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Crossing Linguistic Borders:
A History and Exploration of Multilingualism and Identity Formation
in the Secondary English Classroom

by

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Abstract

This paper argues that secondary American literature curriculums need to include multilingual texts due to the increasing population of English Language Learners and the negative rhetoric surrounding immigrants in contemporary media. The essay traces the history and intersection of immigration and education policies, which have resulted in achievement gaps and ethnic disparities in schools across the state of Minnesota. The goal of this analysis is to provide a theory-based, defensible case for practical and relevant adaptations of Minnesota State English Language standards through the use of multilingual narratives in an American literature classroom.

I. Introduction

With the growing criminalization and negative rhetoric surrounding Latin American immigrants in the media, it becomes increasingly important to teach positive narratives about this underrepresented group within our schools and communities. Traditionally, American literary curriculums have often highlighted texts from the continental United States written by white male authors. However, as our nation becomes increasingly diverse, it is vital to understand American literature with a more global perspective. American literature curriculums need to move beyond canonical texts in order to highlight the voices of underrepresented groups and languages. Secondary American literature curriculums need to change due to issues within language education policies, which were impacted by immigration laws developed in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. These immigration laws and language education policies establish a context for the systematic issues with policies developed to target and undermine Latin American immigrant populations living in the United States. Additionally, with the rise of anti-immigrant rhetoric in the news and media, educators confront daily challenges with their students. Standards-based grading and test-centered approaches are not benefiting the emotional and academic needs of Latin American immigrant and origin students, Latin/x students, Hispanic students, and especially English Language Learners. Minnesota State English Language Arts standards and teaching practices do not meet the needs of the Latin American demographic changes over the past ten years. Other states like California have integrated additional course work and English Language Learner requirements for all general education teachers¹; however, Minnesota requires teachers to have minimal licensure requirements and

¹ In 1994, California created a “two-tiered teacher certification structure for teaching English learners known as the Bilingual, Crosscultural, Language and Academic Development Examination and Certificate,” which requires teachers to prove their understanding of English language instruction through six tests or domains (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing).

only one clock hour of English Language Learner training for licensure renewal every five years. Therefore, this essay seeks to justify the need to change standards and pedagogical practices in Minnesota to address the needs of multilingual students. Along with the changes in Minnesota standards, American literature curriculums need to include multilingual texts to encourage all students to value their own identities or identities of their peers and community members. Therefore, students should read and write about narratives that discuss identity formation and challenge a narrow view of language, race, and culture. The content changes of an American literature curriculum should be supported by culturally relevant pedagogy, which can benefit not only English Language Learners, but also monolingual students as they interact with a culture different from their own. These language practices will provide students with learning opportunities to enhance comprehension, analysis, and critical thinking.

II. Immigration Law and Language Education Policy

Immigration law and education policies intersect, which is one important reason we need curriculum and systematic change within the secondary American literature classroom. These laws and policies result in a negative public response and the rise of anti-immigrant rhetoric toward Latin Americans. In the late nineteenth century as the United States economy began to take shape, “there was a widespread acknowledgment that Mexicans were encouraged to move freely across the border and, in effect, come to work without any official authorization or documents” (Samora and Garcia qtd. in Dowling and Inda 42). After the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which was the first law that restricted immigration into the United States, and the Immigration Act of 1917, which restricted the immigration of “undesirables” into the United States, the need for affordable physical labor increased. Therefore, Mexican migrant labor became an economic resource for the nation’s infrastructure. In *Mexican Emigration to the*

United States Lawrence Cardoso describes the change in Mexico's population as Mexican citizens are recruited to join the United States labor force:

During and after the years of the Mexican Revolution and World War I, from 1910 to 1930, approximately one-tenth of Mexico's total population relocated north of the border, partly owing to social disruptions and dislocations within Mexico during this period of political upheaval, but principally driven and often directly orchestrated by labor demand in new industries and agriculture in the US (Dowling and Inda 43).

Therefore, the Mexican migrant population increased within the workforce in order to build America's economy. At the same time, the rise of nationalism escalated the fears of the white majority that these underrepresented populations would steal their jobs and position within society. The rhetoric surrounding these "undesirable" immigrants resulted from a perspective that they posed a threat to a national, standard, and normalized identity. The Mexican immigrants, who spoke another language, were seen like the early Chinese immigrants of the late nineteenth century as unable to assimilate to culture in the United States. Therefore, this gave rise to racial profiling and other forms of discrimination.

In order to assert control over incoming immigrant groups and profile these individuals for assimilability, the United States Border Patrol was established in 1924. The Border Patrol "had very quickly assumed its distinctive role as a special police force for the repression of Mexican workers in the US" (Ngai qtd. in Dowling and Inda 43). The Border Patrol used "qualitative features of immigration law" to restrict Mexican migration rather than quantitative restrictions (Dowling and Inda 43). Therefore, entrance could be denied if an immigrant head tax was not paid, the immigrant was perceived as illiterate, or if he or she was presumed as a risk to the public. These qualitative measures were also used as means to maintain control and

discipline migrant workers. The interpretations of qualitative features of immigration law were often based on prejudicial attitudes toward these groups rather than facts, primarily because of the fear that they may disrupt the social order.

As a national identity grew during the Great Depression, racist ideologies toward Mexican migrants and US-born Mexican citizens became apparent as both were “systematically excluded from employment and economic relief, which were declared the exclusive preserve of ‘Americans,’ who were presumed to be more ‘deserving’ ...Mexicans were expelled with no regard to legal residence or US citizenship or even birth in the US—simply for being ‘Mexican’” (Dowling and Inda 44). Therefore, those who looked Mexican, but were born in the United States were segregated and mistreated. As a result, Mexican workers were expelled or deported from the United States. Additionally, in 1942 the United States and Mexico established the Bracero Program to counteract these expulsions of Mexican workers since many companies preferred undocumented workers. Many employers could avoid contracts, minimum employment periods, and fixed wages when employing "braceros" (Galarza qtd. in Dowling and Inda 45). In 1964 the Bracero Program was brought to an end with the rise of the Civil Rights Movement and a reconfiguration of US immigration law, which began in 1965. The US immigration law of 1965 reunited immigrant families and hoped to attract a skilled labor force to the United States. Additionally, lawmakers hoped to create more equitable working conditions for the large migrant labor force living in the United States.

The Immigration Law of 1965 led to changes in bilingual and multilingual education policies. As a result of the increase in bilingual and multilingual populations in the United States, “the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 gave an important push to bilingual education programs and policies” (Gorter, Durk and Cenoz 233). Therefore, many schools began encouraging and

requiring students to learn a second language as part of their secondary education. However, resistance to these programs grew in the 1980s and 1990s due to the concerns that instructional time devoted to another language would limit proficiencies in other subject areas or even one's first language. In 1986 language acquisition scholars Jim Cummins and Merrill Swain defined the separation of language practices as the principal of "bilingualism through monolingualism" (qtd. in Gorter, Durk, and Cenoz 236). Additionally, Cummins and Swain state, "it is pedagogically more sound to use language separately in an instructional unit than to use them concurrently" (qtd. in Gorter, Durk, and Cenoz 236). These practices resulted in the belief that languages should be taught separately at different times during the day and by different instructors. In 1994 English language proficiency became part of student assessments by grade level. Therefore, some programs were so concerned with test scores and student performance, they restricted students to "English Only" policies, which prevented students from speaking their home language in the classroom. In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) required schools to designate students who had "Limited English Proficiency." These students were also required to "attain the same English proficiency as the English-speaking students and also meet the same academic standards in all content areas" (Gorter, Durk, and Cenoz 233). More recently the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2016 returns some of the responsibility for assessments to states and local schools, but it does not include explicit language or "provisions for dual language programs, bilingual education, or multilingual enrichment programs" (Gorter, Durk, and Cenoz 234). Therefore, the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2016 tried to remedy the unattainable expectations of English Language Learners (ELL) of NCLB, but it has not restored best practices in schools completely. The hierarchal attitudes toward language are present in many schools across the country. Many institutions, even immersion programs, believe in the

traditional views of separating languages during the school day. However, this is not a natural way of speaking or thinking for many bilingual or multilingual speakers. For example, a “translanguaging” approach allows an educator to examine “the learner as a multilingual person who uses resources from their whole multilingual repertoire” (Gorter, Durk, and Cenoz 243). Allowing students to use multiple languages in the classroom will not only demonstrate a value of the culture of the student, but it will also allow students to communicate naturally since translation is not always clear or even possible.

This historical context allows one to understand the growing crisis within the educational system and the urgency to create curriculum and language policy changes. According to Noni Mendoza Reis and Barbara Flores authors of “Changing the Pedagogical Culture of Schools with Latino English Learners” the population of English Learners is the “fastest growing sector of the public school population...and, by 2025, it is predicted that nearly one out of every four public school students will be an EL” (Portes et al. 194). However, educational practices and policies have not supported these learners and “the majority of poor children from Spanish-speaking families remain in the lowest quartile of academic achievement and are often blamed for the systems’ failure to meet Academic Yearly Progress” (Portes et al. 3). English Language Learners are often assigned blame because they are expected to meet the same standards as native speakers under the same circumstances and teaching methods. This does not mean English Language Learners are not capable of meeting the same standards, but the curriculum practices do not engage these learners who need language and academic support. Additionally, curriculums do not always support these students culturally, which leads to poor engagement and academic achievement. Therefore, with the increasing numbers of English Learners in the classroom, “the design of pedagogy will need to take on a more sophisticated view of what

language competence and bi-literacy are about—one that acknowledges that languages are fundamentally socialized systems of conventions rather than rigid rule systems largely determined by genetic endowment” (Portes et al. 207). Language allows one to construct meaning and draw deeper connections for learning. Therefore, it is important for policy makers and educators to recognize that student learning and intelligence needs to be defined beyond standardized test scores, especially by those who are still developing the language of the test. In April 2019, the Minnesota Department of Education ruled that all students, regardless of their English Language Learner status, must take the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment Reading test. Even students new to the United States within the last few months were required to take this exam. Therefore, the Minnesota Department of Education is structuring the results of standardized tests “to reflect discrete pieces of knowledge and skills represented by standards and an intended curriculum,” and one that these students may not have had access to, which “distorts what learning and mastery really are for students’ (Portes et al. 211). Moreover, this also ignores “deep attention to socialization of learning opportunity and its foundation in students' sense of agency and identity as learners in a broader and more fundamental sense” (Portes et al. 211). Learning is a social process that is influenced by interactions through language. Tests are an isolated process, which does not reflect the social nature of language and the real world, and they influence school systems and policies that do not benefit underrepresented groups and English Learners.

Along with structuring schools based on standardized tests, the Common Core Standards and Minnesota State Standards influence curriculum development. Therefore, “schools remain structured politically to educate and graduate most students subject to group-based inequality below grade level and to house most until they, as a whole, populate the nation’s underclass” (3).

Therefore, the system privileges and empowers those with the language, socioeconomic status, and access to education “to qualify for advanced placement in higher education and the workforce” (Portes and Sales 3). Students are placed in courses based on test scores and grades, which again does not account for the social engagement of learning. These educational opportunities create disparities between Latin American and white/Caucasian students. This education disparity is due to the attitudes, stereotypes, and rhetoric surrounding the academic achievements of this population of students, especially as it relates to their academic language abilities. Therefore, in order to create lasting change within the education system, it is essential to do the following:

We need documentation of grounded examples of effective, culturally responsive instruction showing that Latino/a students can acquire skills relevant to mastery of standards and that students can communicate and act in ways manifesting standards as part of ongoing communities of learners making sense of their identities as learners and of the world around them. (Durán qtd. in Portes et al. 212)

The documentation of these examples needs to be separate from test scores in order to demonstrate a broader understanding of language acquisition and development along with student achievement. These examples would allow schools to see a student's first language, culture, and family experiences as assets, not disadvantages. Furthermore, this may also encourage students to recognize that the retention of their home language will make them more marketable in a professional environment. Additionally, these positive messages are salient for students to see and hear within the school system because historically and contemporarily, immigrant students are bombarded continuously by anti-immigrant rhetoric in the news and the

media. These messages hinder student learning, so it becomes nearly impossible for students to achieve the standards suggested through the Common Core and Minnesota State Standards.

III. Anti Immigrant Rhetoric

The contemporary anti-immigrant rhetoric focuses on vilifying immigrants as criminals and invaders. In *The Latino Threat* Leo Chavez writes, “The Latino Threat Narrative posits that Latinos are not like previous immigrant groups, who ultimately became part of the nation... They are part of an invading force from south of the border that is bent on reconquering land that was formerly theirs (the U.S. Southwest) and destroying the American way of life” (Roman 18).

There is a clear distinction between the attitudes toward Latin American immigrants and European immigrants. President Trump uses the social media platform Twitter to spread fearful messages: “Sadly it looks like Mexico’s Police and Military are unable to stop the Caravan heading to the Southern Border of the United States. Criminals and unknown Middle Easterners are mixed in. I have alerted Border Patrol and Military that this is a National Emergency. Must change laws!” (@realDonaldTrump). Trump uses Twitter to create fear and anxiety and posits himself as the only solution to these issues. Trump tries to solve this problem by “alert[ing] Border Patrol and Military” and claims the laws “must change.” According to David Bennett, a historian and author of *The Party of Fear: The American Far Right From Nativism to the Militia Movement*, “Trump has combined the fear of foreign ideology with fear of foreign immigration in a novel way, with his twin emphasis on Islamist terror and Mexican migrants. This... may be why Trump has done better than many fear-fueled politicians” (Ball 42). Social media platforms like Twitter help to spread these false messages of hate and provide an instant reaction from the public that allows for a continuous conversation, but also a continuous stream of fear. Even though these fears are irrational, they are still psychologically producing the same primitive and

innate response of survival, which in turn prompts individuals to find concrete solutions to immigration. Therefore, anti-immigrant rhetoric is used to find order and control in a chaotic world. The border wall is a concrete solution that comforts xenophobic individuals and their irrational fears of the other because it brings a tangible solution to an abstract problem. However, the "solution" is short-sighted and harmful because it continues to segregate, discriminate, and support people's prejudices toward immigrants.

Fear mongering politics not only impact new immigrants coming into the country, but they also impact the communities who are already living here. The hateful rhetoric grows and becomes embedded within society and directed toward any underrepresented group regardless of their immigration status. For example, "According to a Department of Justice report, for just the state of California, Latinos and Hispanics are increasingly the subjects of hate crimes with a more than 50 percent increase from 2016" (Hinojosa 1). These hate crimes stem from rhetoric that targets Latin American immigrants as "infiltrators, vermin, animals." When individuals who are vulnerable or compelled by racist rhetoric hear these words used by the administration, it persuades them to see these groups as a threat to white western culture. Latin American students who are born in the United States are viewed as threatening even with legal citizenship. Furthermore, students from mixed-status families are perceived as nonacademic because even though they may be fluent in conversational English, they may lack the necessary academic language that would allow them to be successful (Mangual Figueroa qtd. in Portes et al. 150).

In addition to the negative rhetoric surrounding immigrants in the United States, President Trump also discusses the changing culture in Europe due to the wave of immigration. He notes that "It's a very negative thing for Europe" (Hinojosa 9). Trump's word choice implies a claim of value associated with white culture in Europe, which parallels the attitudes of American

culture. In rhetoric like this, the fact that nationalism has historically catered to a white majority is especially blatant, which results in poor race relations like the increase in hate crimes cited above. According to Jennifer Richeson², “when people are in the majority, the sense of their race is dormant. But the prospect of being in the minority can suddenly make white identity--and all the historical privilege that comes with it--salient” (Resnick 4). Therefore, this “perceived ‘threat’ of demographic change” makes individuals “fearful and, in turn, giv[es] power to politicians who implicitly or explicitly stoke that fear” (Resnick 8). The assumption that a rise in one group means a decline in another promotes the widespread fear of the changes in racial demographics present in both Europe and America.

As students absorb these messages from the media and news, they form a destructive view of Latin American groups or their own identity. The negative rhetoric surrounding immigrants needs to be addressed immediately in the classroom by addressing these claims and providing positive messages and narratives. Language plays a critical role in identity formation. Therefore, it is essential to include diverse narratives within a classroom space because “narratives are a primary embodiment of our understanding of the world, of experience, and ultimately ourselves” (Kerby qtd. in DeFina 17). If narratives are temporal and reflect a specific time and space of our reality, it becomes increasingly important to situate positive narratives of immigrants within a time when the media provides negative and false messages of immigrants. Therefore, in order to address positive narratives, the American literature curriculum needs to be redefined outside of canonized texts to include Latin American authors who not only tell their stories, but also incorporate Spanish and English into the narrative. Some may argue that these

² Craig, Maureen A., and Jennifer A. Richeson. "Coalition Or Derogation? How Perceived Discrimination Influences Intraminority Intergroup Relations." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 102, no. 4, 2012, pp. 759-777.

types of texts only belong in a Spanish language classroom, but they have a place in the English language and literature classroom because of the need to demonstrate the sociocultural views of language or “language as action” in the classroom:

In a classroom context, an action-based perspective [of language] means that ELs engage in meaningful activities (projects, presentations, investigations) that engage their interest and that encourage language growth through perception, interaction, planning, research, discussion, and co-construction of academic products of various kinds. (Durán qtd. in Portes et al. 208).

Students need to understand that multiple languages are valued in the classroom space, which can be taught through the texts within the curriculum and the writing or projects developed to support these multilingual readings.

IV. Multilingualism in the English Language and Literature Classroom

Multilingual texts should be part of American literary curriculums because monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual students feel empowered and valued through the negotiation of different languages and codes. Multilingual literature can “undermine Anglo-American monologism, [which] undercuts claims of prevalence, centrality, and superiority, and confirms the condition of heteroglossia” (Artega qtd. in Esplin 180). Therefore, some institutions and individuals may feel hesitant or even threatened by this change in perspective of literary curriculums. However, it is irresponsible to define American literature with one set of texts or through one language when the American culture is diverse and vibrant with history of people emigrating from all over the world.

In order for educators to establish a purpose for using multilingual texts with their students, it is crucial for students to write about language and how it influences their identity,

culture, and society as a whole. Students should think about different circumstances in which they use a variety of codes or languages in order to communicate their thoughts to a particular audience. This is an important connection because it allows students to use English Language Arts standards of purpose, audience, and tone in order to draw connections between the way language is described or used in various texts and their own use of language (Minnesota Department of Education 58). According to Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, we need to use language in order to better understand ourselves and the Other: “Human existence cannot be silent, or can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world” (88). Students must be exposed to underrepresented voices and languages in order to foster an authentic view of these groups. Furthermore, it is vital for monolingual educators to be upfront about not being fluent in a language cited in these texts in order to give power to others in the classroom space. Providing texts by writers like Gloria Anzaldúa and Sandra Cisneros within the context of an American literature classroom, students can begin to see the value of the Spanish language and Latin American identities.

As educators approach Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands*, it is important for students to recognize the rhetorical purpose of code-switching within the text. Anzaldúa refuses to translate many of her Spanish passages because she is trying to argue that in the future, “the literature of the new mestizo will be recognized as legitimate or mainstream” (179). Therefore, monolingual speakers may not always be able to translate the Spanish phrases or passages and thus will experience othering. In “Self-translation and Accommodation,” Marlene Hansen Esplin argues, “Anzaldúa is unapologetic about the multilingual gestures within her text. She presents ambiguity as a primary characteristic of the border community from which she narrates and touts her multilingualism as an asset in theorizing a larger border culture or consciousness” (179).

Therefore, it is through this ambiguity and struggle that one can find a greater sense of self, culture, and identity. It is not one side or border that one possesses, but rather the constant navigation among groups and identities. This is even more present for students who learn in a microcosm of American demographics. Schools represent diverse populations that students must learn to respect. Not only that, adolescence is a formative age for understanding one's place within society and one's relationship with the people within it. Therefore, Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* is a relevant text to include within the American literature curriculum because it allows students to immerse themselves in a text that exemplifies what it means to be an adolescent and civilian in America, constantly negotiating between different realities, identities, and cultures.

Along with the relationship between borders, culture, and identity, code-switching is also an important aspect of Anzaldúa's text that is very relatable for students. In "Code-Switching in Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* and Walcott's *Omeros*" Anastasia Lakhtikova writes, "Code-switching is designed to make the embedded foreign elements transparent or semi-transparent to a monolingual reader with the goal of actively engaging the reader to interact with the culture, its languages and texts, by deciphering the meaning of their foreign elements" (9). Students not only interact with the author in a dialogue rather than a monologue, but they also interact with multiple cultures and multiple dialects of a language. Anzaldúa carefully switches between languages in which many of the "Spanish words are either cognates (animals, papa, mama) or are derived from Latin (mayor, blancas, año, pobre madre, ingles, morirse), while the meaning of others can be deduced from the associative context" (Lakhtikova 10). Monolingual readers are forced to revisit and analyze the lines in Spanish and use context tools and strategies to decipher the lines:

[Readers] must use whatever pieces of Latin and other languages we have to reconstruct the meaning, engaging with the writerly aspects of the text in the ways that bilingual readers who have both languages do not. This uncertainty, the place between the languages, between knowing and not, between having and not having—a history, for example—is symbolic of the *mestizo* culture and state represented [by Anzaldúa’s language]. It is through bilingual coding, the text allows us to experience the *mestizo* state, but not really own it. (Lakhtikova 12)

Offering texts like *Borderlands* that embed Spanish phrases or sentences, not only empowers Spanish speakers because they see their language and culture is valued, but it also empowers monolingual speakers who must use cognates, Latin derivatives, context clues, explanatory context, and associative context to decipher the meaning of the text. One could argue that the same skills are used when trying to decipher a Shakespearean drama or comedy where “reading the older literature of one’s language might well be like reading another language” (Guillory 17). Reading a Shakespearean text has been embedded within Minnesota state graduation standards because of the linguistic challenges it presents. According to the Minnesota Department of Education, students should read these “timeless dramas of Shakespeare” because “students gain a reservoir of literary and cultural knowledge, references, and images; the ability to evaluate intricate arguments; and the capacity to surmount the challenges posed by complex texts” (49). In grades eleven and twelve, teachers are required to “include at least one play by Shakespeare” (Minnesota Department of Education 52). I will not argue that we should not teach Shakespeare; however, the skills and purpose behind one text could also be applied to another text. What we deem as model texts should be challenged if we do not include a diverse range of texts that accomplish similar purposes, especially if they do not represent all voices within a school

community. Therefore, the argument or reasoning used for Shakespeare in the Minnesota State Standards could be applied to Anzaldúa's text *Borderlands*.

Along with valuing Anzaldúa's purpose, it is also important to consider the attitudes of other Chicana/o authors. Ana Castillo argues:

U.S. Chicana/o and Latina/o authors walk the fine line between making a caricature of a local language and community and providing trenchant and complicated portrait of a marginalized group of people...she resents the way in which aspects of Chicana/o and Latina/o culture decorate an otherwise monolingual text; she insinuates that such a practice can encourage the trivialization not the subordination of these cultures. (Esplin 183)

Monolingual readers should consider this argument when teaching these texts even if it is an overwhelming and challenging task to tackle. However, it is important to be vulnerable as an educator and acknowledge one's lack of understanding about a particular topic. Yes, not knowing an entire language that is embedded in a text is a momentous admission, but the solution lies in the students. Giving up power as the sage on the stage can help one gain trust within the classroom space and empower others, which is the ultimate goal.

In order to avoid the narrow, stereotypical view of Latin American identities that Castillo references, multilingual texts should be considered through the "influence of social, cultural, historical, and economic contexts, discourses, and identities in the process of making meaning" (Miller qtd. in Rojas 275). Therefore, multilingual narratives should be used to provide a context for the diverse languages and identities within the Latin American culture. These identities are multifaceted and encompass many different countries, cultures, dialects, and languages, which students need to better understand in order to become more knowledgeable about the populations

in their schools and communities. Incorporating these texts with this diverse perspective demonstrates that they are not being used to meet a diversity requirement or standard, but rather they are being used with the intent to teach acceptance and excitement about Latin American culture. Gloria Anzaldúa's "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" can help situate Sandra Cisneros's *Caramelo*. Students need to first discuss and understand code-switching and language negotiation in order to better understand and compare Cisneros's choices in *Caramelo*.

Sandra Cisneros's novel *Caramelo* explores the relationships among the Reyes family both in Mexico and the United States. Serving both as a historical novel and "homage to [her] father," Cisneros calls attention to the "anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States, especially after September 11th" (Benjumea 255). Cisneros wrote the novel "with *mas ganas* to make a statement about the immigrant experience and his contribution to America" (Benjumea 255). Therefore, this novel serves both a historical and linguistic purpose for readers as the protagonist Celaya (Lala) Reyes travels from Chicago to Mexico City. It is through these visits that Lala is able to form an "understanding of her cultural and familial identity" which is "motivated by a desire for ethnic reunion and belonging" (King qtd. in Szeghi 167). These visits allow Lala to continue her connection and relationship to Mexico. However, as Bill Johnson González argues, Lala struggles with "the traditional norms of Mexican culture" and the novel "seeks to interrogate, rather than preserve" these norms (209). Cisneros uses Spanish, English, and translation in order to demonstrate Lala's identity formation. Lala is bilingual, but "once she is in Mexico, she often finds herself overwhelmed by difference, perceiving things around her through the refractions of a second language and culture" (Johnson González 209). As Lala interacts with her family members and situates herself as both American and Mexican, she begins to see the complexities of language and realize she is not always able to express herself in either language:

“I don’t have the words for what I want to say. Not in English. Not in Spanish” (Cisneros 60). As Mexican American students encounter this text, they will begin to see the relationship between identity and language and perhaps relate to Lala’s experience. All students will benefit from the intersection of English and Spanish and the various forms of translation in *Caramelo*, which challenge notions of correctness or standard language practices. Therefore, students will begin to deconstruct monolinguisitic values and see the benefits of bilingualism or multilingualism.

V. Teaching Gloria Anzaldúa and Sandra Cisneros in the Secondary Classroom

In order to bring language, bilingualism, and multilingualism into the forefront of lessons and discussion in the secondary classroom, Gloria Anzaldúa’s “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” and Sandra Cisneros’s *Caramelo* should be taught together. Therefore, students should begin by listening to a series of recordings in English, Spanish, and Spanglish and write about their views of the speaker. Jennifer Carolina Gómez Menjívar suggests using a survey to assess students’ “perception of the speaker's origin, educational attainment, and professional profile...because, invariably, the ‘speaker’ who uses the standardized language receives a better evaluation than the ‘speaker’ who uses Spanglish”; however, students are “genuinely surprised to find that they have evaluated the same person differently according to the language they hear” (Aldama 1437).

Students need to first recognize that they have a bias toward language before they can approach Anzaldúa's and Cisneros's texts. Additionally, if they can learn to pinpoint the origin of their bias, this may help them be more accepting towards other languages and cultures.

After students discuss and evaluate their bias toward language, they should view Frida Kahlo’s painting *Self-Portrait on the Borderline Between Mexico and the United States*. This painting provides a visual representation of the borders that Anzaldúa describes in her text. Even though this painting was completed in 1932 and represents a traditional Mexico and a heavily

industrialized United States, students can draw contemporary comparisons to the work. Students should write about what the work may represent and how Frida Kahlo situates herself in the middle of the painting. Students should return to this painting after reading “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” and *Caramelo* in order to see new connections they may bring to the piece.

In addition to the physical border represented in *Self-Portrait on the Borderline Between Mexico and the United States*, Gloria Anzaldúa’s “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” describes the borders of language and identity. Students should begin by responding to the following quote from *Borderlands*:

So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself. Until I can accept as legitimate Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex and all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself. Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate. (Anzaldúa 81)

Students should discuss the different languages or codes they speak in order to recognize how audience influences language choices. According to the Minnesota State Standards, students must "apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning" (75). Therefore, the writing and discussion that results from this prompt provide students with a relevant connection to language in their own context. If students are not familiar with code-switching, they should also be introduced to this concept. According to Sociolinguistics, code-switching refers to “bilingual speakers shifting from one

language to another [or] monolingual speakers switching between discourse types” (Chandler and Munday). Authors or characters code-switch depending on a particular context. Students should recognize that they may switch codes depending on the time, purpose, or audience of their intended message. Furthermore, this allows students to consider their language ideologies which are “ingrained, unquestioned beliefs about the way the world is, the way it should be, and the way it has to be with respect to language” (Rickford and Wolfram qtd. in Deveraux and Wheeler 97). Additionally, these perspectives can be connected to the first lesson on bias and language. Once they have discussed the excerpt and code-switching, students should read “How to Tame a Wild Tongue.” Students should trace Anzaldúa's language varieties and draw a conclusion about her experiences and identity. Along with Anzaldúa's attitudes toward language, students should reflect on their own attitudes toward language and how they are perceived by society.

After completing these introductory activities, students are ready to begin *Caramelo*. This text can be read in its entirety or it can be read through excerpts or passages. It is vital that this novel is situated within an American literature curriculum as “an opportunity to transform the encounter with difference into a new understanding of what reading (American) literature means” (Johnson González 212). Therefore, students should be challenged to “transform the act of reading into an ethical search for the surprise of an otherness that enables us continually to rearticulate a new and expanded understanding of ‘ourselves’” (Johnson González 213). Cisneros directly translates common Mexican expressions into English in order to demonstrate that language has a specific artistry and purpose. She does not signal readers that these translations have occurred, which empowers bilingual readers who may be familiar with these expressions. Furthermore, students should be encouraged to see that “Cisneros employs, among other formal

strategies, crisscrossed languages to craft the novel's migratory and communal voice and to engage readers with different language competencies" (Alumbaugh qtd. in Aldama 1900). Students will engage with Lala and her family as they navigate linguistic norms and boundaries throughout their visit. When Lala and her siblings arrive in Mexico City each year they "initially speak only to each other and only in English, due to shyness, although they are cognizant of their perceived rudeness" (Szeghi 166). Lala and her siblings know Spanish, but they fall into a language of familiarity and community. However, this results in their grandmother's dismay who is frustrated that her "daughters-in-law have given birth to a generation of monkeys" (Cisneros 28). Language can be divisive in the Reyes family, but it can also serve to demonstrate the experiences "of those living within and between Mexico and the US" (Szeghi 166). Therefore, the narrative allows students to explore how language is used to form generational attitudes and identities.

In addition to the familial interactions, students can explore the tone of Cisneros's narration as it relates to memory. Lala describes the family visit to Acapulco where she "was off to the side making sand castles, and nobody bothered to call [her] when the photographer came by" (Cisneros 4). Lala feels forgotten by her family and states, "It's as if I didn't exist. It's as if I'm the photographer walking along the beach with the tripod camera on my shoulder asking, *-¿Un recuerdo? A souvenir? A memory?*" (Cisneros 4). Alumbaugh argues that this scene demonstrates that Lala is searching for her identity; however, I would agree with Johnson González's argument that this seems to demonstrate the incomplete nature of memory. Lala believes she is forgotten and her older brother Rafa believes she was mad and refused to be part of the photograph. Cisneros seems to include this scene in order to establish Lala as the observer in her family who writes and narrates their story, which may be remembered differently than

other members of the family. It is a short passage, but establishes the various viewpoints of culture, language, generations, and identity within the Reyes family. Students can use Lala's narration to create their own personal narratives of their own family history. Since Cisneros uses different genres, students should also be encouraged to use historical facts along with their personal details. As students write their stories alongside reading *Caramelo*, they will have the opportunity to explore their own identities along with the characters they encounter.

VI. Conclusion

Due to the history of immigration law, education policies, and contemporary anti-immigrant rhetoric, it is vital that educators use multilingual texts by Latin American authors in the American literature classroom. As the population of English Language Learners continues to increase in our country, students' home language needs to be valued. Standards and assessments do not represent an entire student, so curriculums need to support both the emotional and academic development of a student. According to the Minnesota Department of Education in an April 2019 press release, graduation rates have increased for all racial/ethnic student groups in 2018; however, there is still over a twenty percent achievement gap between Hispanic and white student populations. Educators continue to face the challenge of negative representations of Latin American populations in the media and must work to change these attitudes. Gloria Anzaldúa's "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" and Sandra Cisneros's *Caramelo* provide opportunities for students to examine language and its influence within social and government institutions like school. Students should be taught to challenge negative rhetoric and achievement gaps within their own institutions. As educators, it is important to reflect and practice critical pedagogy in one's classroom. Therefore, it requires students and educators to assert power in the classroom as equals and "perceiving the significance of that relationship is indispensable for those learning to

read and write if we are really committed to liberation...[and students] will ultimately recognize that...they have the right to have a voice" (Freire 213). Students have the right to use their home language in the classroom and should see its value in their education and their future.

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