

# Identity Around Multilingualism: Characterization of Yolanda in *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*

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## Abstract

As no country houses people speaking solely one language in the present world, various studies regarding the use of multilingualism were done over the years not only in the field of empirical research but also in literary contexts. Code-switching has been the most researched phenomenon in literary language from a multilingual perspective. The debate between considering literary characters as real-life human beings or merely textual constructs has intensified over the years. Subsequently, a middle ground combining both humanizing and non-humanizing aspects of literary characters emerged. In this study, I analyze the use of multilingualism in a literary character's portrayal by examining her linguistic identity through her behaviors involving language use and comprehension. Yolanda, the second daughter of the De La Torre family depicted in the novel, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, written by Julia Alvarez in 1991, is the target character for this study. Using a qualitative research approach, Yolanda's character is analyzed by using the characterization model developed by Culpeper in 2001. Three textual cues, namely explicit, implicit, and authorial, are examined in the descriptions and language uses of Yolanda's character. The outcomes of the study not only portray Julia Alvarez's philosophy and attitude regarding multilingualism, but also show Yolanda's unique traits, struggles, confusion, liminality, and linguistic position in the world of the novel.

**Keywords:** Multilingualism, linguistic identity, characterization, literary linguistics, textual cues

## Introduction

Multilingualism refers to the phenomenon whereby a speaker can have more than one language in her linguistic repertoire (Wei, 2008). Sometimes the notion of a geographical area housing speakers from different languages can also be referred to as multilingualism (European Commission, 2005). Multilingualism has long been studied by researchers from multifarious fields but most studies on this phenomenon have extensively considered real-life humans such as in school contexts, family language policy, workplace situations, etc. (Cenoz, 2013). Hence, very few studies considered literary characters as multilingual agents through researching their linguistic behaviors and expressions (Srieh, 2021). In studying literary characters, the code-switching aspect has gained considerable attention over the years (Albakry and Hancock, 2008). However, most characters are studied from the point of view of literary criticism which does not consider linguistic expressions much (Srieh, 2021). Due to the debate regarding literary characters as real-life human beings



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or merely textual constructs, humanizing and de-humanizing aspects of looking at the literary characters have emerged over the years (Srieh, 2021). Still, the characters' linguistic utterances, emotional turmoil, confusing states of identity because of their multilingual or multicultural backgrounds, etc. have not been emphasized much in studies (Cenoz, 2013).

When it comes to literary pieces, the characters are the constructs of the authors or playwrights (McIntyre, 2014). The way language is used by characters in writing is not innate but rather controlled by the writers. Analyzing the intricate linguistic identities, expressions, and decisions of characters can shed light on authors' perspectives and encounters with language (Rees, 2020). Despite being associated with empirical research, a linguistic analysis can also look at literary languages which are sometimes representations of the author's personal experiences. In the target novel, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, the condition of Spanish-speaking Dominican people is portrayed from the period of Rafael Trujillo's reign which lasted from the 1930s to the mid-1960s. The attitude or tension around Spanish and Dominican identity was different from that of today. Therefore, the sociolinguistic situation of a literary text is important in analyzing its characters' linguistic behavior like analyzing real-life people's language use (Litvin, 2020).

### **Background and Rationale of the Data**

The novel *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* was written by Julia Alvarez in 1991. The writing style of this novel is unique as the storyline is unraveled in a backward fashion toward the final five years of Rafael Trujillo's reign, unlike the traditional, chronological order of a novel (Llorente, 2001). Rees (2020) stated that,

Written in English, but with the occasional sprinkling of Spanish, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* conforms to what Brian Lennon denominates as a “weak” form of multilingual literature. Nevertheless, while lacking this aesthetically multilingual element, an ontological form of multilingualism permeates Alvarez's novel as she delves into the identitarian complexities which arise from speaking two languages and belonging to two cultures. (p. 201)

Here, the debate between bilingualism and multilingualism might arise but I chose to use the term “multilingualism” for this study as it is widely accepted now that the phenomenon involving more than one language is known as multilingualism whereas bilingualism and trilingualism are parts of the umbrella term (Aronin and Singleton, 2008). In the Garcia de la Torre family, there are four girls along with their parents who migrate to the USA during Trujillo's rule as, in the Dominican Republic, the father, Carlos, was under the threat of Trujillo's government for his opposing stand against them. Therefore, the migration here does not happen spontaneously or with a happy connotation. Instead, the incident resembles the uprooting of a tree for the four girls on different levels (Rees, 2020). Bilingualism can be included in multilingualism as a part of the whole spectrum (Aronin and Singleton, 2008). However, unlike trilingual, a bilingual situation may imply a binary condition which, from a postcolonial perspective, may maintain and retain the linguistic power asymmetry between the Centre and Periphery (Phillipson, 1992). Through globalization and transnationalism, English, as the colonial language has reached

a new level of omnipresent authority in postcolonial countries. The concepts, methods, and treatment of English in education are just a few examples of how this predominance of English is maintained in these nations (Al Mahmud, 2020). In the Garcia girls' lives, English language played the similar role even when they go back to the Dominican Republic as adults.

The backward narration of the novel is structured into three parts each consisting of five vignettes. Among the four girls: Carla, Yolanda, Sandi, and Sofia, Yolanda narrates most parts of the novel and besides, only she gets to narrate from the first-person point of view in two of the vignettes. Besides, Yolanda's conflicted liminality is more evident than her sisters'. She finds herself stuck between two languages. This, in exchange, makes her stuck between two cultures (Llorente, 2001). This confusing state of being is defined by Cuban sociologist Rúbén G. Rumbaut as belonging to a 1.5 generation where the immigrant children belong to an intermediate group between the first and second generations (Rees, 2020).

Although all four of them potentially belong to this group, Yolanda demonstrates more relevance to the liminal and uncertain state. Hence, I chose to analyze Yolanda's character from the perspective of multilingualism.

### **Aims of the Study**

A multilingual person or character can be analyzed through two different approaches, namely the holistic and atomistic views on multilingualism (Wei, 2011). The atomistic view looks at one or two linguistic aspects at a time when a multilingual individual is regarded as having separate monolingual competencies in separate languages (Cook and Bassetti, 2011). This is not practical as a multilingual person can be involved in multifarious situations with different interlocutors, and she might draw linguistic resources from her multilingual repertoire (the system that stores the languages inside speakers' brains) depending on the situation (Canagarajah, 2007). Hence, considering a person, along with her linguistic behaviors and identity, would provide a researcher with broader perspectives (Kramsch, 2010). Therefore, the character of Yolanda is analyzed in this paper from a holistic view of multilingualism. As a literary character instead of a person from the real world, Yolanda's character needs to be studied using the characterization model from Stylistics. According to Nørgaard, Busse & Montoro (2010),

Stylistics is the study of the ways in which meaning is created through language in literature as well as in other types of text. To this end, stylisticians use linguistic models, theories, and frameworks as their analytical tools to describe and explain how and why a text works as it does, and how we come from the words on the page to its meaning (p. 1).

To analyze the unique features of characters, many models including humanizing and de-humanizing approaches have been proposed by many scholars (Eder, Jannidis, & Schneider, 2010; Bradley, 1965; Propp, 1968). For this study, Culpeper's (2001) model following mixed approaches is selected as it not only involves both approaches: humanizing

and de-humanizing, but also looks at the linguistic prompts of literary texts in a more coherent fashion through different textual cues (Cenoz, 2013). As the linguistic behaviors, expressions, and language use of Yolanda are analyzed, this model seems the most suitable for this study.

Based on the aims of the research, this study addresses the following question:

- How does Julia Alvarez use multilingualism to construct the character of Yolanda from *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*?

### **Multilingualism and Multilingual Identity**

In this study, I choose to look at how the character Yolanda, from the novel *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent*, is portrayed through the holistic view of multilingualism. I decided to apply Culpeper's model of characterization in analyzing the linguistic data from the novel. Therefore, here I review the relevant literature on multilingualism, multilingual identity, and characterization in Stylistics.

Multilingualism is a complex notion that has been studied in different fields such as linguistics, sociology, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, etc. (Cenoz, 2013). However, the definitions of the term multilingualism and people who are multilingual have been provided by many scholars including Li Wei (2008), according to whom,

A multilingual individual is anyone who can communicate in more than one language, be it active, through speaking and writing or passive, through listening and reading. (p. 4)

Moreover, the European Commission (2005) has given a more well-known definition of multilingualism: "The ability of societies, institutions, groups, and individuals to engage, on a regular basis, with more than one language in their day-to-day lives" (p. 6).

The term multilingualism generally refers to both multilingualism and bilingualism according to the present-day mainstream position although, previously, many debates were raised about the difference between these two terms (Cenoz, 2013).

Multilingualism can be related to both individual and social levels. The ability to speak more than one language of an individual or the use of different languages spoken in society can both be considered as multilingualism. These two levels are interconnected as for the presence of multilingual people, a society can be known as multilingual. However, individual multilingualism can be termed plurilingualism to eliminate any confusion. The definition of plurilingualism given by the Council of Europe (n.d.) states that individuals having linguistic repertoires consisting of various languages are known as plurilingual. On the other hand, the geographical area that possesses various languages spoken by the people that live there is multilingual (Council of Europe, n.d.). In this case, not everyone must be plurilingual; many speakers can also be monolingual.

In terms of how individuals conceptualize the languages in their linguistic repertoire, multilingualism can have two views: holistic and atomistic (Wei, 2011). Cenoz (2013) stated that,

Holistic view is based on the belief that the parts of something are intimately interconnected and explicable only by reference to the whole and can be opposed to atomistic, which regards something as interpretable through analysis into distinct, separable, and independent elementary components. (p. 10)

Hence, the holistic view looks at a multilingual person as a whole and considers her multilingual competence, whole linguistic repertoire, and language use in a social context which leads to multilingual identity formation (Kramersch, 2010). To analyze everyday linguistic behaviors and the identities associated with language use, one or two linguistic aspects would not be practical to look at (Canagarajah, 2007). Therefore, I chose to analyze the target character based on the holistic view of multilingualism for this study.

Multilingual speakers are highlighted as different from monolingual speakers by the holistic view. According to this approach, multilingual speakers store their languages as resources at their disposal which is known as their multilingual repertoire (Block, 2008). This tends to have more linguistic resources than that of monolinguals (Block, 2008). Research shows that all the linguistic resources in the repertoire help in third or fourth language acquisition (Cenoz, 2009). The use of different languages is different for multilingual speakers based on the situations or contexts they are in. This notion also differs from monolinguals as they use one language in all situations whereas multilingual speakers navigate among their languages, being dictated by various purposes, communicative situations, domains, and interlocutors (Moore and Gajo, 2009).

In connection with the holistic view, the development of linguistic identity in multilingual individuals is another key topic for this research. Identity formation is a continuous process in human life. What people conceive themselves to be and their position in relation to the interactions and roles they play in society contribute to their sense of identity through different contextual, interactional, and psychological factors (Harklau, 2007). In the identity-developing process, language plays a key role in representing the world through a unique set of lenses to the people. Linguistic identity is a complex notion as it affects the ways in which a person chooses to look at the world, feel, think, and sometimes, infer the meaning of what other people are saying (Norton, 1997). It becomes even more complicated in the case of some multilingual speakers whose mother tongue is different from the language they are supposed to use after growing up (Henry, 2017). In their linguistic repertoire, all the languages acquired in childhood or learned in adulthood coexist with one another. As a result, they find themselves in a liminal position while comprehending the meanings of the utterances of their monolingual or other multilingual friends and family (Llorente, 2001).

### **Characterization**

According to Culpeper & Quintanilla (2017),

The topic of characterization has long been studied in literary studies and especially literary criticism. Nevertheless, the topic of character creation and interpretation in fiction attracts the attention of various disciplines and seems to be approachable from a multitude of perspectives. (p. 93)

Thus, language is regarded as the central feature of characters in analyzing them and the impressions created by languages are significant in forming any character (Culpeper, 2001).

In connection with this notion, Bousfield (2014) argues that,

The style (or way) in which characters are described, and, indeed, the style (or way) by which characters themselves interact all reveal how we, within the cultural context in which we receive the information, are being invited to see, to understand, to appreciate, empathize, sympathize or antipathize with those characters, and what they literally, metaphorically or metonymically represent ... Therefore, a stylistic approach to understanding characters should – indeed, must – explore the language that those characters themselves are presented as using. (p. 118)

Like Bousfield, many scholars agree with the significance of languages in studying literary or fictional characters. Among them, Culpeper's contribution is foremost and extensive through his substantial studies in this area (McIntyre, 2014). According to him, three issues are pivotal in determining any character including readers' prior knowledge, readers' way of inferring the characters, and the textual cues that demonstrate the characterization (Culpeper, 2001).

From the ontological perspective of characters, two extreme approaches are found, namely humanizing and de-humanizing approaches (Eder, Jannidis & Schneider, 2010). The humanizing approach refers to the characters of any literary text as real-life people whom readers can treat like the people they know in their lives (Bradley, 1960; Harvey, 1965). This extreme is contradicted by the de-humanizing approach which presents the complete opposite argument by stating that characters of literary texts are merely textual constructs and cannot be regarded as real human beings (Knights, 1963; Weinsheimer, 1979; Greimas, 1966; Propp, 1968). Peer (1989) narrated that,

Both in narrative and dramatic genres (to a much lesser extent in poetry) the issue of character is an important one. ... More important still is that the category of character is, for its very formation, dependent on linguistic forms. Character, it can hardly be denied, is what readers infer from words, sentences, paragraphs, and textual composition depicting, describing, or suggesting actions, thoughts, utterances, or feelings of a protagonist. Thus, the linguistic organization of a text will predetermine to a certain degree the kind of "picture" one may compose of a protagonist. Therefore, the forms by which this is achieved need to be studied in detail. It appears that at this moment there is hardly a theoretical framework providing for this necessity. (p. 9)

Culpeper (2001) decided to propose an approach that is in between the two extremes.

For this research, Culpeper's model is used which is explained in the theoretical framework. Here, I reviewed the studies and literature related to real-life people as well as textual characters. Thus, this study will connect the notion of literary character as an author's construct with more humanistic features in terms of the character's linguistic choices and expressions.

### Approaching the text

A qualitative approach was selected for this research as the aims of the study are related to the interpretation of the subjective meaning and the description of the textual context within which the target character resides (Fossey et al. 2002). Although this research is not directly concerned with real-life human experiences, the humanizing aspect of the fictional character is important to consider here. Many arguments about the humanizing and de-humanizing aspects of fictional characters have been presented by many scholars where some of them attributed characters to real-life human existence and others stated that characters are only the constructs of the texts (Bradley, 1960; Knight, 1963; Harvey, 1965; Weinsheimer, 1979; Greimas, 1966; Propp, 1968). However, Emmott (1997) argues that,

In reading narrative texts, we imagine worlds inhabited by individuals who can be assumed to behave, physically and psychologically, in ways which reflect our real-life experiences of being situated in the real world. (p. 58)

Many scholars like Styan (1969), advocating the de-humanizing approach, could not wholly refute the aspect by agreeing that

But in some sense, we must feel Lear, Macbeth, Hamlet are humans. We pity or admire because we are throughout the performance in contact with humanity in human situations: the figures in the pattern are, after all, human figures in a human pattern. (p. 164)

Furthermore, among the holistic and atomistic views explained earlier, for this study, I chose the holistic view which will help to combine the humanizing aspect of the character with the dehumanizing aspect of a whole person (Canagarajah, 2007). Consequently, the most suitable approach for this study is the qualitative one.

### Theoretical Framework: Culpeper's Model

The meaning representation level in this model is provided by the Textbase part. Here, what the characters say and what is said about the characters are crucial to acknowledge the linguistic impressions created through those characters (Culpeper, 2001). The Surface structure deals with the linguistic choices ascribed to the characters such as their lexical, syntactic, and semantic use of the linguistic expressions that they employ (Culpeper, 2000). Hence, these two issues are looked at for the present study based on Yolanda from the target novel. To apply these two issues of Culpeper's model in analyzing Yolanda's multilingual identity, linguistic repertoire, and attitude toward languages, three textual cues within the Surface structure and Textbase are chosen to look at. These cues are known as explicit cues, implicit cues, and authorial cues (Culpeper, 2001).

### Explicit cues

These types of cues are found in how characters use explicit linguistic expressions to refer to themselves and other characters. The explicit cues, thus, depict the impressions a character provides to the reader to judge and analyze what type of traits she has in the world of the text. This cue is categorized into two subtypes namely *self-presentation* and *other presentation*.

*Self-presentation* refers to the explicit linguistic expressions a character uses to describe herself or give any information about herself in the presence or absence of other characters within the world of the target text. For example, in the regressive plot of the novel, after Yolanda's parents decide to stay in the USA rather than return to the Dominican Republic, they start to look at things more seriously regarding the US. Although both parents always wanted their daughters including Yolanda to speak English like native speakers, they did not want to lose touch with their roots. The extract below shows the dilemma of being too immersed in the US culture and losing contact with the homeland at the same time. This explicit cue also underlines the multilingual as well as multicultural identities of Yolanda and her sisters.

The next decision was obvious: we four girls would be sent summers to the Island so we wouldn't lose touch with la familia. The hidden agenda was marriage to homeland boys since everyone knew that once a girl married an American, those grandbabies came out jabbering in English and thinking of the Island as a place to go get a suntan. (Alvarez, 1991, p. 109)

*Other-presentation* deals with the explicit linguistic expressions characters use to depict or provide information about other characters. This study does not look at this subtype because of the word limit and scope. However, an excerpt is given here from the point of view of Yolanda's sister, Carla, as an example:

Sandi touches her hand. She looks at her other sisters. Clive, they all know, has gone back to his wife again. "He's such a turd. How many times has he done this now, Yo?" "Yolanda," Carla corrects her. "She wants to be called Yolanda now." "What do you mean, wants to be called Yolanda now? That's my name, you know?" (Alvarez, 1991, p. 61)

Here, if I were to analyze Carla's character instead of Yolanda, I would look at how she describes Yolanda's preference to be called by her original name as an other-presentation by Carla's character.

### **Implicit cues**

Unlike explicit cues, implicit cues look at the underlying prompt of language use in a literary text. In other words, the indirect implications of the characters' linguistic behaviors are analyzed in this type of cue. These cues can surface in different forms in the text such as conversational structure, conversational implicature, lexical items (word choice, phrases, expressions, etc.), syntactic features, accent, dialect, verse and prose, paralinguistic features (movies or drama), visual features, context, etc. (Culpeper, 2000). An example of the implicit cue (based on lexical items) is given below.

In the initial days in the US, Yolanda took shelter in the language to express her creativity. As a poet from her childhood, writing poetry was a way to express herself and relate to the new language. Her enthusiasm for language and linguistic expression led her to embrace this new language more easily than her sisters. In the following excerpt, the lexical cues imply the emergence of her multilingualism as well as her personal attempt to develop a



new linguistic identity to belong with the new linguistic group. The lexical items here are underlined.

This (at night) was Yoyo's time to herself, after she finished her homework, while her sisters were still downstairs watching TV in the basement. Hunched over her small desk, the overhead light turned off, her desk lamp poignantly lighting only her paper, the rest of the room in warm, soft, uncreated darkness, she wrote her secret poems in her new language. (Alvarez, 1991, p. 136)

### **Authorial cues**

These cues include the language used by the authors to give information about the character either in the form of a narration or through the names they attribute to the characters (Culpeper, 2001). In the novel, Yolanda's name, and some incidents regarding her nicknames, are considered under authorial cues. For example, the name Yolanda has Greek and Spanish origins. The name means violet flower with which the author connected the incident of John's nicknaming her "Violet" (Alvarez, 1991, p. 4). Yolanda's ex-husband John used to call her "violet" after the shrinking violet metaphor as he believed Yolanda's mental state was unstable and she was unnecessarily obsessed with her multilingual self-expressions.

Therefore, in Culpeper's model of characterization, language plays a pivotal role to depict a character's existence as well as the traits that she possesses in the realm of the target literary text. Hence, two of the issues in the form of three different textual cues from this model were chosen for this study.

### **Analyzing the Text**

The selected extracts demonstrating explicit cues are arranged by starting from Yolanda's young age to gradually moving toward her adulthood. Julia Alvarez used three types of narrative voices in this novel: first-person, third person, and first-person plural. The cues are found in all the three types of voices. The extracts containing the cues are chosen from the important stages of Yolanda's life.

1. This excerpt shows Yolanda's initial days in the US. She talks about how her teacher used to make her feel at ease and at home in the foreign country:

Our first year in New York we rented a small apartment with a Catholic school nearby, by the Sisters of Charity, ... I liked them a lot, especially my grandmotherly fourth-grade teacher, Sister Zoe. I had a lovely name, she said, and she had me teach the whole class how to pronounce it. Yo-lan-da. As the only immigrant in my class, I was put in a special seat in the first row by the window, apart from the other children so that Sister Zoe could tutor me without disturbing them. (Alvarez, 1991, p. 166)

2. The following section depicts Yolanda's high-school days where she tried to fit in with her peers. She expresses her lack of English vocabulary in this cue:

Back in those days, I had what one teacher called "a vivacious personality." I had to

look up the word in the dictionary and was relieved to find out it didn't mean I had problems. English was then still a party favour for me – crack open the dictionary, find out if I'd just been insulted, praised, admonished, criticized. (p. 87)

3. The next extract shows Yolanda's first day of college where she met a boy named Rudy Brodermann Elmenhurst. In this cue, she talks about her alienating state from the American society through her then linguistic expressions:

This guy with a name like a title leaned over and asked if I could lend him a piece of paper and a pen ... I tore some pages out of my notebook, then rummaged in my pocketbook for another pen. I looked up with a sorry-eyed expression. "I don't have an extra pen," I whispered, complete sentences for whispers, that's what tells you I was still a greenhorn in this culture. (p. 90)

4. The extract below shows the end of Yolanda's relationship with Rudy when she met his parents, and, in this cue, she states how Rudy's parents complimented her "accentless" English:

Rudy did not come calling the next day. I bumped into him as he was leaving with his parents and I was exiting my dorm to take the taxi to the bus to my parents' in New York ... His parents did most of the chatting, talking too slowly to me as if I wouldn't understand native speakers; they complimented me on my "accentless" English and observed that my parents must be so proud of me. (p. 100)

5. Yolanda and her husband, John, used to have countless disagreements and arguments in their life together. Here, Yolanda talks about the emotional as well as linguistic detachment she felt with John after such an argument. This cue is presented through a third person narrative voice:

He came home with a bouquet of flowers that she knew he had paid too much for ... But as he handed them to her, she could not make out his words. They were clean, bright sounds, but they meant nothing to her. "What are you trying to say?" she kept asking. He spoke kindly, but in a language she had never heard before. She spoke precisely as if she were talking to a foreigner or a willful child. "John, can you understand me?" He pointed to his ears and nodded. Volume wasn't the problem. He could hear her. "Babble babble." His lips were in slow motion on each syllable. He is saying I love you, she thought! "Babble," she mimicked him. "Babble babble babble babble." Maybe that meant, still love you too, in whatever tongue he was speaking. (p. 77)

6. In the last paragraph of the novel, Yolanda recounts the incident about a kitten which she displaced from its mother when she was a child. She expresses her guilt over the act and the connection she felt with the kitten in terms of liminality in this cue:

Then we moved to the United States. The cat disappeared altogether. I saw snow ... I read books ... I grew up, a curious woman, a woman of story ghosts and story devils, a woman prone to bad dreams and bad insomnia. There are still times I

wake up at three o'clock in the morning and peer into the darkness. At that hour and in that loneliness, I hear her, a black-furred thing lurking in the corners of my life, her magenta mouth opening, wailing over some violation that lies at the center of my art. (p. 290)

To analyze the implicit cues in the selected extracts, I looked at two main recurring lexical items (according to the research question) or keywords: languages and liminality and the related words and phrases with each of them. The keywords and key phrases are illustrated below in Figures 1 and 2.

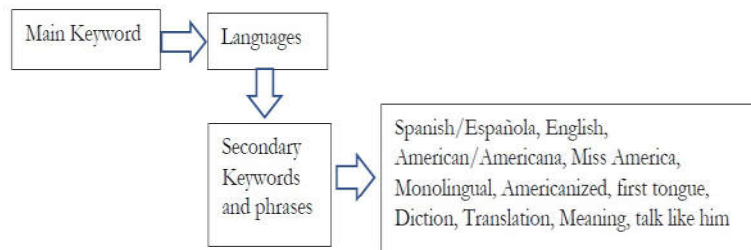


Figure 1: Keywords and phrases related to Language

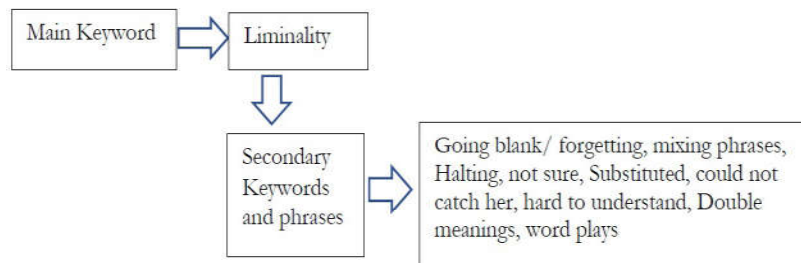


Figure 2: Keywords and phrases related to Liminality

1. The following extract represents Yolanda’s earlier days in the US when she was having difficulty in agreeing to deliver the speech at her school assembly. The key-phrases here are forgetting, Spanish, hard to understand, and diction:

Several times that weekend around the supper table, he recited his own high school valedictorian speech ... Laura sat across the table, the only one who seemed to be listening to him. Yoyo and her sisters were forgetting a lot of their Spanish, and their father’s formal, florid diction was hard to understand. (Alvarez, 1991, p. 142)

2. During her stay in the Dominican Republic, Yolanda had difficulty communicating with her aunts in her mother tongue which was disapproved by them. This cue is depicted in the following extract through the key-phrases: halting Spanish, Español, going blank, and mixing phrases:

In halting Spanish, Yolanda reports on her sisters. When she reverts to English, she

is scolded, “En Espanol.” The more she practices, the sooner she’ll be back into her native tongue, the aunts insist. Yes, and when she returns to the States, she’ll find herself suddenly going blank over some word in English or, like her mother, mixing up some common phrase. (Alvarez, 1991, p. 7)

3. In the ensuing passage, Yolanda’s confusion in understanding two Dominican men who wanted to help her is demonstrated. The key-phrases indicating the cue are Americana, no comprende (does not understand), and not sure:

“Can we help you?” the shorter man repeats. The handsome one smiles knowingly ... “Americana,” he says to the darker man, pointing to the car. “No comprende.” The darker man narrows his eyes and studies Yolanda a moment, “iAmericana?” he asks her, as if not quite sure what to make of her. (Alvarez, 1991, p. 20)

No authorial cue was considered for analysis due to the scope and word limit of the study.

### Results and Discussion

Yolanda faces a constant sense of liminality regarding her linguistic identity and sense of belonging (Luis, 2000). Because of her multilingualism, she sometimes cannot understand the plain English expressions of monolingual speakers. Although she wants to belong to the US society, the English language, and culture, she still feels grateful when someone shows respect to her multilingual state and she feels insulted when the opposite happens. The unbalanced nature of her multilingualism is, hence, another important aspect of her character (Block, 2008).

In the first explicit cue, Yolanda praises a native English-speaking teacher who values her multilingual identity and foreign name instead of excluding her from her peers. Yolanda receives extra attention from the teacher so that she can teach her English vocabulary and pronunciation without disturbing the class. This incident makes Yolanda grateful to be acknowledged as a multilingual individual.

In the second explicit cue, Yolanda is explaining her linguistic situation in high school. Whatever new words and expressions she used to hear, she needed to look for the meaning in the dictionary. She says, English was still a “party favour” for her which shows the intermingling of two languages: Spanish and English in her repertoire but she was still not “fully competent” in the latter. This also shows a somewhat imbalanced multilingualism in Yolanda’s character.

Yolanda describes her first college day in the third explicit cue. She recalls the time when a classmate asked for a pencil, and she whispered that she did not have one. This indicates that “native” speakers generally whisper sentences in fragments, not a complete sentence unlike her. Yolanda believes this tiny distinction shows her “greenhorn” status in American society. Due to her multilingualism, she struggles to fully belong to her new linguistic and cultural identity (Barak, 1998).

In the fourth explicit cue, Yolanda meets Rudy’s parents for the first time. When they hear her speaking with “accentless” English, they praise her, saying that Yolanda’s parents would

be very proud of her. This demonstrates how other people living in the US society view multilingual people and their accents. Besides, they speak to Yolanda slowly so that she can understand them which seems patronizing to her.

Yolanda and John had several fights, as shown in the fifth explicit cue. In this excerpt, John gives Yolanda an expensive bouquet of flowers as a peace offering after an argument. His apology words are incomprehensible to her. She tries to understand but only hears “babble babble.” She calls John a “wilful child” for not communicating clearly. This displays the language difference between monolingual John and multilingual Yolanda. This incident exaggerates verbal misunderstanding, but it highlights their continual linguistic and emotional incomprehension during their marriage.

In the last explicit cue discussed in this research, Yolanda recounts an incident from her childhood where she displaced a kitten from its mother as she wanted to keep the kitten. Although she let the kitten go after a few moments, the wailing of the mother cat haunted her for a long time. Even after migrating to the US, she can still hear the cat crying with a deep sense of grief. This event does not only depict the kitten’s displacement and its mother’s wailing but also underlines Yolanda’s displacement from the Dominican Republic when she was also a little child. She tries to cope with the linguistic and cultural change by fitting in with her American peers but deep down, she still feels the pang of liminality, being stuck between two languages and two cultures (Llorente, 2001).

In the first implicit cue, Yolanda is asked to give a speech in the school assembly. However, she is hesitant to take on the role as everything around her is still new and she feels too anxious to take any risk. Her father, Carlos, tries to convince her by saying how prestigious this role would be for her. In this regard, he recites his own valedictorian speech in Spanish during dinner time. However, Yolanda and her sisters do not understand the formal dictions in Spanish as they had already begun to forget a lot of their vocabulary in that language. Back in 1991, Spanish was not as prestigious or popular as it is today and thus, this incident shows English to be prioritized from her multilingual repertoire (Llorente, 2001).

In the next implicit cue, Yolanda visits the Dominican Republic as an adult when she begins to forget a lot of her Spanish while English takes control of her linguistic repertoire over time. She tries to reply to her aunts and cousins in Spanish but cannot help reverting to English as she struggles to find proper Spanish vocabulary to carry out her conversation despite being scolded because of it. This shows her unbalanced nature of multilingualism but only this time, English takes control over the languages in her repertoire. However, as her aunts scold her for her poor Spanish, she thinks that if she wants to improve her Spanish now, she will forget her English after going back to the US which further portrays the struggle of multilingual speakers.

The last implicit cue analyzed in this study depicts another incident from the same time as the eighth cue. Here, Yolanda’s car tyre gets flat in the middle of the road and two Dominican men come to assist. However, though Yolanda can understand the men’s

questions, she cannot bring herself to answer them in Spanish. This gives the Dominican men the impression that she is an American and cannot understand them. Both the long detachment from her motherland and the familiarity she feels toward English make her stuck and confused.

### Conclusion

The notion of multilingualism has been extensively studied by researchers from various fields including linguistics and literature. However, the multilingual existence of literary characters through their linguistic expressions has gained little attention over the years (Cenoz, 2013). This study looked at that aspect from the perspective of the cognitive stylistics of characterization using Culpeper's (2001) model along with a holistic view of multilingualism to include both humanizing and de-humanizing aspects of the character (Canagarajah, 2007; Kramsch, 2010). The character, Yolanda, from *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* written by Julia Alvarez was analyzed in this study.

The aims of this research were to analyze the character's construction based on multilingualism, how it affects her life, and how her linguistic identities develop differently from those of her monolingual peers. According to the aims, the research question included the topics of the character's multilingualism, different linguistic features, practices, and multilingual repertoire.

The novel's plot is based on the sociolinguistic context of Rafael Trujillo's reign from 1930s to mid-1960 when the position of the Spanish language in terms of prestige was not as favorable as it is today (Llorente, 2001). However, the liminal state that multilingual, immigrant children feel, and the challenges they face because of it turned out to be very similar in Yolanda's character and many empirical studies that have been done before (Norton, 1997; Harklau, 2007; Racicot, 2001; Garrett, 2006). Any one or two linguistic aspects of her character were not looked at for this study. Instead, through the holistic view of multilingualism, the character of Yolanda was analyzed as a whole person making use of different languages in different situations. Besides, the impacts of multilingualism that are found on her sense of existence were also studied through analyzing her linguistic identity and repertoire.

The findings from the data analysis section show that regarding her linguistic identity and sense of belonging, Yolanda has a constant sense of confusion because of the presence of multilingualism. Being a multilingual individual, she occasionally finds it difficult to comprehend what monolingual people are saying in simple English. Despite her desire to integrate into American society and the English language and culture, she feels appreciative when others acknowledge her multilingual state. On the contrary, if people demonstrate a pejorative or condescending attitude toward her multilingual identity, she feels hurt and insulted. Another crucial element of her personality is the unbalanced nature of her multilingualism where two languages from her repertoire, English and Spanish, are never equally dominant.

Through this research, a linguistic analysis of a literary character is demonstrated. Readers can sometimes relate to the complex nature of literary characters more than their real-life peers. Additionally, the characters do not just offer predetermined linguistic expressions

fashioned by authors; they also offer insight into the authors' linguistic inclinations and beliefs intertwined with their creativity (Rees, 2020). Hence, it is recommended to consider literary characters both from humanizing and dehumanizing perspectives to analyze their linguistic contributions. This study adds to the existing literature on characterization and literary multilingualism. This is also expected to contribute to more studies on literary characters' linguistic behaviors and expressions in the future.

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