command she calls Anita "*mi amor*" (799). This is in contrast to when they are treating her more like an adult or an equal they have a conversation entirely in English. For example, when they are waiting for their father to return, Anita asks her mother if they are going to be okay. Rather than brushing her comment aside or stretching the truth as she might have done earlier in the book, Anita's mother responds, "We're in God's hands now" (1517).

Also, as was true in Sáenz work, this contrast between the child Anita and the adult Anita is seen through the nickname that Anita is given. Her father calls her *Cotorrita* playfully because the family thinks she is talkative like a parrot (77-78). In the beginning, this Spanish word is used as a

sign of affection, however, as the novel progresses, Anita becomes more and more frustrated with the term: “Even *cotorrita* is starting to get on my nerves. Honestly! People are always reminding me about my manners, but where are theirs?” (370-71). By the end of the book, Anita has outgrown this term and even feels like her family is belittling her when they use it for example when her mother says; ““Ay, Anita, tell me what’s going on...you’re too quiet to be Mami’s *cotorrita*.’ I hate when Mami worries about me and starts calling me her little parrot and treating me like I’m five again” (1246-48). This nickname is directly used in relationship to the amount that Anita talks. In the beginning of the book, Anita chatters endlessly and has an overall playful attitude towards life that goes with this playful nickname. As the novel progresses, the level of tension and secrecy builds and Anita faces more and more tragic experiences, such as losing her extended family as they escape to America, to her father and brother going missing. With this emotional turmoil in her life, she talks less and less and the nickname slowly disappears. Many reviewers, when discussing *Before We Were Free*, write about how Anita’s growth and maturation are brought into focus through the setting of the Trujillo dictatorship.²⁰ This is true and possibly best seen through Anita’s fulfillment of this category “*señorita*” and fully understanding all of the positives and negatives that come with it.

Code Switching and Presenting a Dictatorship

The contrast of English and Spanish in the novel further help to establish what it means to be oppressed and what it means to be free. In her interview with Sonia Manzano, Álvarez tries to explain what living under a dictatorship was like to the children in the audience, “It’s like...how do I explain a dictator? A dictator is like a mean person, cruel that kills people, that takes over the government, and anybody who says they don’t agree with it, or that they want to be free, that person gets killed.

²⁰ This is seen in Kelli Lyon Johnson’s *Julia Álvarez: Writing a New Place on the Map* pages (2005) 20-21, article by Cecily Callan reviewing *Before We Were Free* page 437-438. Both articles discuss the fact that Anita’s growth is contrasted by the brutality of the regime.

Secret police come and take them away or put them in prison. A dictator is like a horrible person that takes over a government...and they're the boss." In essence, this is one of the difficult questions that the novel tackles: how to explain a dictatorship to a younger audience? Anita starts off with a girlish notion of what it means to be free. Anita's pride in her country is tied to a love of her government she even says, "Just staring at *El Jefe* keeps my tears from flowing" (69). She also has an innocence about her dictator, she believes what her teachers are required to teach her, that Trujillo is a fairly elected official, beloved by his country. She even worships him as a child saying, "I've prayed to him instead of to Jesus on His cross" (722). She thinks of the Dominican Republic as a free country like the United States. She becomes frustrated with her fellow students and teacher who are from the United States and belittle the Dominican Republic, making it seem less free or less of a country than the United States. For example, when her teacher Mrs. Brown tries to explain the *embargo* placed upon the Dominican Republic by the United States, she says "The United States wants to be friends with this country. How many of you have a teenage brother or sister?...You know how your parents will sometimes ground your brother or sister? It's not because they don't love him or her, now, is it? It's because they're concerned and want to make him or her a better person" (508). The question then becomes, "How has the Dominican Republic misbehaved?" (508). Anita is discontented by this treating the Dominican Republic like a misbehaving child and inferior. As the story progresses, Anita retains her pride in her country but loses that faith in her government. As she realizes that her leader is not infallible, that there are many people, including those in her own family who oppose Trujillo and are willing to risk their lives to overthrow him, this attitude quickly changes.

This contrast of freedom and oppression through the two languages is seen in a love of this culture and all of the things that were taken away when a time of turmoil took over the Dominican Republic. When talking about food, there is a sense of loss in this novel. This is different than the

way that food is discussed in the Tía Lola series when food is used more as a nostalgic element. In the *Tía Lola Series*, it is used in memory of a home country, of teaching the next generation the fundamentals of Dominican cuisine. With the *embargo* of the Dominican Republic, for example, Anita's mother cannot get the red dye for the beautiful cakes that she makes so she needs to use a *criollo* one instead. Later, items such as *azúcar* and *mantequilla* become luxury items (555-57). Again, these items are written in Spanish as a way to connect them with the culture of the Dominican Republic. The family is not just losing sugar or butter, they are not just missing the luxury items, they are losing a way to celebrate their culture.

Anita has a complex cultural identity: she loves the Dominican Republic yet she is angry with a dictator who is ruthless towards his people, and expresses further anger at the United States, even though she ultimately seeks refuge here. Anita does not fully understand to which country she belongs. This complex identity is seen through language in the way the different characters discuss language. As Anita reflects on her English and her relationship with this language it directly relates to her relationship with her home country the Dominican Republic. This starts with the idealization of English. For example, even when Anita is angry at the United States for enforcing the *embargo* or jealous of her cousins who live in the United States and do not have to deal with all of the conflict that is happening in the Dominican Republic, still is proud of her English abilities. When Mr. Washburn compliments Anita's English saying, "By the way, young lady, you speak English very well," Anita cherishes this by saying, "That night, I replay his compliment over and over in my head. It's the nicest thing that has happened to me in weeks" (330). Anita feels proud when Oscar, a Dominican, can correct Sam, a boy from the United States' English (693). Furthermore, her mother is always trying to learn English and is jealous of her family who have mastered it. It is said several times throughout the book that "Mami has a hard time with English" (320) or "Mami hushes my

rudeness again, but I can tell she's proud of my being confident in a language she finds so hard to learn" (332). This is all happening as Anita is starting to realize, for the first time, that her home country and its government are not perfect. She is starting to realize the flaws and dangers of the DR government and this is exemplified through this idealization of English as a metonym for the United States.

Sometimes English is discussed as a blending of two cultures, in which neither one has an advantage or a louder voice than the other. This is seen on Christmas when there are carolers outside the window: "Everybody starts singing carols in English and Spanish, and sometimes in both languages combined, now the English overpowering the Spanish, and now the Spanish overpowering the English, depending on whose voices carry the tune of that song" (613). This comes in the story as Anita starts to accept the imperfections of her country's government but can still love the culture, people and traditions of the Dominican Republic. In a story that is focused on conflict, war, and violence, this is one of the few moments of harmony. To the reader, it shows that it is not the people nor the culture that is that is to blame, just the leadership. English can, in contrast be seen as a negative when they ultimately move to the United States, for example, when one shopkeeper yells at Anita angrily saying, "Don't you understand English?" (2260). Tía Laura also worries about her children and family losing their ability to speak Spanish when they only speak English at school (2318). As these moments present themselves when Anita has just immigrated to the United States and is learning to adapt to a new culture, this difficulty with English or fear of losing Spanish directly relates to how difficult it is for her to adapt to a new country. English is no longer a point of pride for Anita but a challenge and disadvantage for her as a recent immigrant. Spanish and English are an important part of Anita's identity and her relationship to her home country and her new

country, these reflections on language help highlight her acceptance of her own culture and her adaption to a new world.

Secrecy and Silencing

Secrecy and silencing are two important themes throughout the novel *Before we were Free*. Anita has to constantly hide what she is writing, the adults are always talking in whispered secrets, even secret Santa celebrations have to be canceled at school due to the dangerous nature of secrets in the society. Spanish is often used in this novel with Trujillo's government as a way of creating intentional unknowns for the monolingual reader. According to ERW Fox, it is natural for individuals to be more afraid of the hidden dangers in life. Not understanding something can create a greater sense of fear than dangers that exist right in front of an individual (1-2). When a monolingual reader encounters Spanish within the text, they naturally don't understand what the characters are communicating. The emotion conveyed in many parts of the story is fear and threat. The reader can understand this fear through the reactions of the characters and the building of suspense. However, this is further elevated through this use of Spanish, the words are unknown and it keeps the threat hidden through this code switching for a few seconds longer. For example, when *El Jefe* writes a mysterious letter to Anita's sister threatening her, Álvarez chooses to display this as a note saying; "*Para la linda Lucinda, flor de la patria, de un admirador*" (995-6).

Beyond *El Jefe*, another suspenseful and threatening part of the government is the dictator's secret police. Álvarez again creates this threatening element of suspense by calling it *la Policía Secreta* instead of the Secret Police (215). Again, for the monolingual reader there is a sense of suspense, the Secret Police are made more mysterious and secretive through this code switching. The use of Spanish furthermore is prevalent with the secret police throughout the book, attaching to it a

sense of intimidation. When the soldiers and SIM come to investigate Anita's home, they say things like "Just doing a routine search, *doña*" (219-220), "*tranquila*" (228), or even "*atención*" (956). Furthermore, the author's choice to refer to Trujillo as *El Jefe* in the book immediately conveys a sense of mystery. The dictator is always referred to in Spanish which subconsciously increases this intimidation. This all helps to highlight the fear and tension that Anita and her family feel throughout the book. There are so many unknowns for Anita, so many secrets that are kept from her by her parents and an overwhelming fear on the part of her parents that they will be caught and tortured or killed. It is important that the reader accept this emotion as she or he reads: no one in the story ever relaxes, but rather all are kept on constant alert by what they do not know. One of the ways that these unknowns are highlighted for the reader is through this code switching.

Code switching also helps to establish secrecy between different characters throughout the book. When two protagonists are talking about something secret they often do so in Spanish to show a break in the conversation, to show more care to the words that are given. Even though the English version usually follows, this disruption of flow helps the reader understand that the next words are important: they need to be kept hidden, they are different from the rest of the conversation. For example, when Anita gets her first period and does not want anyone to find out, her sister understands the gravity of secrecy responding, "*Mi secreto, tu silencio*" (1104). When talking about Tío Toni trying to get a meeting together with "friends" to take over the government, he explains this by saying, "*Tengo un compromiso*" (1388). The biggest example of code switching as a way to keep some things cryptic in the plotline is through the use of the word *Mariposas* (1455). When the characters discuss the killing of innocent women that started the rest of the plotline in motion, they refer to the women as *Las Mariposas*. The hermanas Mirabal, a group of sisters who resisted the regime of Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, are described in this book as "The Butterflies [who]

were ambushed and murdered on a lonely mountain road, their car thrown over a cliff to make it all look like an accident” (2033). This is a direct connection to Álvarez’s famous work *In the time of Butterflies*. Minerva and María Teresa, two of the sisters, are put in jail for months because of their involvement with the resistance movement. Although three of the four are killed for their involvement in the resistance movement, however, their bravery and assassination incited further resistance and revolution. *Before We Were Free* takes off right where *In the Time of Butterflies* ends. Álvarez continues to tribute these brave women in her subsequent book while maintaining this element of secrecy, keeping their code names in Spanish.

Crypticness and secrecy are also established in the book through a newer kind of code-switching where Álvarez uses Spanish idioms and phrases that are translated directly. The fact that these Spanish phrases are translated into English allows the non-Spanish speaking reader to understand the sentence. However, the fact that it is translated directly makes it sound awkward, breaking the reader’s flow and cueing them into a more profound meaning present in these words. For example, Anita’s mother when trying to warn Mrs. Washburn about the importance of secrecy cautions, “Doris, put the lid on the sugar bowl, *por favor*. There are so many flies” (663). This goes with the Spanish phrase that says; *en boca cerrada no entran moscas*. Even though the monolingual reader might not be aware of this phrase, it still draws their attention in and makes them question what the characters are really saying. The code that the adults use to communicate to avoid being caught directly corresponds with real Spanish phrases. Again, this adds to the secrecy of the code being used. The terror that occurs under the Trujillo regime and the suspense of the plotline exists mostly because of a lack of information, because of all the things that must remain a secret or in code. This experience is again exaggerated through the use of code switching, creating a number of unknowns for the monolingual reader and creating breaks in the flow for the bilingual reader.

Kelli Lyon Johnson focuses on the silencing that happened in the Dominican Republic during the regime of Trujillo and how Álvarez manifests this in her novel. Anita's journal is the medium by which this culture of silence is manifested as she continuously writes about her life and then is forced to erase it. She is given the journal as a gift by her mother, however, as the resistance escalates and secrecy becomes more important, her mother makes her erase her writing immediately after writing. For this critic, children's literature is a perfect medium for authors like Álvarez to reclaim their lost childhood and pass these memories and experiences onto the next generation (117). It is a way for them to express and discuss the childhood and experiences they were forced to "erase." This is a story in history that is appropriate for an adult audience as well as an adolescent one, as the Trujillo regime did not only affect the adults of the country (118). While it is easy to agree that an essential role of children's literature is preserving these memories and experiences and passing them onto the next generation, there is something more to the silencing that happens in *Before We Were Free*, a silencing that is all-too familiar for an adolescent reader. According to Cecily Callan, the fact that Anita can never get a straight answer from anyone is a significant source of conflict in the novel (437-438). Anita tries to get answers from the adults around her about what is occurring in their country. Anita tries to ask her teacher Mrs. Brown why no one runs against *El Jefe* in their elections? Mrs. Brown tells Anita to ask her parents, when she asks her father, he tells her to ask her mother, when she asks her mother, her mother tells her to ask her father (649). Adolescents and children, even those living in democratic societies, often feel unheard or silenced by the adult powers. They, in a way, can relate even better to the secrecy and the lack of voice that marks the characters in *Before We Were Free* than the adult readers of some of Álvarez's other novels.

Finally, code switching is used in *Before We Were Free* as an opportunity for making jokes and creating some comic relief in an intense book. This is seen in many of Álvarez's novels both for

adults and children but the relief is needed the most here. For example, when Anita's mother is learning English, Mrs. Washburn brags that her husband went to Yale. Mami, however, hears this the same as *jail* and there is an awkward moment when she responds, "oh that's too bad" (682). Other mistakes are used, for example, when the characters say things like "I'm sorry to be molesting you" instead of "I'm sorry to be bothering you" because *molestar* means "to bother" in Spanish (2131). This is also seen when Sammy says to Anta (in English) "See you later, alligator" to which Anita responds "tomorrow?" (367). There is a playfulness that exists between the two languages. The author is able to make fun of the United States and the Dominican Republic, English and Spanish within the space of the same novel. Neither culture or language truly has the upper hand or is represented as better than the other. It shows the humor that can happen when two cultures mix and how this kind of self-deprecating humor can actually lead to a greater sense of understanding. Álvarez uses language and humor as a way of showing that there are problems in both countries, neither is perfect. This might be best expressed through Sammy's comment to Anita after she is ashamed he had to correct her English, "No big deal, I never do good in English and it's my native language" (357). Through this kind of humor and acceptance, the novel shows that neither country is superior and puts all of the characters on the same playing field.

Four Protagonists and the Experience of an Immigrant Family

The experience of being an immigrant family is perhaps best manifested in the adolescent novel *How Tía Lola Came to (Visit) Stay*.²¹ In this novel, the immigrant experience is relayed in a contrast between the parent and adult generations (Johnson 118). Johnson explains that having Juanita-the younger sister, Miguel-the adolescent, and the parent generation is a way of showing

²¹ *How Tía Lola came to (Visit) Stay* is the full title but is shortened to *Tía Lola* or the *Tía Lola Series* for reading convenience throughout the rest of this investigation.

three stages in generational separation especially when it comes to attitudes about the “home country” or the Dominican Republic (120). Agreeing with this analysis, I would add that the use of Spanish and English shows the contrast between youth and adulthood. This contrast is different with each of the four main protagonists. First, we have the mother who is going through a difficult time. With a new move and a recent divorce, the need to hear Spanish and be surrounded by things from her home country, the Dominican Republic, is strong. Spanish, in this novel, is definitely associated with her and adults. In *Before We Were Free*, this connection with adulthood and Spanish is often in terms of intimidation and fear. Spanish is used in moments to show fear or to highlight the responsibilities and unknowns of adulthood. Because *Tía Lola* takes place in the United States, it has more of a nostalgic feel. It is not used to show fear but to show the absence of a country that is greatly missed. Dominican comfort food is a big part of this story and it is almost always brought up in connection with the mother. There is almost a sigh of relief as Tía Lola unpacks all the ingredients the mother has missed for so long; “bags of *café* and brown sugar...her spices—*hierbabuena*, *orégano*, *anis*, *hojas de guanábana*, *ajíes*...*guayo* to grate *yuca* and her *burén* to shape it into flat, round *casave* loaves” (191). Tía Lola frequently cooks this Dominican food and it comes as a great relief to this grieving mother as the story progresses. Also, as was true in *Before We Were Free* and as I will also show with *Esperanza Rising*, when the characters are being truly treated as children they are spoken to in Spanish. For example, phrases such as “*por favor*,” or “*ay dios mío*” are given in Spanish (114, 335, 380). This language has an authoritative, old-country feel when it is said by the parents. This same use of commands in Spanish was also seen in other adolescent Latina/o literature such as *Island Treasures: Growing Up in Cuba* (2015) by Alma Flor Ada, and *The Circuit* by Francisco Jiménez (1997).

Juanita, the younger sister who is also a key character in the story, represents childhood and a strong dependency on parents. Juanita is always trying to please her mother and because their mother loves it when they use Spanish, Juanita often uses Spanish as a way to connect herself with her parents. When she is trying to comfort her mother, for example, she says; “*Tía Lola, Mami, Tía Lola que viene mañana*” (88). She speaks in Spanish because she knows how happy it makes her mother (768). Even though Miguel is her older brother and should be more experienced with the Spanish language, Juanita outshines his abilities and uses her language skills more often. When Tía Lola gets off her flight and the family is trying to call her over the intercom, the airport worker hands the microphone to Miguel and the only thing that he can come up with is “*Hola Tía Lola...te quiero mucho*” (148). Juanita impatiently picks up the microphone and is able to give more effective directions “*Te esperamos por el mostrador*” (149). For Juanita, Spanish is a way for her to connect with adults as a child and earn their approval.

Miguel, the main protagonist of the story, contrasts significantly with Juanita. In this novel, he has to confront issues of race and identity (Johnson 120). He is the true adolescent character in this novel and uses Spanish to show a separation point between his Dominican parents and family and his English roots in the United States. It is clear that Miguel is not entirely comfortable with his Dominican heritage and especially with how his peers view him. He is struggling with his Latina/o identity which has been amplified now that he lives in Vermont where there are far fewer Latina/os. This is epitomized in his new classmates’ reaction to him, “At his new school, he has told his classmates the same thing. Back in New York, lots of other kids looked like him. Some people even thought he and his best friend, José, were brothers. But here in Vermont, his black hair and brown skin stand out. He feels so different from everybody. ‘Are you Indian?’ one kid asks him” (79). Miguel also struggles to overcome the other stereotypes that his peers place on him. Dean, one of his

new friends at school claims that Miguel is only good at baseball because he is Dominican and it “comes natural” to him (524). When he goes to try out for the baseball team, it somewhat upsets him when he realizes he is going to make the team no matter what because he is Dominican and Dominicans are supposed to be good at baseball (546). Miguel also feels the struggle of identity, not belonging to either culture or to any place that many of the characters face in Latina/o literature. When they are going into the Dominican Republic (as a visit) at the end of the book, the official looks at the two children and doubts their passports saying; “they don’t look American” (1240). This spawns a line of questioning; what does it mean to be an *American*? Is it that he speaks English? Is it because he prefers American food? Is it because of his baseball team preferences? He definitely feels caught between these two identities and tries to reconcile what this is going to mean for him as he grows up. In some ways, Miguel’s use of English over Spanish, differing from his sister, is his way of rejecting his parent’s Dominican identity and forging a new identity for himself in the United States.

Tía Lola is another main protagonist of this story and gives the story its full flavor. In a conversation with Thalia Kids Book Club, interviewed by Sonia Manzano, Álvarez explained, “I had a lot of crazy tías and in the Dominican Republic you don’t just get raised by your parents you also get raised by your extended family, I had all kinds of tías...so when I started writing stories I wanted to write about some of those tías, so I rolled them all into one and they became Tía Lola.” Talking to children, dressed like her vivacious, colorful, and odd character, she describes this person of Tía Lola unpacking examples from her bag with all kinds of wild and exotic supplies from different colored outfits and *pañuelos* that she wraps around her head like a turban to *maracas* and *tambor* for *fiesta* music, to magical ingredients that are all part of her healing practices (182). One of the moments that best describes the eccentricities of Tía Lola, her energy as a character is when

Miguel comments, “Spring has arrived! There is no keeping Tía Lola indoors-She puts on her bright flowered dress and her high-heel *tacones*. She ties her yellow scarf around her neck, buttons up her heavy *suéter*, and sets out to meet the neighbors” (425). Here we see the essence that is Tía Lola; colorful, energized, and ready to meet the neighbors even though, as her niece and nephew remind her, she does not speak English. She is the missing piece of home that their mother needed while still being a fresh new face and redefining what it means to be Dominican for the children. Even with minimal knowledge of the United States, she fully embraces what it means to be Dominican without rejecting what it means to be American. She embodies the American ideal of the melting pot and keeps her culture while blending and enhancing the community around her.

The character of Tía Lola serves as a bridge between Miguel and Juanita’s Dominican heritage and their future in the United States. This can be seen in the way in which she blends the two cultures, especially through food. According to Michael Pollan, cooking is the very foundation of human identity, it was “the possession of fire [that] allowed us to distinguish ourselves from the animals” (616). With the cooking of food, human beings had access to nutrients that would increase their brain size and much less effort was needed in the process of chewing, thus wasting less energy and time on hunting and gathering (835). As humans developed, food continued to play a big part in developing identity and establishing community. Cooking was often a large part of sacrificial rituals for the Ancient Greeks (1358). When looking at the Old Testament, the Jewish Kosher laws, this is also a uniting force that “help[ed] forge a collective identity: We are the people who don’t eat pork” (1365). In modern times, this continues, with Southern Barbecue and a community gathered around a fire, and in the development of recipes that are unique to a culture. Cooking is a way of creating a community, and once these communities are established, other aspects of culture develop around them (1371). This is particularly true for Hispanic families as food is the anchor of many households

and a center of community and community. Food in all of the novels examined in this thesis is a center of the family, the kitchen is a gathering point where young people help their parents prepare meals and knowledge is passed and shared. This is further shown in a study by Kimberly Greder et al. when the researchers examined how difficult it was for immigrant mothers in poorer, Hispanic communities to maintain their culture through food and adapt to the lack of centrality to food culture in the United States. The article expressed that in the United States, Latina women still “retained their cultural identity as primary caregivers” and expressed this family leadership through their cooking (1). An example of the blending of food as a cultural force in the novel is when Tía Lola helps Rudy make what she calls “*pizza dominicana*.” She prepares the pizza how Rudy traditionally does it but adding black beans and *salchichón* (263). She also makes dishes like *arroz con habichuelas* but adds in Vermont ingredients (329).

This uniting and blending through food then has an effect on the local community and its ability to accept Tía Lola. Rudy, the local store owner, tries to communicate back to the aunt but he does not know Spanish and can only utter a few Latin words that he learned as an altar boy to compliment her such as “*magnificat*” and “*adoremus*” (330). Rudy in a way is showing his ignorance with the use of Latin, it could be argued that he is assuming that Latin and Spanish are basically the same thing. Rather than being offended by this, Tía Lola accepts Rudy’s attempts at trying to communicate with her and reciprocates. These cultural exchanges all take place because of Tía Lola, each culture is able to keep its integrity while sharing and laughing in the other. As was true with humor and the blending of cultures in *Before We Were Free*, this language play helps to establish that neither culture is superior to the other. When two cultures are able to laugh at each other, it is a sign of acceptance and humility.

Tía Lola serves not only as a bridge between herself and the community or the Dominican Republic and the community, but acts as a way for the family to become part of the community. It is she, the most significant outsider of the group, not even knowing the language, who makes way for Miguel, Juanita, and their mother to venture out of their comfort zone. It is Tía Lola who knows almost no English who connects them to the rest of their community. When they go to a restaurant and meet a grumpy old man, Tía Lola is able to turn him around with her *huevos rancheros*. In a new neighborhood where the family does not know anyone, Tía Lola is able to make friendships and connections with their neighbors, local business owners, and random people she meets in her day-to-day life. Miguel even remarks upon watching Tía Lola speak with their new neighbor that even though they do not speak the same language they “understand each other perfectly” (439).

Miguel’s relationship with Tía Lola is as rocky as his relationship with Spanish. In a way, he is afraid to accept Tía Lola because he does not want to be like his parents—he does not want to embrace all of the Dominican identity that Tía Lola brings with her to the United States. At first, he doesn’t even want to tell his new friends about his aunt or acknowledge that she is from the Dominican Republic. This is seen from the very first line of the book; “Why can’t we just call her *Aunt Lola*?” Miguel actively resists his mother’s desire to have her children learn Spanish and keep some part of their Dominican heritage (49). In the same conversation, when his mother reminds them that their aunt cannot speak English, he proclaims that he will not be able to say much to his aunt except “*hola*” and “*adiós*” (48). This continues when talking to his father on the phone about Tía Lola coming to live with them in a more permanent situation. He says, “But the kids at school already think I’m different enough...they can’t even pronounce my last name!” (363). Again, we see Miguel resisting his Dominican heritage, trying to obscure it from his new friends in Vermont. Tía Lola is something that will make him even more different, even more Dominican.

Ironically, Tía Lola ends up serving as a resolution for Miguel between his parent's identity and his own separate beginnings as a second-generation Dominican in the United States. He is almost unable to accept anything about his parent's Dominican heritage until Tía Lola comes into their lives. His first attempt at speaking Spanish is after he realizes he has been rude to his aunt and learns how to say *welcome* in Spanish from his mother. He then spells "*bienvenidos*" on their front lawn in snow to make it up (245). When Tía Lola questions who wrote the nice message on the front lawn, Miguel plays into the Dominican stories she has been telling the family and says that "it may have been the *ciguapas*" or ghosts (246). This is a perfect example of Miguel's journey with his Dominican identity: rejection and rudeness, followed by an effort to try the culture on, finishing with an acceptance and ownership.

Language is an integral part of Tía Lola resolving Miguel's conflict of identity with his family's Dominican heritage. Miguel and Tía Lola's speaking in a kind of "Spanglish" helps them forge a relationship. Again, when Miguel hears that Tía Lola is coming to visit them he is immediately hostile and frustrated that he cannot communicate with his aunt because of his lack of Spanish. Miguel eventually starts making an effort to learn Spanish and try to communicate with his aunt even though he is still skeptical about communicating in this language. Their conversations sound like, "It's just *que* sometimes Juanita *es una* baby" (566). An effort is made but code switching is used to show the difficulty in communication between these two characters. The reader finds this resolution when Miguel takes ownership of his Dominican heritage and accepts Tía Lola into his life, trying to improve her English. Miguel tries to teach Tía Lola more adolescent-inspired phrases to make her sound more cool, such as "get a life" and "chill out" (607). It is not just a cultural change but a linguistic one that leads to an acceptance on the part of Miguel towards both identities and cultures. As someone who was initially resistant to being Dominican, something he

wanted to keep hidden from his classmates in a new town, he eventually learns to embrace this part of his family. He goes from resisting this heritage, only thinking of the Dominican Republic in terms of stereotypes and how his classmates see it to a development of his Spanish ending in his teaching Tía Lola English. He ends the story believing that his Dominican identity is something that enhances his family and life not something that hinders it.

Language Play as a Comic Relief

Tía Lola also helps serve as a bridge between two cultures of the Dominican Republic and the United States by adding much needed comic relief to the story and self-deprecating humor, similarly to *Before We Were Free*. According to Nancy D Bell, humor in a second language is often difficult, and can “carry an implicit negative message.” Humor between two different speakers with different native languages can lead to cultural offense. Bell observed that often L2 speakers avoid certain topics and change how they use humor in multilingual contexts (27-28). However, Álvarez does the opposite, embracing language contact and the awkwardness that can ensue rather than hiding it. Álvarez uses her bilingual skills to play with language and allow bilingual readers to get the jokes and play along too. For example, Tía Lola says things like “*Mi inglés no funciona*” when trying to explain her language skills to new potential friends (614). When trying to learn English, Juanita corrects Tía Lola by saying, “No, no you have to say: my name is Tía Lola” to which Tía Lola abruptly parrots, “no, no you have to say...” before Miguel interrupts her (568). More language play occurs as Tía Lola uses idioms randomly and often incorrectly in everyday life. When the mother comments, “Becky has a green thumb” Tía Lola panics and reacts “*Emergencia*” (654) not realizing the idiom at play. Also, after confusing the meaning of “raining cats and dogs” the first time she hears it, Tía Lola tries to tell Juanita and Miguel when it is raining lightly that it is raining

“sin gatos ni perros” (788). Furthermore, when she is lost in New York City, Miguel and Juanita’s father asks her to give them an intersection where they can find her, instead she tells the family that she is “at the corner of ‘Stop’ and ‘One Way’” (749). These are all mistakes that Tía Lola makes: she confuses street signs with driving directions, she cannot grasp idioms, and frequently complains about how difficult English is. The bilingual reader may recognize Tía Lola’s English mistakes in their own errors or in the errors of family members. The intention here being to signify to young readers that language is difficult, it can be funny, and that growing and learning with language is okay, it is still possible to have meaningful relationships while learning a language. To the monolingual reader, these moments may evoke empathy and compassion, the irony being that they struggle to understand Tía Lola’s Spanish phrases in the same way that Tía Lola struggles to use and understand English. Here code switching achieves its fundamental goal, which is that readers be more understanding when they see similar language struggles and interactions in their lives. These are just a few of the countless examples that add to the charm and characterization of Tía Lola. She is a character who is not guarded or shy in Spanish, and this tendency becomes even stronger as she plows through with English, emphasized through this language play.

Through Tía Lola’s attempts to learn this new language, it also shows a kind of effort and respect for the family. Language is one of the forces that brings them closer together and it is one of the things that testifies to the importance of communication in relationships throughout the book. Tía Lola explains, “[It is] a long way to travel from Spanish to English...from the Dominican Republic to Vermont.” Here there is a sense of physical distance that goes with language, that not understanding and the journey between languages can be a difficult one. Tía Lola is ultimately successful in overcoming these separations and using language as a uniting force. Álvarez also uses Tía Lola and even the children’s misunderstandings about language to highlight misunderstandings with regard to

other social issues. For example, when Tía Lola is teaching the children Spanish and about nouns having “gender” the siblings start to argue. Miguel tries to argue that men get the sky *el cielo* while Juanita points out that women get everything in the sky, “*la luna, la lluvia, las estrellas*” (618). Nouns having gender has no real implications for men and women on earth, they are just a grammatical construct; however, through this grammatical construct, Álvarez is making a significant statement about gender, as a strong feminist, and someone who frequently talks about gender issues in her adult novels, it’s not surprising that this message is also given to younger audiences (Johnson 108). As was done with language humor and the United States and the Dominican Republic, including this kind of language play does the same thing with gender: it puts them on equal footing. Similar to how Sáenz in his writing focuses on homosexuality and gender issues through language, this gender battle is seen in these gender-specific articles. In a way Álvarez is saying that this fight between the two young characters over gender is a dispute over something that doesn’t have superiority one over the other. She is expressing that life and all of the words in it are more equal than that, even if they have already been given gender identifiers. Even though the author uses a male protagonist in *Tía Lola*, Miguel is surrounded by strong, female characters. His role as the man of the house is like the gender-specific articles, something that doesn’t matter, allowing him to be an adolescent, growing in his own way.

The Changing Meaning of *La Familia*

In her interview with Sonia Manzano, Álvarez explained that one of the reasons she decided to write literature for children and adolescents is because she wanted these readers to be able to see their lives in print and also the many varieties on the traditional, nuclear family that exist throughout Latin America and continue into today’s modern world. When she first came to the United States,

she realized how unusual her family was compared to that of most families in the United States; her father being one of over twenty children, she had a huge family with many aunts and uncles who were very involved in the lives of their family members (Manzano). In an interview on the Edwards show, Álvarez talked about how family is at the center of her own life and she tries to keep it the center of her stories no matter their setting, whether Vermont, The Dominican Republic, or somewhere else. One can see her achieve this goal in both the *Tía Lola Series* as well as *Before We Were Free*. In Álvarez's novels, the family is important and at the core of the story's plotline. Álvarez often tells the action of the plot through the relationships of various family members. In *Before We Were Free*, for example, a story that is about violence and terror is actually told through conversations that Anita has with her family and community. This feels authentic for Latina/o literature and brings this experience to an audience from the United States that is often more distanced from their extended and sometimes even nuclear family members. Álvarez again draws the reader's attention to these non-traditional families through code switching. This family building and attention drawn to the family is further seen in how many family names are kept in their Spanish form. In *Before We Were Free*, the reader is bombarded with characters from *Tía Laura*, *Tía Mari*, *Tío Toni*, *Tío Carlos*, *Tío Pepe* not to mention dozens of *primos* and other extended family.

However, Álvarez did not just want to contrast a traditional, Hispanic family that is characteristically large and rooted in its connections with a smaller, nuclear American family. As an author, she also wanted to showcase how families change over time. Especially in *Before We Were Free*, the changing families narrative is centered around how families respond to crisis and how immigration shapes families. The novel starts out with a big family, lots of cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and caregivers all living in a community together. As trouble with the dictatorship begins, families migrate to the United States. Anita notes; "Overnight, we've become what Mrs.

Brown calls a nuclear family, just my parents and my sister and brother, instead of the large *familia* of uncles and aunts and cousins and my grandparents, who were living in the compound only a few months ago” (153-54). This code switch *familia* serves as a ruptural element. Mrs. Brown (Anita’s teacher from the United States) has described a nuclear family that contrasts with Anita’s experience of a Dominican *familia*. In this sense [Æ1] we feel Anita’s loss of not just individual family members but the entire idea of what it means to be a family. With this change and the absence of family, non-family members (such as those who protect Anita and her mother at the end of the book) are given familial names like *Tío* and *Tía*. In a way, this is how the characters have adapted to the definition of what “family” means. They have to treat non-family members as family. In an interview, Álvarez explained how close Dominican families usually are and how being so far apart is often a strain on them with immigration. She described this experience of adopting neighbors and local community members as family in their absence. She said, “I grew up in a big extended family in the Dominican Republic, on my father’s side he was the youngest of twenty-five kids... When we left the Dominican Republic and came to this country I was ten years old, and all these characters that I left behind I really missed. Then I found that families are not just the ones you’re born into, you can make all kinds of families.” She continued saying, “Part of the *Tía Lola* book is to celebrate... [the fact that] we are always forming new families.” This further shows how Álvarez’s experiences with her family and community, as well as the changes that happen in each are reflected in her novels.

This idea of having a vast yet separated family is present in the *Tía Lola Series* as well. Maranzano, in an interview commented: “I noticed that in all of your stories families are breaking up and coming together and forming new homes” and Álvarez agreed. She dedicated the novel “*Para mis queridas tías*”--and then proceeded to mention fifteen different aunts in her introduction (27). It is obvious that she has a love of her extended family of aunts and wants to extend this experience to

her readers. Miguel, at the end of the book, finally is able to meet some of his Dominican cousins. He finds himself saying *hola, hola, hola* everywhere he goes and notes that “In the space of a few minutes, he has acquired a dozen cousins, four aunts, seven uncles. His family has grown into a *familia* a mile long” (1269). The same code switch that we see in *Before We Were Free* also occurs here but in reverse. Miguel is used to a small, nuclear unit that fits the definition of “family” in the United States. This in itself is interesting as his family is not traditional according to American standards. He lives with his mother and sister, when the nuclear U.S. family is often patriarchal. Álvarez, a feminist, adds in another dimension to the family: in the end, they decide to have their unit be the two siblings, their mother, and their mother’s aunt. This is anything but traditional, and reflects the realities of divorce and hardship that many in the United States face. He then says it has grown into a “*familia*,” indicating that this word encompasses the Dominican definition: a large group of interconnected people consisting of many more members. At the end of the *Tía Lola Comes to (Visit) Stay* we see Miguel realizing the family he could have had if his mother and father had stayed in the Dominican Republic, but also appreciating the fact that his family goes beyond the traditional definition in the United States. They are able to reconcile the differences between the families and live with them both. Tía Lola, as the constant bridge between the two cultures concludes “*De verdad...home is wherever you are with the people you love*” a definition that fits both types of families (1195).

Code Switching for Cultural Preservation

As a writer, Álvarez not only wants to expose younger readers to the harsh conditions in the Dominican Republic but also wants them to appreciate the culture that was left behind and preserve it in the United States. Code switching is used to expose the reader to a variety of Dominican

traditions and foods. *Before We Were Free* talks about how *La navidad* is celebrated and what an open air *mercado* is like in comparison to a grocery store in the United States (564). The story is littered with examples of Dominican food and ingredients such as *pudín de pan*, *plátanos maduros*, and roasted pig (564, 581). Álvarez also adds in a sense of magical realism in her *Tía Lola Series*, intentionally making the aunt a “*santera*” (182) which the mother describes as “a kind of doctor who works with magic instead of medicine” (482). This is an important part of the Dominican culture and goes back to the indigenous people who lived in the Caribbean as well as the African slaves that came later and their religious practices before Catholicism came to their lands (Johnson 133). These cultures were ultimately mixed with the rituals of the Catholic Church and are still an important practice in many communities (Johnson 136). When Tía Lola first arrives at the family’s home she unpacks all kinds of potions and sprinkles *Agua de Florida* about the room as a kind of protection (174).²² There is a superstition that surrounds Tía Lola’s character. While her being a healer does not play a significant role in the plot, Álvarez finds this superstition and magic of Dominican culture important to pass on to the next generation and, therefore, includes it in her novels (Manzano). Álvarez also strives to keep the magic of storytelling in her books. In an interview, she discussed the fact that there are no public libraries in the rural regions of the Dominican Republic and therefore, oral storytelling is important in families. This kind of oral storytelling is one of the significant influences that lead to her becoming an author. Tía Lola is constantly telling stories, always starting with *había una vez*, repeatedly breaking the flow of the reader and drawing their attention to something important (200). By setting the novel up in a similar vein as fairy tales, it sets the story in a fantastical way as it alludes to superstition and *santería*. The reader expects the story that follows to be significant and meaningful, but it requires a suspension of belief.

²² *Agua de Florida*, is described by Álvarez in an interview with Sonia Maranzano as “lucky water.” It is something that *santeras* in a Dominican Republic tradition would use to bring blessings and luck upon a household.

All of these cultural influences mentioned throughout the book not only are a way for Álvarez to preserve a culture that she left behind but also a way for her to discuss what it means to be a Latina/o in the United States. It is clear that this author loves her birth country but hates the corruption. In her first *Tía Lola* novel, the aunt plants a garden in the shape of Hispaniola and dedicates it “*Para los políticos y por las mentiras que dicen*” (636). In an interview with Edwards she talks about various efforts that she has started to help the island of Hispaniola and her country of the Dominican Republic. From starting a library, to a literacy program for farmers to “Border of Lights” getting Dominicans and Haitians to volunteer in each other’s country to overcome a past of hate and genocide Julia Álvarez is invested in making a change.²³ It is clear that she wants her audiences to consider all of the positive things that come from being a Latina/o as well as the challenges that this social group faces.

In *Once Upon a Quinceañera*, the closest thing that Álvarez has to an autobiography, she further investigates the tradition of *quinceañeras*, a tradition where nowadays families spend an average of a \$5,000 budget on a one-night celebration. She talks about how Hispanics are plagued by high school dropout rates, poverty, early pregnancy, and lack of higher education in the United States, and wonders why this cultural group spends so much on a party that might be better used saving toward a girl’s educational advancement. She talks about the roles we push young Latina/os into; for males there is the *machismo* and for girls the establishment of becoming a wife and mother. In her family, the expectation was that a Hispanic young lady was allowed to be one of three things: a virgin, married, or a scholar. Having been married three times, Álvarez writes as a way to understand the parts of her Latina heritage and the pieces of her life that tripped her up and continue

²³ There is a long history of conflict between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, the two countries that share the island of Hispaniola in the Caribbean. In 1937 there was a Haitian Massacre, when thousands of Haitians living in the Dominican Republic were executed simply because of their race and country. This was ordered by then dictator Trujillo as an attempted genocide (Derby 488-490).

to trip up so many other girls. Álvarez concludes the book by talking about the importance of empowering the next generation of Latina women, how she had heroes in the world of Latina literature to look up to that inspired her to take the next steps in her career after a series of failures. She talks about how there is inherent value in the tradition of the quinceañera that focuses on Latina women, that makes them feel supported and valued but doesn't require extravagant costs. In essence, this is why Álvarez uses code switching and writes to adolescents. She too believes in the power of storytelling, the power of seeing real, powerful characters that deal with difficult circumstances but rise above and take on the world. She uses code switching to reach mainstream audiences like Benjamin Alire Sáenz, and she aims to make the culture and history of the Dominican Republic accessible to a variety of audiences. However, she also writes and uses code switching as a way to empower the young Latina reader. Álvarez, through her writing, empowers young, minority women as she was once empowered. Code switching is just one of the ways that she makes this narrative more accessible to this audience.

Chapter Four

Pam Muñoz Ryan: An Echo from the Past and Hope for the Future

Pam Muñoz Ryan is an award-winning author who is fundamental to any discussion about Latina/o literature for adolescents. She was born on December 25, 1951 and was raised in Bakersfield California. As a third-generation Latina, she adds a different perspective to this sector of adolescent literature. She remembers her experiences with reading and writing as an influential part of her childhood as she matured and tried to fit into her community. She eventually graduated from San Diego State University and became a bilingual teacher in Escondido. She took time off from her professional life to help raise her four children and finish her master's degree before she began her writing career. Her experiences as a teacher and as a mother have greatly influenced her craft as she writes predominantly for children and adolescents (Muñoz Ryan, "Pam"). She has had great success throughout her writing career; according to the New York Historical Society, Muñoz Ryan has written more than 30 books including *Esperanza Rising* (2004), *The Dreamer* (2010), and *Echo* (2015) which are explored in this thesis as well as *Riding Freedom* (1999), *Becoming Naomi León* (2004), *Paint the Wind* (2007), *When Marian Sang* (2002), and *Amelia and Eleanor Go for a Ride* (1999), which are respected in the adolescent literary community. She is also the winner of many awards such as the Pura Belpre Award, the Jane Addams Children's Book Award, as well as the Schneider Family Book Award. Her most recent novel, *Echo*, is a Newbery Honor recipient.²⁴

Esperanza Rising (2004) is the story of Esperanza, a wealthy Mexican girl living on *El Rancho de Las Rosas* during the 1930s. Tragedy strikes and her father is killed by a gang of revolutionaries on his way home from work the day before Esperanza's birthday. The Mexican

²⁴ These experiences and influences on her writing were mentioned in Ryan's Author Page as well as in the book covers and acknowledgements of the novels studied.

Revolution is part of the inciting incident in the novel, the author providing this historical background:

They both knew that even though it was 1930 and the revolution in Mexico had been over for ten years, there was still resentment against the large landowners. 'Change has not come fast enough, Esperanza. The wealthy still own most of the land while some of the poor have not even a garden plot. There are cattle grazing on the big ranches yet some peasants are forced to eat cats. Papa is sympathetic and has given land to many of his workers. The people know that' (11-12).²⁵

The situation goes from bad to worse as Tío Luís tries to force Esperanza's mother's hand in marriage. When she refuses, he burns their estate home. Fearing greater wrath, they escape from Mexico with nothing but the basic necessities and a few precious items to the United States. There they begin to establish a life as farm workers. Esperanza has to quickly grow up and become accustomed to being one of the workers instead of one of the wealthy. After a dust storm, Ramona, her mother becomes ill leaving the protagonist with even more to manage; trying to pay for medical bills while saving up enough money to bring her grandmother, who was physically unable to make the original journey, to the United States. Strikers are protesting the working conditions on the various farms in the area, and the workers at their new farm are forced to choose between striking or just continuing to deal with inhumane working conditions. Esperanza is just about to give up hope when Miguel, a love interest and former servant from El Rancho de las Rosas, bravely returns to Mexico and retrieves Esperanza's grandmother.

²⁵ In Mexico's revolutionary history, there were a series of revolutions and revolts. This started with the occupation of Napoleon Bonaparte in Mexico in the early 1800s and continued with the revolts of Manuel Hidalgo and Jose Morelos. Spain maintained control in the region with a social hierarchy favoring the rich elites. The subsequent Mexican Revolution in 1910 intensified this conflict between the elites and the poor which is demonstrated in *Esperanza Rising*. Though it is not clear what racial and economic ties led Esperanza's family to wealth and power this is where they find themselves at the beginning of the book. Esperanza's father is killed by revolutionaries who see themselves as overcoming the unjust, powerful upper class (History.com)

Echo (2015) is the story of a harmonica. Muñoz Ryan effortlessly uses magical realism to show this simple instrument's journey from one hand to the other of young musicians showing the various difficult circumstances they must overcome in the 1930s and 40s. The story begins with Friedrich in Germany who has a facial abnormality and a congenital defect. Targeted by the Nazi's he and his father, both accomplished musicians, must find a way to escape before they are trapped in concentration camps. The next section of the book, the harmonica travels to the United States of America and finds its way to the hands of Mike and Frankie, two boys recently left at an orphanage after the death of their grandmother. As it is the middle of the Great Depression, it is not easy to find them a new home until Mrs. Sturbridge unwillingly adopts them. They must learn to become a family through a series of trials or use the harmonica to land themselves in the famous Philadelphia Harmonica Band.

The book concludes in the perspective of Ivy, who has shown recent musical prowess and is selected to play a harmonica solo on the local television. When her Brother has gone to fight in World War II, she is devastated when her family has to move to yet another farm where her father is looking for still better work, separating her from her beloved music teacher. Her family is originally from California before it was part of the United States and still a part of Mexico. When she moves to this new community, everyone looks upon Ivy and her family as foreigners and immigrants, despite their heritage. This plot choice accurately represents a historical phenomenon, in which the United States annexed certain areas that had been Mexico without consideration to the populations of people that already existed there. According to *Latino Americans: Foreigners in their Own Land*, the California Gold Rush led to a substantial increase in settlers to the region, during which even the Mexican elites in the region lost their land. Land laws prejudiced against the Mexican people helped to perpetuate this loss. In *Echo*, Ryan beautifully shows this conflict: that Mexicans in California

were viewed as the “other” without ever having immigrated to the United States. Ivy has to battle a school system that does not want her in the midst of trying to save the Yakamoto’s land from the strong prejudice against Japanese. The book ends with a reflection on the lives of the three characters and their unified story through music.

Code switching has a central role in these novels and is used to highlight injustices and issues of equality. In her acceptance speech of the Pura Belpre Award for *The Dreamer*, another young adult novel that she has written, Muñoz Ryan stated that she originally wrote this novel with the intention of an adult audience. When taking a look at Pablo Neruda’s life, she realized that his experiences had great potential to connect with younger readers:

I think that young readers need to feel that they can still become something they’ve never been before. That there is something splendid dwelling inside, some talent or ability yet unknown. I often envisioned middle grade boys and girls as the potential readers--brooding adolescents, who might feel misunderstood and might be closet poets, artists, scientists, or musicians, who are too embarrassed to speak their heart (2).

In essence, she fully understands the struggle to find one’s identity as an immigrant in the United States can emotionally compare to the struggle of an adolescent trying to balance their struggles of identity, which is a large part of the goals of this investigation. She shows this struggle and conflict of identities in her writing as an author for this age group. Muñoz Ryan understands that both the experience of Latina/os and the experience of adolescents have both been ignored until relatively recently in the publishing spheres. While authors have written about their experience as adolescents and as recent immigrants, rarely has this experience been geared toward adolescent readers. Muñoz Ryan marries these two experiences together beautifully. My aim in this chapter is to show how Muñoz Ryan uses reflections on language to show the emotional growth and maturity of her

characters as well as to highlight struggles for social justice which surround her historical fiction novels.

Scholars who have written on Muñoz Ryan focus on a variety of dimensions. Critics such as Deborah Kaplan often discuss her characters' struggles for justice and equality. Cyndi Giorgis compares the struggles for equality found in *Esperanza Rising* such as strikes, the Great Depression, discrimination, and the Deportation Act with the actual time period. All of these things are hard for children to understand and can be made accessible to this age group through her excellent craft (Giorgis). Another focus of many is on the chapter titles, each featuring a different kind of fruit. Muñoz Ryan admits in the Afterward that she chose these titles to coincide with the harvest and that the cycle of the book follows the natural flow of this harvest. The fruits of the title are often featured throughout the chapter as an individual metaphor. While the foods and produce found as chapter titles and within the chapters and are good examples of code switching, as they are all written in Spanish, they follow more of a harvest theme rather than create a boundary between adulthood and childhood, as will be discussed in the rest of this investigation.

Food, however, is an essential theme throughout the novel. According to Kara Keeling and Scott Pollard, food has another layer of significance and can be an indication of prosperity and wealth. Keeling and Pollard focus on how the specific examples of food are a way for the author to express Esperanza's loss of status. Foods that are associated with wealth comprise the chapter titles and are found as symbols within the chapters in times in which Esperanza lives in prosperity. For example, *Las Papayas*, a produce that is a sign of status, is found at the beginning of the book. In the chapter *Las Uvas*, the fruit is grown on their plantation and is cut by Esperanza as a sign of her future and the fact that she is destined to inherit the plantation and become a wealthy owner. As Esperanza loses her wealth and status, these food images change into crops that require hard labor

and are signs of her lower economic status (Keeling, Pollard). For example, *Las Cebollas* are found in chapter six, which is a vegetable most associated with the poor as Esperanza is just starting to experience the hardships of poverty (Keeling, Pollard 11-16). *Las Uvas* is the title of the first chapter and the last chapter of the novel. These chapter titles reference the cyclical nature of the harvest and that this season is starting over, just like Esperanza is starting her life over. Her family is not in the wealthy, prosperous position that they found themselves in at the beginning of the book but they have found a way to deal with their difficult situation and are thankful for what they have. The wealth that they have at the end of the book highlighted with the chapter title *Las Uvas* comes from family and relationships rather than from monetary gain.

Echo is another award-winning novel. In a review by *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, critics focus on the fact that it realistically captures the lives of people who existed during this transformative time in history. The music that accompanies the characters throughout the book punctuates the plotline. It features a sense of magic and wonder through the use of the harmonica (Coats). There has been less written by scholars about *Echo* as it is a relatively new book, published in 2015; however, there is sure to be more in the future as it is a novel that has already received considerable praise in the young adult literary sphere. This chapter shows that code switching is used in Muñoz Ryan's novels to articulate this experience of growing up; Spanish and English are used to contrast two aspects of the individual's life, similarly to Álvarez and Sáenz. More importantly, however, the author uses reflections on language to draw attention to critical social issues surrounding her characters. This chapter will show that Spanish is not only used to create a ruptural element and focus the reader's attention on specific moments in the text, but also to emphasize that language is an integral part of the social issues presented in her novels, creating advantage and disadvantage, dividing and uniting communities.

Hope and Reality, Riches to Rags

One of the ways that Muñoz Ryan uses code switching in *Esperanza Rising* is to create a division between hope and reality. *Esperanza* literally means *hope* in Spanish, and this is a theme that is immediately apparent to the reader. Spanish is used to establish the hope while English is used to establish the reality of the situation. For example, in the beginning of the book, Esperanza and her family are wealthy plantation owners. When their home catches on fire, Esperanza runs towards it; “hoping for *un milagro*, a miracle. She looked closely, but all that remained were black cinders. There was nothing left inside, for someday” (44). Esperanza hopes for *un milagro*, but her reality (expressed in English) is a house that is burned down as well as everything they had hoped for the future. The burning down of the house is the catalyst that helps the rest of the story unravel. This kind of code switching happens again at their work camp in the United States when Esperanza is telling Isabel, about how they will return to Mexico and about how this situation is temporary. This dream is brought into question with the simple phrase “¿*De veras?*” As readers, we know that her reality will be quite different, her dreams of living a wealthy life on *El Rancho de las Rosas* are over (105). At the end of the novel, Esperanza meets with her grandmother. She cannot believe it is true, that she is actually here with the rest of the family in the United States. Her disbelief is expressed as she describes her grandmother as a “*fantasma*” walking toward her until she understands that it is true, her “*abuelita*” is here (239).

Esperanza Rising is often described as a “riches to rags story” (WCSU). Code switching is used throughout the novel to separate these two sides of the river, rich and poor. One of these words is “*cosecha*” which has an important meaning in the beginning of the book as a separation (5). In the beginning of the book *la cosecha* is a sign of Esperanza’s wealth and potential future prosperity. As

was pointed out by Keeling and Pollard, Esperanza participates in this life and *cosecha* as the wealthy landowner's daughter to cut the first *uvas* of the harvest: “This job was usually reserved for the eldest son of a wealthy rancher, but since Esperanza was an only child and Papa’s pride and glory, she was always given the honor” (4). This action shows the family’s intention that the plantation will be passed on to Esperanza continuing their prosperity and passing on the land through the family each generation like a cycle in a bigger harvest. Harvest is a time of prosperity and abundance, a time where the family shows off their wealth with a lavish party and does this symbolic act to show that they expect this comfortable lifestyle to continue. The harvest is described in a positive way. For example, in the beginning of the book, Esperanza notes, “When the grapes delivered their harvest, she always turned another year. This year, she would be thirteen. The picking would take three weeks and then, like every other year, Mama and Papa would host a *fiesta* for the harvest. And for her birthday” (6-7).

Throughout the novel, the idea of the harvest remains constant; however, as Esperanza moves from the position of a wealthy landowner to a poor field worker, it takes on a different meaning. *La cosecha* becomes a sign of her being part of the lower class, a sign that she must work hard to bring in the harvest for the wealthy landowner (67). The sentiment used to describe the harvest changes, the emotions surrounding this event turn harsh and negative, “They passed miles of naked grapevines, stripped of their harvest and bereft of their leaves. Fading into the mist, the brown and twisted trunks looked frigid and lonely” (168). Although the whole book revolves around the cycle of the harvest from the featuring of produce centered chapter titles to the actual actions of the characters harvesting the food, the meaning of that harvest changes over time. The entity of the harvest is constant throughout the book and gives a means of comparison for the reader. It is a way

for the reader to grasp just how far Esperanza has fallen from the queen of the harvest, inheritor of a wealthy plantation to a field worker picking produce for someone else.

Esperanza's life is deeply connected to farming and the growth of plants, some of these words like *campesino* also change meanings as the story progresses. In the beginning, Esperanza describes *los campesinos* who work for her father (76). Though she does not describe them in a disrespectful way, it is clear that she thinks of herself as their superior, even as a child. They are nameless, storyless people much like the trees and the cows that are part of the background setting. She thinks of the workers as being lucky to have the opportunity to work for her father. Later in the novel, however, Esperanza assumes this identity as she is forced to work on farms in the United States. Like the word *cosecha* the meaning of the words *campesino* and *vaquero* change throughout the book. Esperanza at the beginning of the book runs to her father yelling "*Papi, papi*" and later in the book she sees the *campesino* children running to their fathers yelling the same thing. In Mexico at the beginning of the novel, she sees them as part of the machinery that makes them part of their plantation's success: "The *vaqueros* already sitting on their horses ready to ride out to the cattle, and fifty or sixty *campesinos*, straw hats in their hands, holding their own knives ready (4-5)" or later describing, "The *campesinos*, the field-workers, spread out over the land and began the task of reaping the fields" (6). This changes to her seeing them as humans with families and a valued part of her community and family. Though she still doesn't see how she is going to fit into this new world, the *campesinos* become more humanized than just objects. She describes, "A *campesino* family waved to them. Juan and Josefina each held a baby about a year old in their arms. It was easy to see that the man was Alfonso's brother, even though he didn't have a mustache. Josefina was plump with a round face and a complexion that was fairer than Esperanza's" (85-86). She starts to worry about the *campesino* families when observing the strikes and immigration officials coming to collect

and deport field workers. She asks how families will even know if their loved ones have been deported to which a fellow worker responds, “Word gets out. It is sad. They leave the buses parked at the station until late at night with those they captured on board. Families don’t want to be separated from their loved ones and usually go with them. That is the idea. They call it a voluntary deportation. But it is not much of a choice” (207). Esperanza ultimately takes on this identity as a *campesino* and does her work with pride, providing for her family. She joins the workers in the field no longer wishing to return to her previous life of wealth and abundance but wanting only the survival and happiness of her family.

A further example of Spanish words that separate Esperanza’s life as a wealthy individual to her life as a member of the lower class is how she is referred to by Miguel (her family’s servant and later fellow field worker). Miguel starts off as a character that is merely a servant, working for Esperanza and her family. While the two families are friendly with each other, there is a clear divide between them. When Esperanza was a small child she had proclaimed that she was going to marry Miguel. At the beginning of the book, she thinks that she has matured and understands, “But now that she was a young woman, she understood that Miguel was the housekeeper’s son and she was the ranch owner’s daughter and between them ran a deep river” (18). When she explains this river metaphor to Miguel, he becomes upset and only speaks a few words for the next few weeks referring to her “*Mi reina.*” Miguel calls her this in the beginning to ironically acknowledge this divide, to acknowledge the further separation that exists between himself and Esperanza, that wealth is an uncrossable barrier between the two (18). When Esperanza and her mother are forced to cross over into the United States, staying with another Mexican family and looking for work, Miguel still says, “At your service *mi reina*” (119). Esperanza notices that “This time, his voice was kind.” A divide still exists between the two characters and Esperanza still feels superior to Miguel, but she treats him

less as a servant and more like an equal, asking him about his attempts to find a job in the United States. Later, Isabel, a young *campesino* daughter who has only known a life of poverty says, “He calls you *mi reina!* Will you tell me about your life as a queen?” (120). The term at this point is a glance back at Esperanza’s past. It was a piece of her life that no longer exists anymore. She trades her stories as a rich girl in Mexico for Isabel’s help in learning to wash and pin diapers. This is difficult for Esperanza to admit, that she needs help from someone like Isabel and that she needs to accept her new life as being a servant for others instead of having servants, and it is an important moment of transition in the novel.

There are moments of conflict in this transition toward accepting Miguel as an equal instead of a subordinate. Miguel always had the dream to come to the United States to improve his economic status, and Esperanza accuses his dream of being nothing more than a falsehood saying, “But it does no good! Look at yourself. Are you standing on the other side of the river? No! You are still a peasant!” (224). Miguel fights back saying, “And you think you are still a queen” (224). Miguel has forgiven Esperanza for her past superiority and accepts what Esperanza cannot: that they are on the same side of the metaphorical river, they may both be poor, but they are now in the same situation. With time, as the novel progresses, Esperanza has fully accepted her new life of poverty, and there is no longer a separation between her and Miguel. Miguel still refers to her as *mi reina* but means it much more as a term of endearment saying, “What have I done to deserve this honor, *mi reina?*” he said, smiling and walking toward her” (165-166). As was the case with the *campesinos*, Esperanza begins the novel thinking of herself as Miguel’s superior even saying to him that they are on two sides of the river, she is rich and he is poor. By the end of the novel, Esperanza accepts Miguel as her equal and the two end the novel in love, feeling the heartbeat of the earth beneath their hands, hopeful for their futures in this new country. It takes a long time for Esperanza to cross this river

metaphorically. Even though she has to face the hardships of poverty and loss, she still has a difficult time not feeling superior to the other characters. The author uses this metaphor of the river to separate the rich from the poor as well as to show that Esperanza still sees herself as being different, separated and superior to the *campesinos*. When she is able to lower herself in class and accept that they are all in the same situation and is a human being, not superior to the other *campesinos* that she is indeed able to start over, fall in love, and have a new, and better life in the United States. In this way she is able to grow in her humanity.

Childhood into Adulthood

Like the other two authors mentioned, the most prominent way that Muñoz Ryan uses code switching is to highlight the metamorphosis from childhood to adulthood. Unlike other authors who use code switching as a means to draw attention to specific actions or moments within a text, Muñoz Ryan uses the languages explicitly to create a separation between the past and the future. In her book *Dreamer*, a historical fiction novel about the life of Pablo Neruda, she uses Spanish to signify adult status or entry into a more mature life. However, in *Esperanza Rising*, Spanish is used to signify childhood or the past and English is used to signify the future or adulthood. Even though there is a tremendous socioeconomic divide between her past of wealth and her future of poverty, her growth and maturity are seen in her ability to accept her situation and make adult decisions. There is not only a socioeconomic decision but also a change in personal maturity. The differences in socioeconomic status separate these two stages of development of Esperanza. As a wealthy person in the beginning of the book, there are servants to do everything for her, and she does not have to make many decisions. As she moves into a life of poverty, she has to become a more mature adult, taking on more responsibilities and making more decisions.

I mention both works because it is important to note that the author is not making a statement about the languages themselves: neither Spanish nor English is the “lesser” language, they are both used in her different works as a device to separate the past, present, and future. It makes sense that in *Dreamer*, Spanish would be the language of adulthood because Naftali, or Pablo Neruda, is moving into life as a Spanish poet. This is the opposite of *Esperanza Rising*, in which the book starts off in Mexico, where it makes sense that Spanish would be established as the language of childhood, and then when the family moves to the United States, logically, English is the language of her future.

Unlike Álvarez and Sáenz, many of Muñoz Ryan’s works could easily exist in one language without code switching. The characters in her novels struggle less in between two cultures, but to find themselves within the circumstances of their lives. None of the plot action in *Dreamer* takes place in an English-speaking country so the entire book could have easily be presented in Spanish without language changes. Likewise, with *Esperanza Rising*, even though the characters immigrate to the United States, the majority of the plot’s action is set in Mexico or in plantation camps where all of the dialogue would have taken place in Spanish. There is little evidence throughout the book that the characters received any education in English or made any attempts to learn English phrases. Code switching is an intentional choice by the author; beyond giving the story a Latin flair, it shows something about the characters, drawing attention to specific moments, and creating these parallels between the past and the future. Another difference between Muñoz Ryan’s code switching and that of the other two authors in this investigation is found in her novel *Echo*. As it is her most recent publication, the author goes beyond Spanish-English code switching and creates a similar metaphor with German-English code switching. She specifically uses different languages and then intentionally uses only English to say something about the characters and their setting, which will be explored in greater detail in the following sections.

In *Esperanza Rising*, the first way that Spanish is established to be the “childhood” form and English is established to be the “adult” form is by using common phrases that are employed almost exclusively in Spanish and then switch to English. For example, the phrase *gracias* is originally seen in this Spanish form but then switches to the English *thank you*. Without a careful reading, this might seem to be the result of the book switching settings from Mexico to the United States; however, as stated previously, all of the book’s action takes place in Spanish so all of these phrases could have stayed in their Spanish form. This switch of common phrases is intentional to establish Spanish as the past and English as the future. A second way that English is set up as the language of Esperanza’s future is by the amount of code switching that takes place: far more phrases are shown in Spanish with an immediate English translation in the beginning of the book than in the end. For example, in the first section of the book, the workers are routinely called “*campesinos*” or “*vaqueros*,” the harvest referred to as “*la cosecha*,” and crops mentioned in their Spanish names “*las papayas*” “*la calabaza*” (5, 8, 19, 28). Hortensia refers to her husband as “*el jefe*,” friends are called “*compañeros*,” animals are referred to in their Spanish names such as “*burro*,” rooms of the house are called “*salas*,” Esperanza wraps herself in “*un chal*” (15, 23). These and many more are not momentous code switches, but they are numerous in the beginning of the book. As the story progresses, the number of code switches drastically decreases. These words for workers, family names, crops, and daily expressions are later in the book only presented in English especially with the word “worker” (98, 117, 168). Again, this is used as a sign pointing to the future of the family as they eventually make their way in the United States.

Spanish is further established as the childhood language in this novel through the fact that whenever Esperanza is “babied” or acts childishly, it is through Spanish. For example, Esperanza’s father will say things like “*Cuídate los dedos*” or “watch your fingers” in Spanish (4). Phrases like

this where Esperanza is being reprimanded like a child exist in Spanish. This is further seen with Esperanza's mother. Like her father, Esperanza's mother reprimands her in Spanish. On the train, she encourages Esperanza to say thank you, and Esperanza shyly responds "*gracias*" (589).

Whenever she is treating her daughter in a childish manner or reprimanding her she refers to her daughter as "*mija*" such as "*Mija*, my daughter, do not worry...I know what I am doing" (45) or when she is convincing a whining Esperanza to cover herself with fruit in a wagon to cross into the United States she says "*Mija*, it is necessary" (58). This contrasts to the moments when she is referring to her daughter on more equal footing or giving her the extra responsibilities of an adult, when she refers to her by her name, *Esperanza*.

In addition, whenever Esperanza whines or expresses a childish concern, it is always expressed in Spanish. For example, in the beginning of the book, Esperanza is worried about the loss of her birthday party or "*fiesta*" (6) with the "*Las Mañanitas*" song, when there are so many bigger things at play such as the loss of their house and feuding with her uncles (9). Like a child, she is focused on the immediate damage rather than the long-term implications. Even after her father dies, Esperanza cannot help but think about her presents and lost party (20). Also, Esperanza brings with her a *muñeca* from *El Rancho de Las Rosas*. The doll is a significant symbol of her childhood and an important moment is when she gives it away, demonstrating her transition to adulthood. This could be a connection to the traditional Mexican *quinceañera*, or female coming of age party where a girl receives her last doll, a symbol that she is stepping into adulthood. Either way, when she describes her doll, she uses Spanish words, such as the *mantilla* over the doll's black hair (28). The doll, like Spanish, is part of her past, part of Mexico, and part of her childhood that she is leaving behind to become an adult in the United States. Furthermore, the moments when other characters act as Esperanza's superiors and teachers, they do so in Spanish. For example, in the beginning of the

novel, Esperanza's father says "*Aguántate tantito y la fruta caerá en tu mano*" (45). Here we see the father teaching Esperanza about the need to have patience when growing. Though he is talking about the harvest, this is a metaphor that can be applied to Esperanza's life. This metaphor comes back later in the book with the same advice "*Aguántate tantito y la fruta caerá en tu mano*" (222) as a flashback to the patience and pain experienced when growing from a child into a young adult.

Another way that English is established as Esperanza's future and Spanish is established as Esperanza's past is through the use of proverbs. The book opens with the proverb; "*Aquel que hoy se cae, se levantará mañana*, He who falls today may rise tomorrow" (1). The author puts the Spanish version of this proverb first and the English version second. Immediately, language is used to set the stage for the change of Esperanza's old self in contrast to the woman she will become through language. This proverb foreshadows to the reader that Esperanza will fall in Spanish but then rise again in English. Another proverb: "*Es más rico el rico cuando empobrece que el pobre cuando enriquece*. The rich person is richer when he becomes poor, than the poor person when he becomes rich" (1). Again, this is foreshadowing the changes that will happen to Esperanza over the course of the book and how her character will be enriched by the experiences she goes through even though they will be difficult. It is showing that Esperanza will have to lose everything to gain this new life, a death and life theme that will be explored further when talking about the harvest and phoenix themes in this book. The proverb "*No hay rosa sin espinas*" or "There is no rose without thorns" is another important proverb found at the beginning of the novel (14). The rose is a prominent symbol throughout the novel (for example, the house that they live on is called *El Rancho de las Rosas*), and it is used as a metaphor for growing up and experiencing the beauty of life but first going through trials and struggles. These struggles are endured in the first part of the book that features a lot of Spanish and then Esperanza's life blossoms or rises anew in the second part of the book that is

almost exclusively in English. For example, when she finally establishes herself in the United States, is reunited with her grandmother, and life seems to be getting better she compares herself to a phoenix rising out of the ashes:

As the sun rose, Esperanza began to feel as if she rose with it. Floating again, like that day on the mountain, when she first arrived in the valley. She closed her eyes, and this time she did not careen out of control. Instead, she glided above the earth, unafraid. She let herself be lifted into the sky, and she knew that she would not slip away. She knew that she would never lose Papa or *El Rancho de las Rosas*, or *Abuelita* or Mama, no matter what happened ... Now, she had even more than that, and it carried her up, as on the wings of the phoenix (249-50).

This play of adult/child English/Spanish duality can also be seen in the relationship between Esperanza and Isabel, one of the *campesino* children that Esperanza and her family live with when the first move to a plantation to work in the United States. When Esperanza first meets Isabel, the latter says, “Well, when I go to school, I will learn in English” (89). Esperanza dismisses Isabel thinking to herself, “Isabel [is] so happy...about such little things” (89). In some ways, Isabel is more mature than the protagonist, even though she is younger in age than Esperanza, because she has had experienced greater conflict and trials. Isabel has never had the spoiled life of a Mexican plantation daughter. These two girls switch roles constantly throughout the book. Isabel, for example, runs back into the house during the dust storm yelling after her cat, *Mi gata, Chiquita* (150). Esperanza here is the more mature of the two girls worrying more about the larger family and community than one small cat while Isabel’s focus remains strictly on her cat. This moment is highlighted with this code switch: Isabel acts with a childish concern and therefore expresses it in Spanish.

Finally, the *quinceañera* that never was has a role in this story and the division between adulthood and childhood. In the beginning of the book, Esperanza dreams about this coming of age party that she will someday have. She dreams of the day that she will become the *patrona* of a household, old enough to marry (86). She also talks about the linens at the end of her bed for “*algún día*” a dreamed-of future (105). As a child, Esperanza reveres these titles and respects the inherent adulthood and maturity held in these items. These items are shown in Spanish and connected with adulthood, but it is the adulthood that Esperanza envisions as a child. All of these dreams of having a fancy *quinceañera*, becoming a *patrona*, owning the plantation, sharing the linens at the end of her bed with a wealthy husband who will take care of her are all dreams that will not come to fruition. As the reality of immigration hits and Esperanza has to deal with her new life in the United States, her dreams shift to being expressed in English. She understands that even though she cannot have what she used to dream about, a happy future is possible: “She soared with the anticipation of dreams she never knew she could have, of learning English, of supporting her family, of someday buying a tiny house. Miguel had been right about never giving up, and she had been right, too, about rising above those who held them down” (250). A significant point is made here by the author. When the mother becomes sick, Esperanza becomes the leader of her household without the need for a party. This theme of the *quinceañera* as a coming-of-age ceremony was also criticized by Álvarez, who argued that girls do not need a big *quince* party to have a coming-of-age experience, and Esperanza clearly becomes an adult without this party to celebrate her maturity.

A Celebration of Mexico and the Struggles of Immigrants

Muñoz Ryan, like Sáenz, wants to question the idea that all Latina/os and Mexican-Americans are recent immigrants to the United States. *Esperanza Rising* tells the imagined story of

her grandmother coming to the United States in the early 1900s, as the author states in the dedication that this novel is for “Esperanza Ortega Muñoz Hernández Elgart, *mi abuleita*” (4). She explains this in the Author’s Note at the end of the novel:

My grandmother, Esperanza Ortega, was the inspiration for this book. When I was a young girl, Grandma used to tell me what her life was like when she first came to the United States from Mexico ... This fictional story parallels her life in some ways. She was born and raised in Aguascalientes, México. Her father was Sixto Ortega and her mother, Ramona. They lived on El Rancho de la Trinidad (which I changed to *El Rancho de las Rosas*) and her uncles did hold prominent positions in the community. A series of circumstances, including her father’s death, eventually forced my grandmother to immigrate to the United States to a company-owned farm labor camp in Arvin, California (253-54).

Not only is Esperanza the name of her grandmother whom she is paying homage to but also translated as hope, an essential theme for the novel. Muñoz Ryan notes in the Afterward, “It is no wonder that in Spanish, *esperanza* means ‘hope’” (254). That hope is what drove her family away from Mexico to the United States and hope is what pushed them forward to start over again just as Esperanza does throughout the story. This dedication and the sentiments that follow are different from authors like Julia Álvarez, Alma Flor Ada, and Francisco Jiménez who are actually from the countries where their stories are set. While Sáenz and Álvarez write about cultural interactions that directly relate to their personal experiences, in Muñoz Ryan’s work, there is a sense of nostalgia. She has never lived in Mexico but feels this culture that is part of her ancestry and tries to represent this Mexican heritage through her literature. As the granddaughter of an immigrant, she is keeping this culture alive in her life and for others with Mexican heritage. This is important to consider when understanding that she is writing about her grandmother and including all of these memories of her

past with her family. The reader can see all of these important memories of her grandmother throughout the book, such as her weaving of a crisscrossing patterned blanket. We see these family ties and nostalgia through the constant code switching of names such as “*abuelita*” “*tio*” “*tía*” “*nieta*” and “*hija*” (125, 167, 437). In Muñoz Ryan’s books there is a focus on the family, not just to represent this essential Mexican cultural value, but to also show Muñoz Ryan’s ties with her family and how this family is expressed throughout the book.

Furthermore, the use of food and other cultural elements all help Muñoz Ryan celebrate the country of her ancestors and her Mexican heritage. As was the case in Benjamin Alire Sáenz work, food and other traditions have a unifying presence in *Esperanza Rising* beyond the signifiers in the chapter titles. From the “*tamales*” that cross the border and exist in both time periods of her life to the “*rebozo*” or blanket that her grandmother is making in the beginning that travels with her to the end there are many unifying aspects of Mexican culture that cross through the book (55, 64).

However, these cultural touches can have more meaning hidden within them. Keeling and Pollard argue in their article that Muñoz Ryan is trying to give a different image of early farming in the United States than the idealized one that many in the United States conceptualize when thinking of this time period (280). According to Keeling and Pollard, many individuals in the United States when thinking about the United States farming practices during this time imagine the idealized, small family farms that existed on the East Coast not realizing this was very different from the exploitive practices found on the West Coast. Many are unaware that corporate, abusive practices against farmworkers have existed in the United States for over a century (280). In some ways, *Esperanza Rising* serves as an educational tool, combatting these false images of the United States farming ideology which is why food has such a presence in the plot line. Beyond the noticeable chapter titles, the most significant change in the food is that it goes from being consumed by the

characters to produced by the characters. Food like *las uvas* repeats from the beginning of the book to the end of the book, but it is not repeated in the same way (Keeling, Pollard 1-7).

Muñoz Ryan also uses the Spanish language to highlight these injustices and Mexicans fighting for their rights. She includes chanting from the farm workers yelling, “*huelga, huelga*” to highlight that the Mexican workers are going to use strikes to start fighting for their rights in the United States (133). This book takes place before the time of César Chávez, Dolores Huerta and the fight for the rights of Mexican Americans. Dolores Huerta says when explaining why she was so passionately involved in the movement, “The workers were literally like slaves, the living conditions were horrendous” (Bosch). It would take decades before the horrible living conditions that Esperanza experiences while working on a farm were improved, but it took farmers protesting and brave workers who stood up for their rights as human beings participating in strikes or *huelgas* to bring about this change (Bosch). Muñoz Ryan also makes it clear as they continue talking about their rights and the issues extend beyond their plantation that “Mexicans are *juntos* together” (132). In a concrete way, she uses Spanish to show missteps in translation between the characters and the authorities. Through Spanish, she highlights how English in and of itself can be a privilege and lack of English can lead to a loss of rights. There is a clear fear of “*La Migra,*” and when characters shout this to one another in Spanish, it highlights this fear (207). One of the most depressing moments of the book is when a woman is rounded up and tries to convince *la migra* that she is “*¡Americana! ¡Americana!*” and she even has her paperwork to prove it. The official rips up her paperwork and forces her onto the bus that the reader assumes will lead to deportation (205). It is disheartening to the reader that this woman, who is living under such terrible conditions, living and working legally in the United States, is being deported from the country primarily because she does not speak English. This is also important to the adolescent reader in the United States because it proves the

point that Mexican-American immigration is a heated issue that extends well beyond the publicity it has received in the 21st century. Muñoz Ryan brings to light an area of American history that is often left undiscussed: that many areas that are now a part of the United States were a part of Mexico, and before Mexico was land occupied by Native Americans. Beyond this, she reminds her readers that many people were immigrating to the United States from Mexico, at times at the encouragement of the United States' government, for over a century. Establishing these cultural or national divides based on language or race is forgetting the United States's rich history of cultural diversity (Bosch).

A Chicana that does a Different kind of Code Switching

Though there is much more Spanish code switching in her other novels, *Echo* is an interesting piece in this investigation because it uses code switching quite differently than in the other works written by Muñoz Ryan. Throughout the text, Muñoz Ryan pays close attention to the sensation of sound and wants to create this imagery for the reader. In the medium of a novel where there is no sound, it is interesting that the author should have included so many references to songs, their lyrics, and the way that the music is "played" throughout the novel. Each section starts off with song lyrics and even describes the method in which they are played, a practice that serves as a transition from one culture to the next. The novel starts off with lyrics from Johannes Brahms and a series of numbers which signify the fingerings on a harmonica to play this song "556556, 567-7-66." The novel moves into the patriotic pieces from the United States played by Mike in the American section of the book such as "Old Kentucky Home" and "America the Beautiful" (298) (197). This is again shown with harmonica fingerings, "665566-4-4, 5-56-6-76" (197). Code switching then comes in as each of the characters wish the harmonica and the magic that it brought them good luck as they

send it off to another owner. Freidrich, for example, places the treasured harmonica in a box and says “*Gute Rise*” and prays that it does someone else good as it has brought him comfort and relief in these difficult times (186). Even though each of the characters says goodbye to the harmonica, each of them does so in a different way. Their lives are changed by their interactions with the magical harmonica, each getting different things out of their interactions.

Music acts as a kind of language throughout the book, a language that, unlike German, Spanish, or English, does not require translation. In the first section of the book, when confronting Nazism and the pressures to play only German music, Freidrich’s father responds, “Music does not have a race or a disposition!” said Father. “Every instrument has a voice that contributes. Music is a universal language. A universal religion of sorts. Certainly it’s my religion. Music surpasses all distinctions between people” (86). This sentiment is repeated when people are passing by and notice Friedrich playing the harmonica the narrator comments, “Friedrich had something to say with the harmonica in a language they all understood” (121). The culmination of this idea is seen at the end of the book when all three are playing together onstage at Carnegie Hall, unknowing that the same magical harmonica assisted them in their musical success and played a pivotal role in their individual histories. The narrator describes, “They all spoke the same language and had found their way to this night with their own stories of determination and practice and their love for music” (554). In a way, the author is code switching between the universal language of music and all of the other languages used to tell the story. Even though language is often a divisive factor in stories, making communication more difficult between characters and cultures, music is seen as a language that doesn’t need translation, a force that can cross through the histories of the three protagonist characters from around the globe from one another and unite them.

In *Echo*, code switching functions a bit differently because three separate cultures are investigated. As is true for *Esperanza Rising*, a key theme in the book is exposing prejudices that existed. This is one of the key reasons it has won so many awards, that it is a way for adolescents to talk about the injustices of the past to prevent their recurrence in the future (New York Historical Society). Muñoz Ryan in this novel, however, goes beyond Latina/os and tries to give a snapshot of prejudices that existed around the world during the early 20th century. As the harmonica passes from person to person, it gives its owner a refuge from the difficulties and prejudices that they are experiencing in their day-to-day lives. The book begins in Nazi Germany, where code switching takes on one dimension. This chicana author goes beyond just code switching in Spanish and English to using German code switching to further her message in the book. Here German is used as a separation point but not between youth and adulthood, rather between good and evil. The story begins in the style of a fairy tale; the midwife, to save a baby girl from a jealous king, gives her to a witch in the forest. The witch accepts the baby saying, “I will call her *Eins* [meaning first]” The midwife thought it cruel to give the baby a number instead of a name” (5). This proceeds with two more daughters, who are each given to the witch and given a number instead of a name “*Zwei*” meaning second and “*Drei*” meaning third (8, 13). This is a way for the author to foreshadow the dehumanization that will occur to all three groups of people examined throughout the novel: the Jews in Nazi Germany, the poor in the Midwest, the migrant workers in California with the discrimination against Japanese immigrants. Immediately code switching gives a setting to the story in Germany, but it also pulls the reader’s attention into this separation of good and evil through the witch and the daughters. It is also important to note that this book was published in 2015, and should be considered in the context of the 2016 presidential election and the heated debate over immigration and national acceptance of other cultures. As a woman of Mexican descent, Muñoz Ryan is putting

herself into this national debate. Without explicitly saying anything about the present debate, this novel is a cautionary tale, echoing the mistakes of these countries pasts, reminding the reader of what fear of the foreign, and placing other cultures in the category of “the other,” can do to a country. Language is often a dividing force amongst cultures and groups of people. Language debates in this novel are used to help bring to light these separations between cultures and ultimately unify them.

Cross-cultural prejudice is a critical theme in the novel *Echo* as it acts as a unifying force rather than pitting people against each other. It is not the white plantation owners versus the Mexicans, and it is not the poor against the rich; it is a multi-perspective book that allows the reader to consider hardship from many different angles. It is also important that the author explores this cross-cultural narrative because it allows for the changing concept of who or what is the enemy. Differing from the other novels investigated, the identity of *ally* or *enemy* is a more important one than that of *child* and *adult* in this novel. In the beginning of the book, as it is told from the perspective of Germans, it allows the German people, although not necessarily the Nazis, to be the heroes and protagonists. It focuses on the protagonist, Friedrich, who lives with his father, a harmonica maker in Germany. Friedrich was born ill and has a congenital defect which have been a cause of prejudice against him his entire life, which has heightened since the rise of Nazism. He is, however, a gifted musician. When his sister Elisabeth comes home from Berlin, the family discovers that she has joined “The League,” that is, “the girls’ division of Hitler Youth” (85). Language and cultural elements are used to create this identity of ally and enemy. Nazi characters and Elisabeth, as we will see later, are the characters who use German. This helps to create an ally-or-enemy dichotomy in this section of the novel. To Elisabeth, those who value and promote “Traditional German music, literature, and values” are allies, while Jewish composers and “Jazz...Negro Music”

are associated with the other (85). To Freidrich and his father, those who do not allow open-minded acceptance of other people and cultures are the enemy, and those who do are allies.

Later in the book, however, in Ivy's perspective, the Mexican-American who is moving with her migrant farming family, this idea of enemy and ally comes into question. Her brother Fernando goes to fight against the Germans and Japanese as his duty as an American. He says, "I enlisted in the army. I want to protect our country against Germany and Italy and Japan. It is my duty as an American" (395). It is clear in this instance that Germany is the enemy (even though a German character was the hero earlier in the book), along with Japan. This identity of ally or enemy switches again when Ivy meets Kenny, a Japanese translator for the United States Army whose family is in an Internment Camp. Ivy wants to believe that her brother is fighting against the enemy and that her country has done the right thing by putting the Japanese into internment camps to keep them safe, but it seems hard to understand where the enemy/ally line is drawn. She even asks, "His parents and sisters are enemies, but he is not?" (417). Language further comes into play in this section as Ivy, who is of Mexican descent, is assumed to not have proper English because of her race and is therefore sent to a separate, less challenging school with other Mexican students.²⁶ The school system, despite the protests of her family, claims this is so she can learn to speak English and doesn't pass any "diseases" to the Caucasian students (445). Her Spanish gives the school system an excuse to separate students based on race, placing them in the category of "other" or "enemy."

This good and evil struggle through code switching will prominently continue as the story continues to Nazi Germany during the Second World War. Almost every time that German is used throughout this section, it is in relationship to some evil or Nazism. When his sister confesses to

²⁶ I use the words "Mexican descent" to describe Ivy's nationality because this is how she had her family describe themselves in this book. However, it is also clear, as will be discussed in further sections, that her family is of Mexican descent from the people who were native to California while it was still a part of Mexico, having never actually immigrated to the United States.

being a Hitlerite, Friedrich chokes on his “*spaetzle*” (84). When Elisabeth the sister is trying to convert the family to her ideology she suggests that they read “*Mein Kampf*” (86). When their home is robbed, “*Mein Kampf*” is the only book left on the shelf (159). This also continues through the frequent use of Germany by the German soldiers, especially as Friedrich comes to help his father escape from a concentration camp. The music shown in these chapters is German such as *Für Elise*, and music by Brahms (46). The author does this to show the culture that is being stolen by Nazi Germany from the rest of Germany’s citizens.

The plotline then shifts to the United States. In the second part of the book that takes place in the United States, code switching does not exist because the entire plot of the book takes place in English and is exploring a different kind of discrimination so code switching is not necessary and would take away from the overall purpose of these chapters. Some code switching returns in the California portion of the book, however less than in Muñoz Ryan’s other novels. This section focuses on Ivy, a gifted musician whose family works and helps run various farms across California. She complains that her parents are always in search of a place called “Better” (448). When she moves from Fresno to the outskirts of Los Angeles, she has to confront the persistent prejudice of the surrounding community based on her ethnicity. The author keeps some cultural identifiers and some basic code switching in the dialogue mostly through food and basic expressions. For example, the family enjoys Mama’s “*albóndigas*” soup or talks about “*serrano chiles*” burning on Ivy’s tongue (455). Family words like *hermano*, *mamá*, and *papá* are kept in Spanish to show Ivy’s heritage (454). Finally, a few code switches are kept such as the word “*barrio*” and “*La Colonia*” to keep the authenticity of the setting; to show that Ivy and her family are living in an area of California that is steeped with Mexican culture (370). Muñoz Ryan again challenges the reader’s idea of the reader’s definition of Mexican-American. Ivy’s father makes the point “My family has lived here for over

one hundred years. My great-grandfather worked on a rancho when this very land belonged to Mexico and was not yet California” (454). Younger audiences and even adults tend to think that Mexican Immigration is a new phenomenon. Muñoz Ryan challenges this idea with Ivy, reminding readers that the United States seized large sections of land that once belonged to Mexico, those residents did not necessarily pack up their belongings and move south.

It seems like an interesting choice for a Chicana author to use more German code switching than Spanish until one realizes that this choice is intentional. While her other novels that were investigated; *Esperanza Rising* (2004) and *The Dreamer* take place in Spanish, Ivy’s experiences (the Latina character in this novel) take place in English. Pam Muñoz Ryan wants to make a point that Ivy and her family truly belong in the United States. A primary source of prejudice is that the rest of society sees her as “just another Mexican.” Ivy is forced to go to a worse school than her neighbor who is white because she is Latina. The other students on the bus make fun of her singing “Old McDonald Had a Farm” and do not feel that she belongs in the after-school music program. Ivy and her family make the point over and over again throughout the book; “But ... I’m already American and I already speak English” (448). Various teachers and characters point out that Ivy “speak[s] English very well” (450). This evokes frustration in the reader because clearly Ivy has been communicating in English the entire section and is a native, English speaker. Because of her race, her teachers and the society around her assume that Ivy is a recent immigrant, that she is not a United States Citizen, and most importantly, that she is not capable of participating in the same education of the other students in the community. The reader is repeatedly reminded that Ivy, though she has Mexican heritage, is entirely a part of the United States. If the author were to use more Spanish code switching, it would take away from this point; that Ivy lives her life in English, even though everyone else in their community does not see her in this way, she belongs in this country. It

is interesting that an author powerfully uses code switching to draw a reader's attention to certain aspects of the book, to create divides and parallels, but she can also take away the code switching to make a powerful statement as well. Many words in Ivy's world, as stated previously, show that Ivy belongs to her Mexican heritage, but the fact that she does not ever speak Spanish with her parents, teachers, or friends helps to emphasize this point that though she is Mexican, this is not her defining characteristic.

Muñoz Ryan uses code switching to make a variety of powerful statements throughout her novels. However, the moment that epitomizes her goal in writing is found possibly at the end of *Echo*. The three main characters; Ivy, Mike, and Freidrich all sit onstage in New York playing together, unaware that they have all fallen in love with music through the same magical harmonica. They play an American Broadway classic "Some Enchanted Evening from South Pacific" (553). This shows Muñoz Ryan's true goal in writing and writing with Chicano/a characters. She wants to show Mexicans in this country and the vital role that they have played in the symphony of culture that is the United States. She wants to prove to the short sighted edges of American history and nationalist critics that Mexicans have lived in this country emphasizing that much of the United States was once part of Mexico. Mexican culture has been important to this country long before the twenty-first century, that immigrants have played an essential role in developing the United States into the nation it is today. Using code switching is a way of acknowledging these roots, giving them a rich cultural flavor and connecting it in a broader sense. Muñoz Ryan wants to show that the struggles of poverty and prejudice faced by Latina/os are not unique to this cultural group. She wants to show that immigrants coming to the United States have always wanted the same things; a better, freer life, and a better future for their children and the generations to come. Muñoz Ryan has clearly benefited

from the sacrifices made by her ancestors in coming to the United States, and her writing is a homage to them.

Chapter Five

Conclusion, Why this Matters

Authors of adolescent Latina/o literature use code switching and reflect on language use in a variety of different ways. Usually, this code switching is present to contrast two aspects of the adolescent character's experiences when defining his or her identity. In the works of Benjamin Alire Sáenz, this is to put a divide between the character's acceptance of his parent's culture and identity and rejection, most often associated with the character's definition of his homosexuality. In the works of Julia Álvarez, when language is discussed it serves as a separation point between the young child and the maturing adult version of the protagonist characters. With Pam Muñoz Ryan's works, this language reflection and code switching serves as a way to highlight social issues and show that language, in itself unites rather than divides. Language for people all across the world is an enormous part of identity. It is how people stay connected to a culture and preserve it with the next generation. Adolescents are in a time of transition when they are deciding to accept or reject that cultural background. Though these are exemplars in the realm of adolescent, Latina/o literature, they do not stand alone; many other authors use the contrast of Spanish and English to help adolescents define their identity throughout their works.

The United States is a nation of immigrants, the majority of people living in this country come from somewhere else in the line of their family tree. Though first and second generation immigrants can encourage and motivate the next generation to embrace the culture of their parent's home country and retain their language skills and traditions, the fact is that adolescents and the next generation will need to define these things for themselves. As I have demonstrated throughout this investigation, adolescents actively engage with language and often embrace and reject different pieces of their parent's culture when trying to define themselves and their identity. Adolescent

Latina/o literature intends to authentically reflect how adolescents are changing what it means to be bilingual, it demonstrates how more than one language has an active place in these adolescents' lives. Furthermore, the authors of adolescent Latina/o literature not only reflect this reality but predict how this next generation will continue to take the language and cultures of their parents and make it their own. Literature is a reflection of identity formation but can also play an important role in identity formation and helps encourage language to play a role in identity formation and cultural acceptance. Rather than an Americanization process which existed in the early 20th century where immigrants coming to the United States were discouraged from passing their language and culture onto their children, as a nation we should learn from the errors of the past and help encourage the preservation of language and culture through literature, music, and other media.

There are many valuable applications for studying adolescent Latina/o literature. The reality is that when it comes to young adult and adolescent literature, that which is produced in English from the United States is among the only literature available for adolescents featuring authentic Latin American experiences. In *Academic Writing in a Global Context*, Theresa Lillis and Mary Jane Curry explain why this is true in academia and the world of publishing. Those who write in English enjoy a privileged position when it comes to publishing. Because English is the universal language of science, it is subsequently the most popular language when it comes to publishing (1-5). This combined with the publishing establishments available in Europe and the United States could be one of the reasons that English speaking and European authors have such an advantage as well when it comes to children's and adolescent literature (Lillis, Curry 54, 93).

In the world of children's and adolescent literature, it is easy to realize bias that exists towards English speaking and European authors and teachers, students, and community members have started to advocate for multicultural books within the publishing sphere. Reading adolescent

Latina/o literature that effectively uses code switching is one of the ways we can fill this void. With more demand for this kind of literature, supply will follow. Many authors echo the importance of multicultural literature in the United States and using code switching in these works. This recognition of the importance of language and showing authentic code switching in literature is seen by Erika Gisela Abad in *Papa's Lessons: Code Switching Language, Cultural Literacy and Forgiveness* (2014):

As a bilingual poet, I have historically politicized word choice, code-switching, and monolingual verses. When my poems work through issues of race relations and immigration, code-switching, word choice, and spelling resist the expectation that I belong to either language. The strategy preceded me in Latina/o writers I was fortunate enough to have found during my adolescence (549).

Julia Álvarez echoes this need for multicultural authors in the publishing economy of the United States in *Once Upon a Quinceañera* as well as in many interviews when she describes the experience of reading her first “Ethnic Novel:” *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1989) (Álvarez 222).²⁷ Even though this novel is about a Chinese immigration experience, Álvarez speaks about how important this story was for her to read, that many of this woman’s experiences were seen in her own life. She notes that reading this novel made her feel accepted and legitimized as part of American Literature (222-223). At a first glance, code switching in adolescent literature may seem like a way to include a sprinkling of culture in a text, yet within these bilingual words there resides so much more. As Abad says in the quote above, it is clear that code-switching has a profound influence on her understanding of race and identity. It is a way to empower a culture traditionally put down and allowing for cultural expression.

²⁷ This was seen in her Interview with Edwards on his morning show as well as with Elizabeth Huergo in her interview for the F Scott Fitzgerald Award.

A further reason that it is vital to promote the study and publication of adolescent Latino novels is the impact that it can have on students as well as their surrounding communities. There are an abundance of studies that find exposing children and young adults to literature featuring characters from their culture, authors who look and speak like them is important for their academic and personal development. In a study published in the article *Prescribing Books for Immigrant Children* (2000) by Lee M Sanders, this researcher found that just leaving books in Spanish in the waiting rooms of doctor's offices or having doctors "prescribe" or recommend reading practices to the parents of their young patients increased their readiness for kindergarten and literacy skills (Sanders). This study found that having access to these books within the community had positive results and increased the valuing of education and reading at an early age. Furthermore, Ron Espiritú, one cultural studies advocate, started a program in Los Angeles that found that students not only did far better than their peers in language arts but also in math, something not even taught in the program, when given the opportunity to engage in multicultural studies. It is empowering for children to find cultural role models in literature. Though I and many others hope for a future in which more adolescent literature comes from Latin America and other countries outside of the United States and Europe, focusing on Latina/o literature in the United States is an important start.²⁸

While there are many ways that adolescent Latina/o literature is essential and can play an important role in the development of teens it still remains in the shadows of young adult literature. The hope is that this is the beginning of a plethora of multicultural literature for adolescents in the United States, however, with this increase in Latina/o literature it is crucial that it be done correctly, in a way that promotes open-mindedness and acceptance. This concept was investigated by Graciela Italiano who spent 20 years studying the importance of children's literature in bridging cultures and

²⁸ Though there are more books for children being published in this region, there are very few books for more advanced readers. It is difficult to find books for adolescents published in Latin America and most parts of South America beyond picture books and poetry.

eliminating divides looking at 120 different children's books in Spanish and English. While she found that exposing children to multicultural literature was important, she also cautioned against the consequences of code switching and multicultural literature (119). She cautions that often multicultural books feature stereotypical characters (128). While it helps to have authors that are from the Latina/o community writing about this experience, it is not exclusive to that group; she cautions against inauthentic representations of Latina/o characters especially written by non-Latina/o authors. An example of this is *Diego* (1994) written by Jonah Winter which portrays a Hispanic character but lacks authenticity in his depiction (129). Margaret Schmidt also cautioned against inauthenticity in children's and adolescent Latina/o books (40). When a book is not authentically representing a culture, it is only promoting essentialism and stereotypical versions of the minority culture. Students need to encounter their heritage and the culture of others in this authentic way to understand themselves and to better accept other cultures in their world. Schmidt and Italiano further argue that Latina/os are often pressured to give up their culture or conform, and this conformity sometimes appears in writing, showing characters who have Hispanic names but only reflects white American culture in every way except these names (Schmidt 40) (Italiano 120). Furthermore, Italiano argues that Latina/o literature should portray and perpetuate positive Latina/o values such as the importance of community sharing and the interconnectedness of families (129-30). Finally, another concept that needs to be addressed and cautioned against in the promotion of adolescent Latina/o literature is the too often temptation to lump all Latina/o cultures and heritages together in the realm of literature. Though this was discussed in this introduction, it is worth noting again, as adolescent Latina/o literature continues forward, it is important to express a multiplicity of Latina/o identities (129). Italiano finishes by saying that Latina/o literature for children and adolescents should leave the reader with a feeling of pride over their cultural identity (130-1).

I believe that the books investigated in this thesis are shining examples of adolescent Latina/o literature because they do not succumb to any of these criterion. They show the multiplicity of the Latina/o experience, and there are subtle yet significant differences between the Dominican and Mexican cultures portrayed in these novels. They perpetuate positive Latina/o values, addressing and rejecting negative stereotypes, encouraging the importance of family and sharing, as well as celebrating cultural differences from food to dance to religion. I believe that these books show authentic characters while meeting the goal of leaving any Latina/o reader proud of their heritage. Beyond the obvious implications for students who are of Latino heritage or the children of recent immigrants to the United States, Latina/o literature has an important role for children and young adults of other ethnicities in their identity formation and growth into adulthood. There is a tone of acceptance that goes beyond essentialism that is all too common in the culture of the United States that is present in this type of literature. With increased exposure to other cultures and experiences with other individuals going through similar struggles no matter how different the circumstances are around their growth.

Our world is becoming more interconnected, more globalized. Society needs to start preparing students to live in this multicultural, globalized society and that starts with students' encounters in childhood and adolescence. Because our world is becoming more globalized, so too is adolescent literature. Though still published from very few places, adolescent literature is starting to include more and more cultures in its text. In turn, this change will hopefully affect globalization, making a more open-minded, culturally aware society. Rebecca Walkowitz makes a similar argument in *Location of Literature: The Transnational Book and the Migrant Writer*. She argues that book have the power to be a part of "transcultural networks" and have far-reaching audiences (919). This "Migrant Literature" gives a model for how to live in two distinct cultures and forces the reader

to reevaluate their opinions on globalization and immigration every time they encounter it (918-922). Based on the theories of identity formation discussed in the introduction by Marcia and Erikson and the importance of adolescents in this identity, I conclude that adolescent Latina/o literature could play an important role in identity formation. This literature reflects biculturalism, introducing younger readers to a variety of cultures. It also demonstrates the complexities of their own culture, making them more likely to accept these differences in the future as well as understand the nuances of their identity. As the world becomes a more globalized society, it becomes increasingly important for adolescents and the future workforce to be comfortable working in a multicultural sphere and multicultural literature is one of the ways that this can become a reality.

Three major authors were investigated in depth, however, there are still many more authors to read. There are many more important figures in this field of writing emerging each year, especially with the expansions that have occurred in the recognition and publishing of authors from different, multicultural backgrounds including Matt de la Peña, Gary Soto, Viola Canales, Margarita Engle, Marjorie Aguinó, and many others. How these authors use code switching and reflections on language are likely similar to those discussed for Sáenz, Muñoz Ryan, and Álvarez, however each of these authors brings their own flavor to their writing and each defy stereotypes and promote Latino Literature in his or her own way. Through the course of this investigation, I read and researched other multicultural adolescent literature for its use of code switching though not discussed here. Novels such as *Akata Witch* (2011) featuring Igbo Nigerian, *Gilded* (2014) featuring Korean, *Between Shades of Gray* (2011) featuring Latvian, and *Making Bombs for Hitler* (2012) featuring Ukrainian are all examples of authors authentically showing language and culture for adolescents. Each use code switching in similar ways to the ones seen in this thesis reflecting on adolescent Latina/o literature, but also use language in a way that reflects the unique aspects of their culture. In

Gilded, author Christina Farley uses code switching primarily to show the difficulties that the main character feels in adjusting to the high-pressure environment that she finds in South Korea. In *Making Bombs for Hitler* and *Between Shades of Gray*, the Ukrainian and Latvian adds levels of understanding and ethnic identity, different characters, as they are removed from their homes are united with those who speak the same language. Language is a source of freedom and persecution throughout both of these books showing the struggles of Latvian and Ukrainian refugees. In *Akata Witch*, different languages are used in conjunction with the fantastical and magical elements of the book to develop a sense of mysticism. It also is used to show the variety of languages spoken throughout the African continent and the constant code switching and language learning that happens because of this. Books such as these featuring other languages and cultures should be studied in conjunction with adolescent Latina/o literature to encourage this understanding of self further for both those of that multicultural group and those of another. Diversifying the pool of literature available to adolescents furthers their understanding of the world and helps to eliminate this sense of “other.” As it is written in *Akata Witch* when one of the characters from the United States requests a scholar to communicate in English, she responds, “They don’t teach them to understand others, they teach them to expect *others* to understand *them*” (303). These books aim to eliminate this sense of superiority that coming from the United States and speaking English brings with it.

While many scholarly works influenced my findings in this thesis regarding the use of language reflections and code switching, most of the works I analyzed focused on either adult Latina/o literature or children’s Latina/o literature. With regards to children’s literature, those I found often were for an intended audience of eight or younger and predominantly focused on picture books and bilingual books for children learning to read. More investigations are needed to fully

understand the implications and trends in language use in adolescent and children's literature, especially within the Latina/o community. I hope that this thesis is part of that community of scholastic work that promotes these works in the academic and publishing sphere. I firmly believe that novels like the ones discussed in this thesis can help adolescents better understand themselves and accept the culture of their heritage and make it their own, mix it into the melting pot that is the United States of America. This is a conversation and a journey to find oneself in adolescence that, according to adolescent psychologists does not happen only in adulthood but is formed and solidified during adolescence. Literature is an integral part of that process and having access to good books that help adolescents discover and work through the issues that will define themselves and the next generation is important.

To conclude, it is for these reasons that this thesis aims to participate in the academic discussion of adolescent Latina/o literature as an important part of American literature. Code switching within this genre helps to establish this duplicity of life. This time in transition in adolescence is felt by both those finding their identity in the stages of childhood to adulthood and those who are balancing the culture of their home country or their parent's home country and the country in which they have immigrated. Latina/o literature plays an important role in exploring and helping with this time of being in between two distinct identities. It helps readers to understand different cultures and put themselves in the perspective of the other, something that is going to be increasingly important in our globalized world. Furthermore, with the identity development that happens in adolescents and the fact that so many Latina/o authors use code switching to show a development of an individualized identity, these books are not only critical in increasing multicultural understanding but can aide this difficult age in transition better understand themselves.

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